ABSTRACT

Title of capstone: INCREASING SELF-EFFICACY IN EXPLICIT TEACHING OF ORAL LANGUAGE TO ENGLISH LEARNERS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

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In the Crowne Point School District, only 12% of English Learners (ELs) met established reading benchmarks in 2023, compared to 23% of non-EL students, a gap this capstone sought to begin addressing through targeted professional development focused on oral language instruction. Although the Science of Reading (SOR) provides evidence-based frameworks for reading instruction, research indicates that oral language development, critical for EL literacy success, remains overlooked in classroom practice. Using an improvement science methodology, the researcher conducted two Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles with 12 elementary literacy leaders from high-EL-population schools (60% or higher). Data were collected through pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys, focus groups, exit tickets, lesson plan artifacts, and researcher memos, and were analyzed using thematic and document analysis.

Findings revealed significant gains across multiple dimensions: 82% of participants reported absolute understanding of oral language post-PD (compared to 50% split between "some" and "most" pre-PD); 100% reported being 'Mostly' or 'Absolutely' confident in identifying specific OL strategies for ELs. Participants demonstrated a shift from incidental to intentional teaching of OL, with enhanced capacity to locate existing OL strategies in the curriculum and add new ones where gaps existed. The professional development design, featuring iterative sessions, active learning, coaching support, and job-embedded assignments, proved effective in building educator capacity. Notably, instructional time constraints emerged as a persistent barrier to full implementation, a systemic challenge that professional development alone cannot

resolve. These findings suggest that well-designed, targeted PD can effectively build literacy leader capacity to support EL oral language development, positioning leaders as agents of change within their schools and districts.

INCREASING SELF-EFFICACY IN EXPLICIT TEACHING OF ORAL LANGUAGE TO ENGLISH LEARNERS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

by

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Preface

My educational career began unconventionally in 1999, when I served as a resident teacher. The Maryland State Department of Education grants resident teacher certification to individuals who wish to switch careers but have no prior teaching experience or education. I hold an undergraduate degree in Finance, so mathematics was not an issue when I began teaching elementary school. Reading, however, was an enigma. I do not remember how I learned to read, and with no formal training, how could I teach someone else to read? My reading knowledge deficit drove my pursuit of a Master's degree in Reading/Language Arts, and I became a Reading Specialist, followed by training as a Reading Recovery Teacher.

As my career as a Reading Recovery Teacher progressed, the number of my students learning to communicate in English increased. The growing English learner population posed a new challenge, so I pursued a deeper understanding by earning an additional Master's degree in Teaching Speakers of Other Languages. The combination of reading knowledge and teaching English learners laid the groundwork for my career in elementary education, as both areas support our young learners' English language development.

Recently, the Crowne Point School District (a pseudonym) introduced reading methods based on the Science of Reading, along with a mandatory structured literacy program for elementary students. I was skeptical about these methods because I have seen many students become successful readers using the techniques learned by Marie Clay, the founder of Reading Recovery. I was especially concerned about the impact on English learners.

As an Elementary Literacy Support Teacher, I seek the best methods to help educators support the growing marginalized population in the district. I have expanded my knowledge of teaching reading to English learners by studying and exploring this topic while I pursued a Doctorate. I sought to discover what works for the students learning English in the Crowne Point

School District (CPSD) and specific strategies that would help my students thrive. When pursuing a Master's degree in TESOL, I was disappointed to find that most of the strategies were similar to those I had already learned as a Reading Specialist. When I asked one professor about the “magic” strategies of TESOL, she laughed and said there are no TESOL-specific strategies, and that a good teaching strategy works for any student. I was disappointed by this response, and in the years since, I have learned that this thinking reflects a deficit in our view of second-language learners. I want to join the movement that equips educators with the tools and strategies to help students succeed. I sought to leverage my dual expertise as a reading leader and a professional with a strong second-language background to initiate a paradigm shift away from deficit thinking. My mission was to assist elementary reading leaders by providing research-based methods that are practical and engaging for student support.

Dedication

This capstone is dedicated to my mother, Selma Spencer and my son, Kevin Taylor, who were with me at the beginning of this journey but are no longer here to see its completion. Their love, encouragement, and belief in me sustained me through the earliest steps of this process and continue to guide me still. Though they are not here in person, their presence remains constant in my work, my perseverance, and my purpose. I carry them with me on every page of this accomplishment.

Acknowledgement

This capstone represents the culmination of a journey shaped by the support, guidance, and encouragement of the communities and individuals that God has placed in my life.

First, to my family, David and Shayla—your unwavering love and belief in me sustained this work from beginning to end. You provided patience during long hours, understanding during moments of stress, and encouragement when the path felt uncertain. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine, and I carry your support with me in all that I do.

To my ELST colleagues—thank you for your collaboration, insight, and shared commitment to our work. Your willingness to engage in thoughtful dialogue, reflect on practice, and support one another created the conditions that made this study both meaningful and possible. I am grateful to be part of a professional community that values growth, inquiry, and continuous improvement.

To the university professors who guided this process—your expertise, mentorship, and high expectations challenged me to think more critically and work more rigorously. Your feedback strengthened this study and deepened my understanding of both research and practice. I am sincerely appreciative of the time, care, and dedication you invested in my development.

Finally, to my capstone advisor, Dr. Kane–I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for your exceptional guidance, mentorship, and unwavering support throughout this process. Your expertise and thoughtful feedback consistently pushed me to refine my work, and uphold a high standard of scholarship. Thank you for your patience and encouragement during both the challenging and rewarding moments of this journey. Your ability to provide meaningful direction strengthened not only this capstone but also my confidence as a scholar-practitioner. I am sincerely appreciative of the time, care, and dedication you invested in my growth and success. Your mentorship has made a lasting impact, and I am truly grateful. Thank you.

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Section One: Background

Introduction

Reading and writing are essential to personal and professional development and to functioning in society; however, many children and adults worldwide do not acquire these skills, or do so only to a limited extent (Cree et al., 2012). Reading performance is described as a problem at the national, state, and district levels. For most of the history of U.S. education, student reading achievement has been described as failing, and vulnerable student populations (minoritized races, impoverished students, students with special needs such as dyslexia, and multilingual learners) have always been underserved (Thomas, 2022). In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education reported that four in five adults have sufficient literacy skills, meaning one in five, or 43 million, have limited literacy skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Thirty-four percent, a little over 18 million, of those possessing limited literacy skills were not born in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The Nation's Report Card (2022) reported that nearly 31% of all students in Maryland scored at or above grade level, meaning that 69% of Maryland students scored below grade level in reading.

Students acquiring English in the United States are identified with various terms such as English Learner (EL), English language learner (ELL), and multilingual learner (ML). For continuity, the term English learner (EL) was used throughout this capstone unless another entity quoted used an equivalent term, such as one previously listed.

Some school districts mirror the data of insufficient reading achievement. Although limited literacy skills are an issue in the Crowne Point School District[1], the problem is more prevalent with English learners (ELs). For the 2023 school year, CPSD reported that 12% of elementary ELs and former ELs, students who have progressed beyond the EL label, achieved

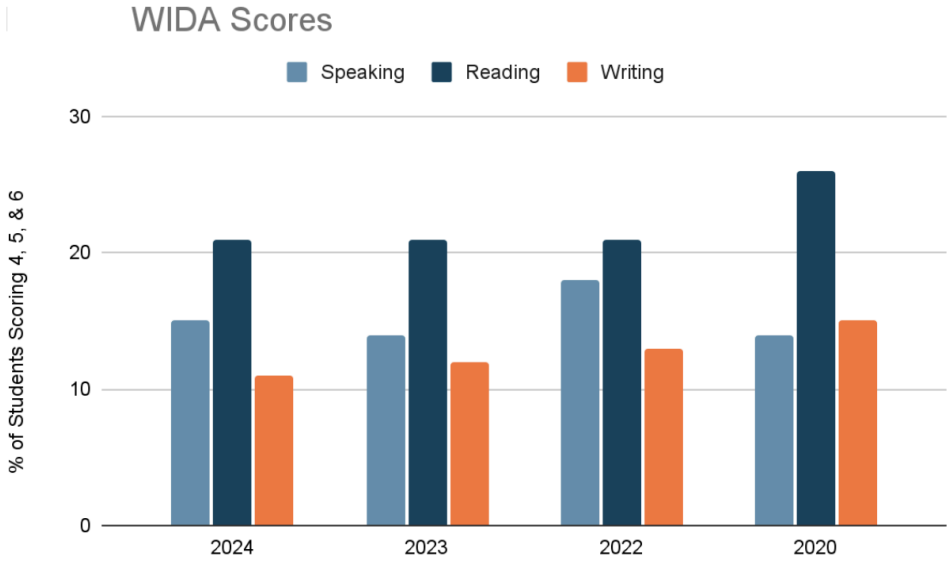
[1] Crowne Point School District is a pseudonym for the school district. The names of all employees of the district have been changed to protect privacy.

the English Language Arts (ELA) goal of reading at or above grade level as measured by the ELA Benchmark assessments, compared to 23% of students who were never ELs (See Appendix A).

CPSD administers the WIDA ACCESS assessment annually to measure language development for ELs. According to the CPSD Enrollment and Testing site, the percentage of students who scored at level 4-expanding, 5-bridging, or 6-reaching in Speaking ranged from 14% to 18% for school years ending in 2020-2024 (See Graph 1). Given this data, over 80% of English learners are considered on levels 1-entering, 2-beginning, and 3-developing. It is important to note that students performing at these levels may reflect distinct language profiles: some students may have limited oral language development across all languages, while others may be proficient in their home language but are still developing English oral proficiency. These distinctions matter for instructional planning, as the appropriate support differs depending on a student's language background. The reading scores for school years ending in 2024 - 2022 have remained constant at 21%, with levels 4, 5, or 6, meaning that 79% of ELs scored 1, 2, or 3. In Writing, students scored between 11% and 15% at levels 4 - 6, meaning that 85% and 89% of English learners were underachieving. The information does not reveal what an acceptable level of achievement is expected on this assessment.

The CPSD Enrollment and Testing site presents this data in aggregate form across the district, without disaggregation by school, grade level, or home language. As a result, it is not possible to determine from this source whether particular subgroups of English learners, for example, students at targeted grade levels or those who speak identified home languages, are performing differently from one another. The data reported here reflect what the district makes available and represent the broadest available picture of EL language proficiency trends across the years shown.

Graph 1



CPSD Enrollment and Testing Website

Without basic reading skills, it is more difficult to function in society, get a job, or effectively perform certain transactions, such as purchasing a home or car. Freire (1983, 2020) posits that reading contributes to human development and growth by relating personal experiences and understanding the social world. It is difficult to argue that a lack of literacy is beneficial. Acquiring literacy skills is essential during the early elementary years. If a student is not reading successfully, providing reading interventions in the early stages of learning is critical, as the overall efficacy of adult reading interventions is lower than previously believed (Cree et al., 2012). Brunner (1993) and Weaver & Mutti (2021) found that reading failure is likely a cause for delinquent behavior, not just a correlate. This research revealed that many juveniles in custody could not read accurately or fluently and could not write legibly, grammatically correct sentences (Brunner, 1993; Weaver & Mutti, 2021). The number of juveniles would decrease if educators could correct reading failure.

Maryland has taken a legislative approach to address limited reading achievement by mandating that all primary school curricula, assessments, and interventions be rooted in the

research surrounding the Science of Reading (SOR) (Maryland Ready to Read Act, 2019). This evidence-based approach focuses on the five essential components of reading established by the National Reading Panel (2000). These essential components, or pillars, are phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, and are crucial for improving literacy outcomes. To improve reading performance in Maryland, as of July 1, 2025, all public school teachers licensed in early childhood education, elementary education, special education, and English to Speakers of Other Languages must demonstrate proficiency in the SOR by acquiring an acceptable score on the Maryland State Assessment (or an approved training program) or risk non-renewal of their teaching license (Code of Maryland Regulation 13A.12.02.06). Two state-approved training programs, Language Essentials to Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) and State University of New York (SUNY) Microcredential, mention oral language but do not emphasize the importance of explicitly teaching it.

This legislative context is significant because it means that while the Science of Reading has become a legal requirement, the component most critical for English learners, oral language development, has not received equivalent attention in the policy structures, training requirements, or materials designed to support implementation. Given the continued evolution of state-level policy and the persistent gap between Science of Reading mandates and explicit oral language instruction, this capstone focused on what could be addressed at the local level, specifically within CPSD, where the need is documented, the population is present, and change can begin now.

Crowne Point School District has shifted to foundational curricula based on the SOR, Really Great Reading. Pre-K-2nd-grade teachers must complete a virtual training course to implement the program with fidelity. The virtual training offered by Really Great Reading, like LETRS and SUNY, mentions oral language but lacks explicit instruction. However, is this shift

enough to ensure the success of English learners in reading, especially considering the absence of explicit oral language instruction in these materials?

Oral language competence has been defined as the “ability to engage successfully with a range of communication partners via the spoken word” (Snow, 2009, p. 102). Children who participate in rich and complex conversations have an overwhelming advantage in vocabulary development, understanding language structures, and tuning into the sounds of English (Konza, 2014, p. 156). In other words, children who engage in conversations have a strong foundation to build literacy skills. There is also evidence that children with limited oral language skills often have reading difficulties (Snowling, 2005). Konza (2014) argues that the five pillars critical for independent reading identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) should have included oral language as the sixth pillar.

Most English learners in the United States, including CPSD, are in English-only programs and face the challenge of learning literacy skills in a language they are simultaneously learning to speak and understand (Goldenberg, 2020). Researchers have found that reading skills in the second language are related to oral language skills in that language (Swanson et al., 2008; Prevoo et al., 2016). Goldenberg (2020) posits that ELs require greater emphasis on oral language development and that proficiency in oral language plays a role at all stages of reading development. Although there should be greater emphasis on oral language, Escamilla and Strong (2024) found that the science of reading curriculum is hindering the teaching of oral language to ELs. They found that although ELD time, the block when oral language is a focus, is protected, there is pressure to emphasize phonics. This protected time is increasingly becoming an extension of the language arts curriculum.

This capstone explored building reading leadership capacity and the importance of explicitly incorporating oral language into daily foundational reading lessons. It also sought to answer the following two questions: How does targeted professional development influence

literacy leaders' self-efficacy and perceived preparedness to support teachers in promoting oral language development among English Learners (EL)? In what ways does targeted professional development shape the instructional practices of literacy leaders as they support teachers in developing English Learners' (EL) oral language skills?

Section One discusses the history of reading methods utilized in CPSD over the past 35 years. CPSD went from a phonics-based program to a quasi-whole-language program to balanced literacy, and has returned to an improved phonics-based program. This journey, along with the research and reasoning behind the shifts, is discussed. Next, the current research models in the science of reading are defined and discussed, with a focus on oral language as it applies to all learners, specifically English learners. A critical component for ELs, oral language, is highlighted as a missing or marginalized literacy component. Finally, this section explores possible solutions to limited literacy among ELs and highlights one potential solution: increasing educators' knowledge of oral language development.

History

Reading Instruction in the Crowne Point School District

CPSD has made many changes to the early reading instruction program in the last 35 years. In the early 1990s, Primary Project was a phonics-based reading curriculum in primary grades. Primary Project was created within CPSD by Katherine Sawyer (L.M. Gaines, personal communication, September 10, 2024; F. Hill, personal communication, October 30, 2024; L. Robbins, personal communication, November 5, 2024). Ms. Sawyer supervised Early Childhood Education for the Crowne Point School District when she co-created and implemented the Primary Project program. The Primary Project program used hand-drawn practice sheets provided by the CPSD printshop, consisting of letters to trace and pictures to match sounds to letters. Teachers would track student progress with grade-level word lists. "There was one letter

taught every five days. We focused on everything about that letter: upper and lower case, the sound, how to write it, and pictures that began with the sound," stated a CPSD Kindergarten teacher during the 1990s (S. Alston, personal communication, October 8, 2024).

Teachers who used Primary Project expressed a fondness for this phonics-based curriculum and felt it was an effective way to teach students. However, L.M. Gaines stated, "It was a far cry from today's phonics programs." One fallacy of the Primary Project she mentioned was that the program had no writing component beyond tracing and forming letters. Other significant differences between the Primary Project and how the science of reading is currently taught include focusing on one letter at a time for five days and hands-on learning, such as matching objects, cutting out pictures, and tracing letters. More recent research has shown that teaching a single letter for an entire week is not the most effective use of instructional time (Dougherty Stahl, 2014). Students may already be familiar with a particular letter; some letters do not require the same amount of repetition or attention.

In 1998, a basal reading program, Invitations to Literacy (ITL), was adapted following the phonics-based Primary Project. The basal program used in CPSD consisted of a collection of books for students, allowing for differentiation. A basal program can be described as a whole language program. Bergeron (1990) defined whole language as an approach to literacy instruction that emphasizes using authentic literature and writing activities to teach reading and writing in meaningful contexts. The whole language approach states that reading in English is as natural a human process as learning to speak. A more recent researcher states that this process should emphasize making meaning and expressing meaning in reading and writing (Guilamo, 2021). The switch to whole language resolved the issue of incorporating writing, which was missing from the Primary Project; however, research has shown that explicit instruction is more effective than incidental instruction in ensuring students understand the alphabetic principle (Foorman, B. R., 1995). During the use of ITL, each letter of the alphabet

was associated with a character and a song, such as Andy Apple, Benny Bear, and Callie Cat. S. Alston (October 8, 2024) stated that this program was engaging for the students and enjoyable to teach. L.M. Gaines (September 10, 2024) stated that although ITL was advertised as having everything students needed, CPSD supplemented the ITL program with additional writing activities, such as Four Square Writing, and vocabulary activities, such as Making Big Words. ITL added the richness of authentic stories but did not include phonics instruction beyond the first grade.

In the 2000s, limited reading comprehension forced another switch, and balanced literacy was implemented. Balanced literacy is a multifaceted approach that heavily emphasizes reading comprehension and students' creation of meaning through active interaction with text (Bitter et al., 2009). Researchers have found that cognitively engaged readers in literacy activities have better comprehension and reading achievement than less engaged readers (Campbell et al., 1997; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). CPSD believed balanced literacy aligned with the research reviewed by the National Reading Panel (2000). The 2010 CPSD Annual Report stated, "the Balanced Reading Program provides a PreK-12 framework to deliver comprehensive reading instruction based on scientifically-based reading research as delineated by the National Reading Panel" (2010 Annual Report, 2010, p. 37).

Balanced literacy was accompanied by extensive teacher training in Developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs). DRAs track each word a student reads and analyze each error to determine what needs to be taught. However, DRAs lacked a tracking system as CPSD entered the data era. CPSD created a K-2 Data Tool to support state standards. However, using balanced literacy methods produced consistently limited reading achievement: 33% to 40% of students in K-2 were reading below grade level (L.M. Gaines, personal communication, September 10, 2024). Balanced literacy remained an anchor in classrooms for over 20 years, until 2022.

Once the COVID pandemic hit in 2020, the reading scores plummeted further. Fewer than a third of all K-2 students progressed to grade level or above. The science of reading movement, also referred to as structured literacy, was gaining attention in Maryland, and a program based on the science of reading, Really Great Reading, was piloted in CPSD in the fall of 2021. The pilot of Really Great Reading's success led to the full implementation of structured literacy in the fall of 2022. Structured literacy requires extensive teacher training. Implementing teacher training in structured literacy is challenging for a large district like CPSD. Teachers tend to teach only phonemic awareness and phonics because they feel successful and students enjoy them (L.M. Gaines, personal communication, September 10, 2024). Phonemic awareness and phonics are just pieces of the reading puzzle. The other pieces, such as fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, were overlooked.

Table 1

History of Reading Methods in CPSD

Method	Implementation Years	Distinguishing Characteristics
Primary Project	Early 1990s - 1997	Phonics-based, teaches one letter for five days, no writing component
Whole Language (ITL)	1997 - Early 2000s	Real literature, emphasizes meaning, writing included
Balanced Literacy	Early 2000s - 2022	Meaning developed through text interactions, DRA three times
Structured Literacy	2022 - Present	Science of Reading-based, strong emphasis on phonemic awareness

L.M. Gaines, personal communication, September 10, 2024

During the 1990s, CPSD had an early reading curriculum based on phonics. The curriculum shifted to a semi-whole-language approach and then to balanced literacy (See Table

1). In the fall of 2022, CPSD began implementing a science-of-reading-based curriculum. However, what exactly is the science of reading, and how is it different from phonics?

Defining the Science of Reading

There are many definitions of the science of reading. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) defines the SOR as research that informs effective reading instruction by examining how the brain processes written language (MSDE Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy, 2024, p.6). This broad definition is one of many definitions. Generally, the science of reading refers to the interdisciplinary body of research on reading that addresses its five essential components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (See Table 2) (Seidenberg, 2020). The National Reading Panel Report (2000) revealed that all five components are critical to reading success. Some researchers debate that the SOR focuses primarily on decoding, meaning phonemic awareness and phonics (Silverman et al., 2020). For clarity, the National Reading Panel's (2000) definition of the science of reading should not be confused with the science of reading movement, which is the focus of Silverman et al. (2020). The movement focuses on phonics and phonological awareness and rarely mentions vocabulary, fluency, or comprehension. This paper focused on the SOR definition described by the National Reading Panel, which includes the five essential components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Table 2

Five Essential Components of the Science of Reading

Component	Definition
Phonemic Awareness	The ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds
Phonics	Understanding the relationship between letters and sounds

Vocabulary	The knowledge of words and their meanings
Fluency	Refers to reading with accuracy, speed, and prosody
Comprehension	Understanding the meaning of a text

National Reading Panel (2000).

The Simple View of Reading

When defining the SOR, public discourse has emphasized the simple view of reading (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; Taboada Barber et al., 2021). Gough and Tunmer (1986) presented the simple view of reading (SVR) model as *Decoding x Language Comprehension = Reading Comprehension* (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Simple View of Reading



Gough and Tunmer (1986)

Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2021) discuss the various definitions of the science of reading, focusing on Gough and Tunmer's (1986) description of the simple view of reading. The simple view of reading is more recently described as the lead character in the SOR play (Cervetti et al., 2020). The simple view of reading explains the complexities of learning to read with a simple diagram and proposes that the model fully addresses reading proficiency (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021). The model clarifies that decoding *and* language

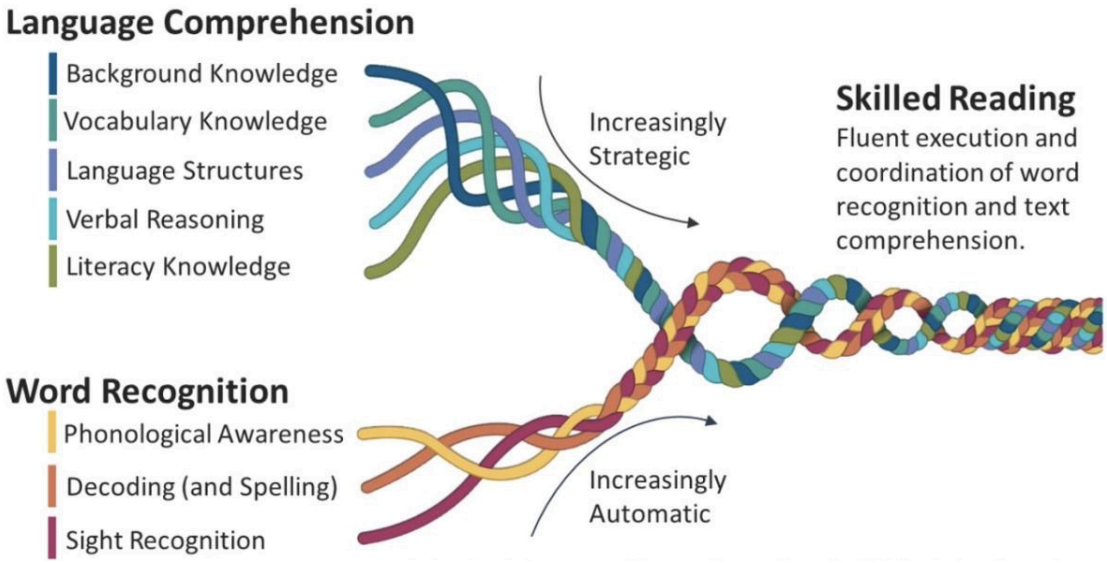
comprehension are equally important and necessary for strong reading comprehension. If one area is weak, reading comprehension will also be weak. When decoding skills are more substantial, language comprehension becomes a more critical influence on reading comprehension. Once a text has been decoded, one limit on comprehension is variations in listening comprehension (Lervåg et al., 2018; Lervåg & Melby-Lervåg, 2022).

Scarborough's Reading Rope

In 2001, Scarborough presented a depiction of reading comprehension in the Reading Rope (See Figure 2) and described it as the strands of early literacy development. The Reading Rope is an expansion of the simple view of reading. Each central domain of the SVR–word recognition and language comprehension–includes strands that are definable, measurable, and somewhat independent (Moats & Tolman, 2019; Jones & Christensen, 2022).

Figure 2

Scarborough's Reading Rope



Scarborough (2001)

According to Scarborough (2001), there are five segments in language comprehension: background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. Background knowledge consists of the facts and concepts an individual already knows about a subject (Scarborough, 2001). If a student does not possess prior knowledge, the teacher must help build the knowledge needed to understand the text. Vocabulary knowledge is understanding words' precise uses, definitions, and pronunciations (Scarborough, 2001). Language structures are the arrangement of words in sentences and include syntax and semantics (Scarborough, 2001). Verbal reasoning is thinking creatively using words, including making inferences and metaphors (Scarborough, 2001). Literacy knowledge refers to print concepts, such as knowing how to hold a book, directionality, punctuation, and genres (Scarborough, 2001).

Additionally, the Reading Rope's word recognition component consists of three parts: phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition. Phonological awareness is the ability to manipulate sounds, including hearing phonemes, individual sounds, syllables, or word parts (Scarborough, 2001). The second strand is decoding. Decoding uses the alphabetic principle and spelling-sound correspondences to determine a word (Scarborough, 2001). Not all words can be decoded, and sight recognition is acknowledged in the final strand. Sight recognition or familiar words, as the name implies, is the ability to know a word when seen and not have to decode the word (Scarborough, 2001). As the individual strands, or skills, become more robust, the rope binds together, creating a skilled reader who is fluent and strategic.

The Science of Reading and English Learners

In CPSD, the population of ELs has been steadily increasing, with 20,369 ELs in the 2015 - 2016 school year and 34,961 ELs in 2024 - 2025 (CPSD ELD Enrollment & Testing, personal communication, January 30, 2025). Despite the increasing EL population, the CPSD Elementary Reading/Language Arts (ES RELA) section of the 2010 Annual Report did not

mention any goals for English learners. Currently, the CPSD goals in the Comprehensive Literacy Plan (2024) are to improve educational outcomes for *all* students and narrow achievement gaps in literacy for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

The ES RELA Department has implemented a science of reading-based curriculum to serve all students, including ELs, and their literacy needs. The SVR proposes that word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension fully address reading proficiency (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021). However, does this model fully address the literacy needs of English learners?

English learners were noticeably absent when the National Reading Panel (2000) report was released. Goldenberg (2008) noted that the research included in the National Reading Panel's review was primarily drawn from studies conducted with English-speaking students, and it did not disaggregate data or provide detailed recommendations for students learning English as an additional language. The science of reading studies only represented "typical classroom teachers" and "typical American or English-speaking students" (Guilamo, 2021). As a result, further research was conducted to address the growing EL population. August and Shanahan (2007) completed a national report on second-language learners' literacy. Two of the significant findings were:

1. Instruction that provides substantial coverage in the key components of reading—identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension—has clear benefits for language-minority students (August & Shanahan, 2007, p. 3).
2. Instruction in the key components of reading is necessary—but insufficient—for teaching language-minority students to read and write proficiently in English. Oral proficiency in English is also critical, but

> student performance suggests that it is often overlooked in instruction (August & Shanahan, 2007, p. 4).

These two findings mean that although the five core reading components identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) are beneficial and necessary for ELs to become fully literate in English, oral language is not prioritized in the classroom, even though it is just as critical. Diane August posits that one reason oral language is not prioritized is a lack of appropriate resources for English Language Development teachers to become experts in content areas (D. August, personal communication, October 24, 2024). She emphasized that the content and oral language need to be taught in tandem to be effective. Both SOR models, the simple view of reading and the Reading Rope, include oral language skills as crucial when learning to read. Although language development is included and inferred as part of the literacy process, oral language development is not overtly apparent.

Other researchers have agreed with August and Shanahan (2007) and found that oral language is critical in literacy (Konza, 2014; Swanson et al., 2008; West et al., 2024). Goldenberg (2020) found that the basic foundation of effective literacy education for ELs mirrors effective literacy education for students learning to read in their first language. However, it emphasizes that English literacy *and* oral language proficiency must be priorities.

Oral Language Development

Oral language is one of the areas that should be a focus for reading instruction for ELs (August & Shanahan, 2007). Many ELs at risk for reading problems in first grade also have limited oral language skills in both English and Spanish (Vaughn et al., 2006; Solari et al., 2022). Oral language is the system of spoken words and communication that includes receptive language, understanding what others say, and expressive language, the ability to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings verbally (Durgunoglu & Goldenberg, 2011). Research

has pointed to the importance of early oral language development and the potential limitations of an exclusive focus on phonics and decoding in early reading instruction (Cervetti et al., 2020). The SOR debate overlooks the importance of oral language and obscures the complex dynamic relations among the skills and knowledge that lead to successful comprehension (Cervetti et al., 2020). Cutting et al. (2009) and Kapalková et al. (2023) found that oral language significantly influences reading comprehension more than decoding skills. However, the core components defined in the National Reading Panel (2000) do not focus on oral language development. According to the SVR model, successful reading comprehension does not occur without developing oral language skills. More careful attention should be directed to the language comprehension component of the SVR, including the many dimensions of oral language development (Cervetti et al., 2020).

Vaughn et al. (2006) demonstrated how a robust early literacy intervention was successful with non-ELs and was made effective for ELs by adding oral language instruction. Explicit oral language instruction helps support English reading development (Goldenberg, 2020). August and Shanahan (2007) found that well-developed oral proficiency in English is associated with English reading comprehension and writing skills for English learners. Oral language can improve literacy and benefit numeracy, social and emotional development, and behavior (West et al., 2021).

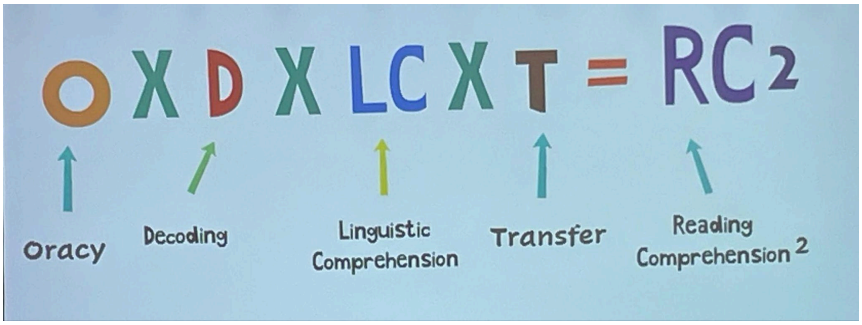
Guilamo (2021) posits that the only way to attain biliteracy is to expand the SVR formula for reading from Decoding x Language Comprehension = Reading Comprehension to the formula for developing biliteracy as Oracy[2] (talk) x Decoding x Linguistic Comprehension x Transfer, or O x C x D x T = R2 (Figure 3). The two additional components, oracy (or student talk) and transfer, are designed to provide ELs access to a dual language education. Oracy (or

[2] The term oracy was used by the presenter as a means to describe *student talk* as compared to the more traditional definition of oracy (ability to communicate effectively using spoken language in a range of social contexts) derived by Wilkinson in the 1960s.

student talk) develops oral language through accountable classroom talk (Guilamo, 2021). Transfer is “the ability to directly apply one’s previous learning to a new setting or problem” (Schwartz & Bransford, 1998, p. 68).

Figure 3

Formula for Developing Biliteracy



Guilamo (2021)

Impact of Limited Oral Language Skills

Researchers have reported the impact of limited oral language skills. Oral language abilities enable children to learn to read, and these abilities predict future academic achievement and life outcomes (Adlof & Hogan, 2019). Students with limited oral language skills experience a significantly lower quality of life than their peers with average or above oral language skills (Haukedal et al.,2023). Burnley et al. (2024) found that students with limited language development experienced higher levels of anxiety, lower self-esteem, emotion dysregulation, and social frustrations.

Oral Language Development and CPSD Elementary Reading

The state of Maryland has speaking and listening requirements listed in the College and Career Ready Standards for ELA at all grade levels. “The listening and speaking standards are clear, but no one pays attention to them.” (M. Gray, personal communication, March 7, 2025). M. Gray is a leader in the Special Education department and believes that if teachers paid

attention and implemented the Speaking and Listening Standards, many student issues related to reading and writing could be resolved.

Oral language also plays a minor role at the district level. “When the Common Core State Standards were introduced in 2009, speaking and listening were unclear” (L.M. Gaines, personal communication, September 10, 2024). A focus group was created in CPSD to help provide clarity. The focus group found two significant noticings: a large amount of teacher talk and the limited opportunities for students to speak. These noticings of the focus group were in sync with the findings of August and Shanahan (2007), who stated that oral language proficiency was often overlooked in the classroom.

A direct result of the CPSD focus group findings was the creation of the CPSD Cross-Content Speaking, Listening, and Reasoning Toolkit. The toolkit explains why oral language is essential. It contains directions on three protocols that can be used across content curricula: active listening, collaborative conversations, and accountable talk. Active listening gives educators a structure to ensure students pay attention and think about what was said (Cross-Content Speaking, Listening, and Reasoning Toolkit, personal communication, February 5, 2025). Collaborative conversation is an oral language support strategy that provides students with scaffolded interactions to formulate ideas and share their thinking with another student (Crowne Point School District, 2015). These procedures are sometimes referred to as Think-Pair-Share or Pair/Square. The last protocol, accountable talk, is a learning discussion where each contributor is responsible for giving reasons and evidence for opinions and ideas (Crowne Point School District, 2015).

The toolkit was last updated during the 2015-2016 school year, but the protocols are still suggested and linked in the current primary curricula. Foundational skills have been the focus since implementing a curriculum based on the science of reading, but oral language has not been at the forefront (L.M. Gaines, personal communication, September 10, 2024). The

second-grade lesson seeds introduce the listening and speaking protocols on the first day of school. In Kindergarten and first grade, only active listening is focused on during the first days of school.

For over a decade, CPSD has been aware that a targeted focus on oral language development instruction is beneficial. Nevertheless, there has been a limited concentration on oral language development, especially considering the growing population of ELs. Additionally, the new implementation of the SOR-based curricula gives minimal attention to oral language development.

Problem of Practice

The Elementary Reading Language Arts Department (ES RELA) of CPSD initiated the change from balanced to structured literacy during the 2020 pandemic. The structured literacy program for the early elementary grades follows the definition of the science of reading provided by Silverman et al. (2020), which heavily focuses on phonemic awareness and phonics. August and Shanahan (2007) found that ELs need the five elements of literacy mentioned in the National Reading Panel (2000), but they also require additional support to be successful in reading. The Problem of Practice (PoP) addresses what needs to be included for ELs in the structured literacy program adopted by CPSD: *the current incorporation of the science of reading is not equitably addressing the literacy needs of early elementary ELs.*

The issue of addressing literacy needs for all students is a concern nationally, statewide, and locally. Crowne Point School District has reflected the broader national trend of limited reading scores, with even lower performance among multilingual learners. CPSD is attempting to address the limited literacy scores and specifically target ELs in the current plan. The CPSD Administrative Procedure 5111.3 defines a multilingual learner as follows: A Multilingual Learner (ML) is a student:

1. who communicates in a language other than English or comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant, *or*
2. whose family uses a primary language other than English in the home *and*
3. whose English language proficiency falls within the range established by the state for an English language development program.

As of October 24, 2024, Crowne Point School District served nearly 133,000 students (Facts & Figures, 2024), of whom 35,000 are ELs, meaning over 26% of the student body is defined as an EL (CPSD ELD Enrollment & Testing, personal communication, January 30, 2024). This number does not include any students who successfully exited the English Language Department program. The CPSD Strategic Plan (2023) mentions improving reading achievement in *all* learners, including multilingual learners. CPSD attempts to improve reading scores in all students by implementing structured literacy programs in the classroom and through intervention groups. Although Administrative Procedure 5111.3 states explicitly that all teachers, including ELD teachers, mainstream classroom teachers, and specialists, such as reading teachers, share the responsibility of educating ELs, there are no specific structures in place in the reading department to address the literacy needs of the EL population.

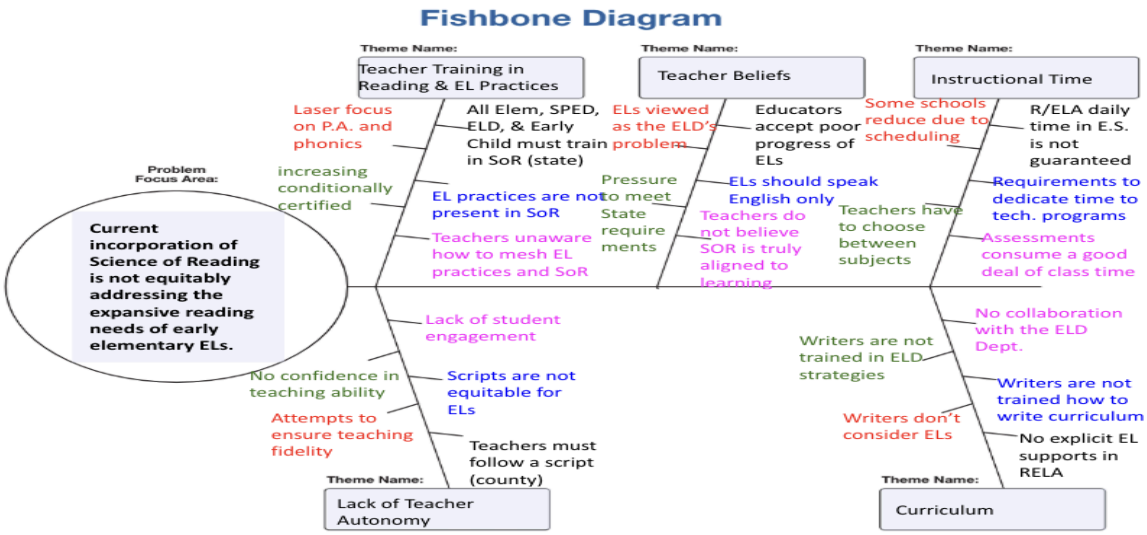
Causal System Analysis

English learners' reading achievement lags behind that of their native-speaking counterparts. In CPSD (2023), 12% of ELs scored proficient on literacy assessments, while 25% of native English speakers scored proficient. The gap in EL literacy compared to native English speakers is complicated and can be attributed to various causal factors. Thomas (2022) posits that the reasons students have struggled for decades to acquire reading skills are multifaceted; therefore, the solutions are complex and quite large. The gap in EL literacy

compared to native English speakers can be attributed to various causal factors. The potential causal factors influencing EL literacy underscore five key themes that can help address EL literacy needs: teacher beliefs, lack of teacher autonomy, adequate instructional time, curriculum development, and teacher training (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Revised Causal System Analysis



Teacher Beliefs

Teacher beliefs are significantly related to teachers' reported practices (Haim & Tannenbaum, 2022). "Although I was encouraged to go to many ESOL (English as a Second Language) training sessions, my kids were served by the ESOL teacher, so I really did not worry about it," stated S. Alston. "I do not recall having any mandatory ESOL training. I was focused on teaching them their letters and sounds. If I had known then what I know now, I would have incorporated more ELD techniques into my everyday teaching" (S. Alston, personal communication, October 8, 2024). A teacher mindset shift is slowly arriving at the revelation that

all kids are *our* kids, as demonstrated by Ms. Alston. One researcher found that most teachers want to help ELs learn but feel incompetent in addressing their needs if they have not been specifically trained to meet EL needs (Gándara et al., 2005; Shafiei, 2024).

Teacher beliefs are often not considered when content changes occur. The switch to structured literacy was mandated by the State of Maryland (Ready to Read Act, 2019), requiring District and teachers to follow an SOR curriculum regardless of their personal beliefs about teaching reading. For over twenty years, balanced literacy practices have been entrenched in CPSD, and many educators are having difficulty switching to structured literacy instruction, which is crucial for ELs. “The change to structured literacy is a daunting task in a district as large as CPSD,” stated L.M. Gaines, “Many teachers are still holding on to the old way we used to teach. The data just doesn’t support continuing with balanced literacy.” Richards et al. (2001) found that teachers' beliefs must change *before* teaching practices change. Some educators believe that the SOR movement and SOR policy are not aligned with the complex and still-developing reading science (Thomas, 2022).

Teacher Autonomy

The National Curriculum Framework states that teacher autonomy is essential for ensuring a learning environment that addresses children's diverse needs (NCF, 2005). Research demonstrates that (1) teachers can develop autonomy-supportive practices, since this approach to instruction is malleable, and (2) once adopted, these practices lead to numerous benefits for students, teachers, and the overall classroom climate (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). However, teacher autonomy is limited in the structured literacy program mandated in CPSD. Teacher autonomy is the freedom to study, learn, and teach, not total independence or isolation (Sehrawat, 2014). Really Great Reading, the K-2 program is scripted, and the ES RELA department expects all teachers to have the script in hand as they teach. Although scripts can be helpful, especially for new teachers, some experienced teachers have expressed during

literacy coaching sessions that the scripts are confining and insinuate a lack of trust in teacher implementation. Teachers have also expressed that they feel they are breaking the rules if they stray from the script, and reading from a script causes some students to become disengaged.

Marshik et al. (2017) found that teachers who report having low autonomy (i.e., those who report that they lack the autonomy to influence school policy and/or to choose how and what they teach) are less likely to support their students' need for autonomy compared to teachers who report having higher autonomy at work. Marshik et al. (2017) said that students' autonomy and perceptions of academic competence were positively related to students' reading achievement in both 3rd and 5th grades. In other words, supporting teacher autonomy indirectly supports higher reading achievement. If teachers are professionals, then autonomy is essential in confirming the status of teachers' work (Sehrawat, 2014).

Instructional Time

Researchers advocate for 120 uninterrupted minutes daily when scheduling reading in elementary grades (Denton et al., 2003). Many schools in CPSD can provide a 120-minute continuous block of time for literacy instruction, but other schools need help achieving this task. With the limited time during the school day, the content areas compete for classroom instructional time. Other obstacles, such as scheduling and the required use of technology programs, sometimes leave less than the recommended time. "If you add up all the recommended times for the content areas, Reading, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health, Art, Physical Education, Music, Media, Guidance, Lunch, Recess, and then add the Talented and Gifted, English Language Development and the Special Education schedules, you run out of time, and something has to give," stated Sherri Green (S. Green, personal communication, September 26, 2024). Ms. Green is a Reading Specialist and assists with creating the master schedule for her elementary school. "We know that sometimes it looks good on paper, but not in reality. Some cases don't look good on paper," she admits. Some classes at Ms. Green's school

do not get the full 120 minutes, some have an interrupted block, and some don't get daily reading instruction. The limited time doesn't allow for searching through and planning additional activities, like EL strategies or oral language development (S. Alston, personal communication, October 8, 2024).

Educator Training

Maryland elementary teachers are mandated to receive training in the Science of Reading. The SOR training does not explicitly address oral language development or the specific needs of ELs. Maryland Policy 13A.12.02.06 states that educators holding a license in Elementary, Special Education, English as a Second Language, or Early Childhood must demonstrate adequate knowledge of reading science by passing a state-approved course or an additional teacher assessment. With a laser focus on phonemic awareness and phonics in the early grades, some effective EL strategies, like oral language development, do not receive instructional focus in the classroom (August & Shanahan, 2007).

The Maryland Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy (2024) requires all K-3 teachers, special education teachers, and English language development (ELD) teachers to receive coaching to assist with implementing SOR. However, there is no requirement for literacy coaches to be trained in the science of reading or oral language development, which is a serious oversight. A critical challenge is helping teachers understand language as a vehicle for minoritized students to engage with ideas and participate in practices across disciplines (Jensen et al., 2021). In other words, educators need informed supporters with in-depth knowledge of reading and oral language practices.

"Many content area teachers have no idea how to scaffold instruction for ELs," explains Diane August, "The districts need to invest in educators who are dually certified in ESOL and a content area." (D. August, personal communication, October 24, 2024). Teacher preparation

has been significantly hampered for the past 40 years by top-down accountability mandates that have reduced most teacher education and certification to more bureaucracy than preparation (Thomas, 2022). “Teachers have to be supported to ensure proper implementation of Tier 1 instruction” (M. Woods, personal communication, November 8, 2024). Tier 1 instruction is defined by CPSD Administrative Procedure 5124 as the support provided to all students and must include all the traits of high-quality instruction. CPSD expects 80% of the student body to progress appropriately through Tier 1 support. Put another way, Tier 1 support is the regular, everyday teaching that goes on in the classroom. Tier 1 support is inequitable for ELs because teachers are not trained or supported in the way they should be to implement an appropriate literacy program (M. Woods, personal communication, November 8, 2024).

Curriculum Development and Oral Language

Research has supported implementing a curriculum for ELs that connects with students’ lives and enables them to use their home languages (Rowe, 2018; Pierson et al., 2021; Shi & Rolstad, 2023). These multilingual and multimodal classroom practices, which include oral language development, can change classroom dynamics and allow students access to identity positions of expertise, increasing their literacy investment, literacy engagement, and learning (Ntelioglou et al., 2014).

Oral proficiency for ELs is critical but often overlooked in instruction (August & Shanahan, 2007). Oral language is embedded in the CPSD foundational literacy curriculum, but needs to be more explicit because it is sometimes bypassed (M. Woods, personal communication, November 8, 2024). One way to prevent oral language from being overlooked is to make it conspicuous in the curriculum. School districts and researchers must develop a curriculum, not just provide professional development (D. August, personal communication, October 24, 2024). Dr. August emphasized the importance of developing and implementing curriculum and professional learning for teachers; to do one without the other is not sustainable.

Goldfeld et al.'s (2021) findings agree with Dr. August. They found that teacher knowledge of oral language dissipated over time, reinforcing the importance of embedding explicit knowledge of oral language and literacy construct (Goldfeld et al., 2021).

In CPSD, curriculum development in the content areas is completed within the individual departments with minimal input from English Language Development, as evidenced in the 'Acknowledgements' section of official documents. ELD teachers receive specific training in developing English oral language that could be beneficial to all content area educators. Curriculum writers are often a collection of teachers, reading specialists, and coaches. Some writers are trained in curriculum development and effective EL strategies, but the focus is not on incorporating these skills into the curriculum.

Theory of Improvement

Primary Drivers

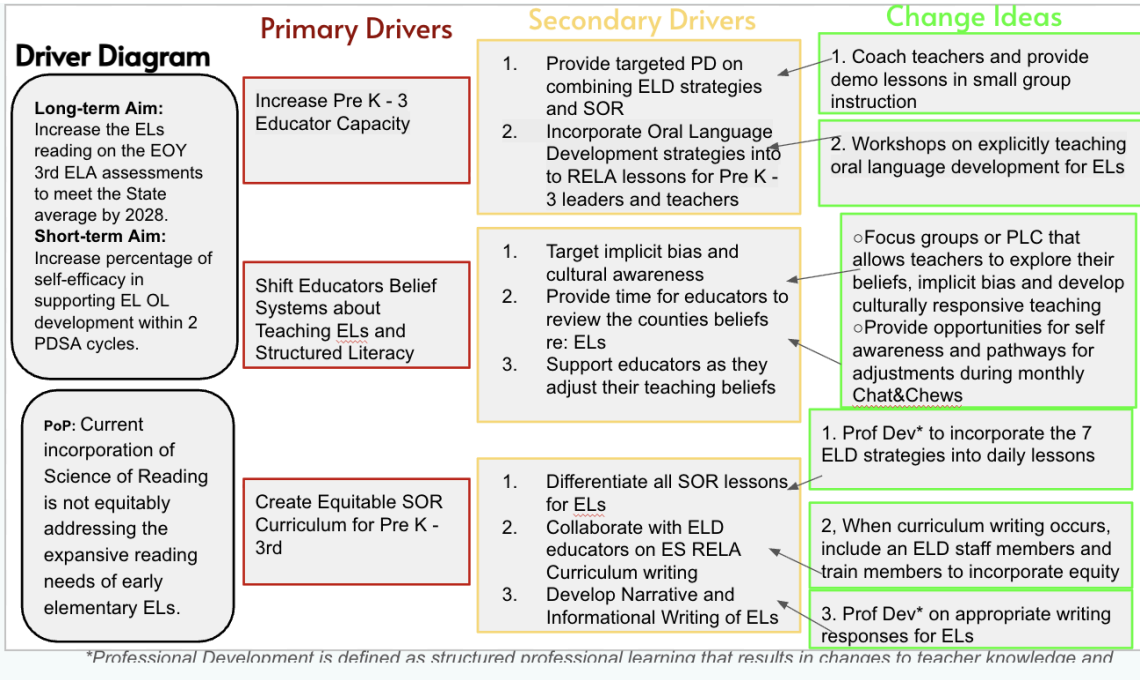
Solving the literacy issue for ELs and native speakers is multifaceted and requires multiple solutions (August & Shanahan, 2007; Thomas, 2022). Building teacher capacity should be implemented, creating an equitable curriculum (D. August, personal communication, October 24, 2024), and altering teacher beliefs so that classroom practices would align with the imposed curriculum (Richards et al., 2001). However, this capstone project focused on increasing teachers' understanding of the importance of oral language and its implementation to improve reading comprehension among ELs.

The long-term aim is to increase the number of ELs reading on grade level (OGL) at the end of the 3rd-grade literacy assessments to meet the state average of 31% by 2028, which could be reasonably achieved by incorporating the entire theory of improvement. The short-term aim of this capstone is to increase educators' self-efficacy in supporting ELs' oral language development through two PDSA cycles.

The primary goal of this capstone was to enhance educators' understanding of the importance of oral language, integrate oral language strategies into existing lesson plans, and develop the capacity to support colleagues in raising awareness about oral language. The theory of improvement includes continued use of the established SOR practices while enhancing them with targeted attention on the marginalized EL group in three areas: (1) increasing educator capacity, (2) shifting educators' belief systems regarding teaching reading and ELs, and (3) creating an *equitable* SOR curriculum (See Figure 5).

Figure 5

Theory of Improvement



Increasing Educator Capacity

Teacher training is critical to EL reading achievement. Lopez et al. (2013) found that required coursework on English language development and assessment was positively related to Hispanic ELs' reading outcomes. If teachers are not prepared, it will be challenging to

implement the structured literacy program with fidelity. The inability to successfully teach children to read reflects a failure to translate knowledge derived from the scientific literature into practice (Snow, 2021). The focus was on helping teachers translate the scientific literature into practice.

The numerous advances in reading science need to be complemented with equivalent attention to the science *of teaching* reading (Kim & Snow, 2021). The first primary driver, increasing teacher capacity, addresses the science of teaching reading. Effective professional development can teach teachers how to deliver innovative instruction (August et al., 2009). All professional development (PD) in the Driver Diagram included the practical features found by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017). The researchers posit that these seven features must be present for professional development to be effective: (1) PD is content-focused, (2) incorporates active learning, (3) supports collaboration, (4) uses models of effective practice, (5) provides coaching and expert support, (6) offers feedback and reflection, and (7) is of sustained duration, in other words, no more “one and done” sessions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 4).

One of the secondary drivers for increasing teacher capacity is providing professional development that combines best SOR practices with the seven Key English Language Development strategies on which the English Language Department (ELD) of CPSD bases its core belief. Singer (2018) suggests seven essential strategies: (1) visual support, (2) sentence starters, (3) learning by doing, (4) building background knowledge, (5) direct vocabulary instruction, (6) modified graphic organizers, and (7) collaborative conversations. The ELD office of CPSD provides professional development supporting the strategies, and the Elementary Reading/English Language Department (ES RELA) oversees training in SOR. Combining the SOR practices with the ELD strategies is an innovative way to train teachers. The change idea supporting this secondary driver included all the effective professional development features, but coaching and expert support were a primary focus.

The other secondary driver for increasing teacher capacity is incorporating oral language strategies into the SOR and ES RELA lessons that reflect grade-level appropriate strategies. Although collaborative conversations are included in the seven ELD strategies discussed in the preceding paragraphs, oral language development incorporates several strategies, and collaborative conversations are just a portion of developing oral language skills. Oral language needs to expand beyond academic collaborative conversations. Well-developed oral proficiency in English is associated with English reading comprehension and writing skills for MLs (August et al., 2009). Training teachers to explicitly incorporate oral language into daily lessons is the change idea that is highlighted in the final section of the theory of improvement.

Shifting Educators' Belief Systems

Engaging teachers directly in exploring their beliefs and principles provides greater self-awareness through reflection and critical questioning, which can be starting points for later adaptation (Richards et al., 2001). The second primary driver allows educators to explore their beliefs about teaching MLs and reading. Fives and Buehl (2016) recommended that educational leaders enable teachers to examine and reflect on their beliefs in light of reforms.

According to the Maryland Report Card, 25% of the student population in CPSD was classified as ELs in the school year 2023. Most teachers in the county are likely to encounter an English learner at some point in their teaching career. Therefore, teachers must examine their belief systems to ensure that implicit or cultural bias does not influence their teaching. Implicit biases are pervasive and can challenge even the most well-intentioned individuals, resulting in actions and outcomes that do not align with intentions (Staats, 2016). Implicit and cultural biases can unintentionally negatively impact reading progress. The change ideas presented, creating professional learning groups, and providing opportunities for self-awareness, will provide space to help adjust belief systems and create awareness (Richards et al., 2001).

Monthly Chat & Chews, where educators can come together casually, and professional learning communities (PLCs) provide time and space for teachers to explore this strenuous topic safely.

Creating an Equitable SOR Curriculum

The Elementary RELA and SOR curricula should reflect best practices for ELs to include the seven Key ELD strategies and oral language development strategies. Once teachers have received training, a more equitable curriculum would allow them direct access to resources. Rumberger and Gándara (2004) found that providing an appropriate curriculum starts with *constructing* a relevant curriculum. The writers must be experienced with incorporating the SOR with appropriate ELD strategies. Connecting science to educational practice is beneficial but extremely difficult to achieve (Seidenberg, 2013). Enlisting professionals with the appropriate skill set will take additional time and possibly incur additional expense.

The third primary driver, creating an equitable SOR curriculum, will require 1) appropriately trained curriculum writers who include ELD teachers and coaches during the content curriculum construction and review, and 2) realistic writing responses from ELs at various levels to be presented. For example, an EL classified as entering would have a very different writing ability than a developing EL. Classroom teachers can gauge progress toward meeting the exemplar for each ELD level by providing exemplars. Writing instruction benefits language minority students (August et al., 2009), but progress toward the exemplar needs to be considered.

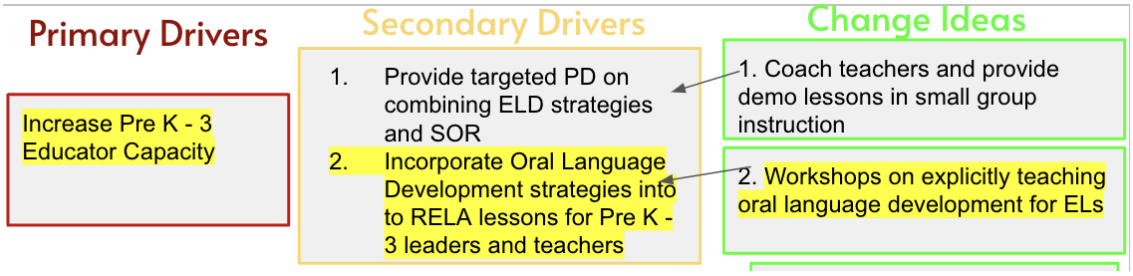
Change Idea

The change idea focused on in the driver diagram (Figure 6) addressed the lack of explicit oral language instruction. Oral language abilities enable children to learn to read, and these abilities predict future academic achievement and life outcomes (Adlof & Hogan, 2019). Lervåg et al. (2018) found that multiple language-related skills are involved in listening

comprehension, which, in turn, strongly influences the development of reading comprehension. Building teacher capacity by developing professional development sessions informed teachers about the importance of oral language development and introduced strategies to explicitly incorporate oral language into the existing curriculum and interventions that could be implemented during focus group instruction.

Figure 6

Change Idea



Suppose the goal is to increase the ELs' reading on grade level at the end of the third-grade year, and English Language Arts assessments to meet the state average of 31% by 2028. In that case, CPSD needs to focus on increasing PreK-3 teacher capacity by incorporating English oral language development strategies into Reading/Language Arts lessons. To address this gap, pilot workshops that explicitly teach English oral language development were implemented. A series of professional development sessions was created that clearly explained why oral language is crucial to instruction and assisted with implementing effective strategies and locating points within the existing curriculum to insert oral language development. The pilot targeted reading leaders and evaluated adjustments to their knowledge of oral language and their ability to support others as they incorporated oral language into lessons.

Integrating oral language can significantly impact literacy outcomes for ELs. Goldenberg (2020) found that daily lessons focused on the five reading components identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) *and* a significant focus on integrating oral language into the reading process had moderate to large (d = +0.44 to >1) effects on measures of English phonological awareness, word reading, decoding, and reading and comprehending texts. It is not enough to teach reading skills to language-minority students alone. For successful literacy instruction, extensive development of oral English skills must be incorporated (August et al., 2009).

Conclusion

The Crowne Point School District has changed how reading has been implemented over the past 30 years. CPSD is currently navigating a shift from balanced literacy to structured literacy. This shift has focused on primary learners' phonemic awareness and phonics skills. While phonemic awareness and phonics are critical skills for becoming literate, oral language is just as important. However, oral language is not explicitly taught in primary classrooms. While oral language is mentioned in the ES RELA curriculum and the required training, oral language remains in the background and is overlooked. The implementation of structured literacy has impacted English Language Development coaches and teachers in positive and negative ways (A. Melvin, personal communication, February 18, 2025). Learning about the science of reading benefits teaching ELs, but some ELD teachers must serve as an extension of the literacy block and may not always have time to focus on oral language.

Improving EL reading is a multifaceted problem that requires a focus on many primary drivers. This capstone project focused on one change idea that could impact the three primary drivers discussed: building educator capacity, shifting belief systems, and creating a more equitable curriculum. Section Two outlines professional development plans to address ELs'

needs and emphasizes the importance of explicitly teaching oral language daily. Additionally, it explains the rationale for choosing the design and implementation of professional development.

Section Two: Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

The Crowne Point School District (CPSD) population of English learners (ELs) continues to increase. Section One highlighted the importance of implementing a structured literacy program for ELs, but there are additional requirements beyond the five pillars for ELs to become successful readers. The explicit, systematic literacy curriculum currently used by CPSD strongly emphasizes decoding and sight word recognition. While this emphasis has shown clear benefits for ELs, research suggests that adjustments to these approaches are needed to maximize their benefits (August & Shanahan, 2007). Some scholars, such as Julia Lindsay (2023), agree with August & Shanahan (2007) that ELs need more explicit, systematic instruction and ongoing support for oral language development.

Section Two introduces a professional development project that informed educators about the importance of oral language and incorporated oral language development strategies into the current curricula. One of the instructional implications suggested by Vadasy & Sanders (2011) is that providing ELs with interventions that emphasize English oral language may be valuable. However, developing oral language can be addressed through many classroom strategies, including shared reading, guided play, dialogic questions, direct vocabulary instruction, and retelling (West et al., 2024). Helman (2012) posits that four conditions are required to improve ELs' language skills. These four conditions are (1) providing language models, (2) explicit language instruction, (3) providing feedback, and (4) providing opportunities to practice. Although these strategies have occasionally been observed in CPSD, explicit instruction in oral language strategies is not a focus in the elementary Reading Language Arts curricula (L.M. Gaines, personal communication, September 10, 2024).

Crowne Point School District (CPSD) lists some of the oral language goals to be achieved by the end of Pre-K as (a) listening, asking, and answering questions, (b) participating in conversations with adults and peers, (c) describing persons, animals, places, events, and actions, and (d) speaking or expressing thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly enough to be understood in a variety of settings. These skills should be mastered by the end of Pre-K, allowing teachers to build upon them in subsequent grades. However, the curricula in CPSD are not explicit in teaching oral language skills in K-2nd in an observable or measurable way. The lack of explicit oral language development is especially concerning for English learners. If the skills are expected to be mastered by the end of Pre-K, what is the expectation for those who enter the school system beyond Pre-K? ELs need instruction in English in the content areas beyond the primary grades, such as math, history, and science (Goldenberg, 2008). CPSD expects that students will develop these skills through consistent interactions with teachers and peers throughout the learning day. English Language Development (ELD) teachers are responsible for providing oral language instruction for ELs. ELs spend most of their learning program in the “regular” classroom, away from the instruction of an ELD teacher.

In CPSD, ELs' oral language development depends on arbitrary classroom interactions and limited instructional time with an ELD teacher. Except for ELD teachers, educators are not required to participate in any EL training, including oral language development. The science of reading training is needed to maintain state licensure for teaching. Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) and the State of New York SOR Microcredentials Program mention oral language as a part of the Simple View of Reading, but do not explicitly address teaching oral language.

The lack of explicit oral language training and structured implementation raised the following questions in this study: How does targeted professional development influence literacy leaders’ self-efficacy and perceived preparedness to support teachers in promoting oral

language development among English Learners (ELs)? In what ways does targeted professional development shape the instructional practices of literacy leaders as they support teachers in developing English Learners' (EL) oral language skills?

Positionality

The researcher is a monolingual female with a background in Reading Education and TESOL, and has been formally trained as a Reading Recovery teacher. The researcher has also received training in the science of reading through LETRS, Volumes 1 & 2, and Early Childhood, as well as training as a local LETRS facilitator. The researcher has completed the State University of New York Microcredential course. The state requirements for renewing licensure include LETRS or the Microcredential course. CPSD utilizes the foundational curriculum, Really Great Reading, which requires completing virtual training courses prior to implementing the program. The researcher has completed training for the kindergarten, first-, and second-grade programs.

The researcher has been employed with CPSD for over twenty-five years, serving as an elementary classroom teacher, a Reading Specialist, a Reading Recovery Teacher, and an elementary ESOL teacher. The current position, Elementary Literacy Support Teacher, is an extension of the ES RELA Department that supports educators in implementing curricula. This position includes assisting schools in transitioning from balanced to structured literacy.

Reading Recovery (RR) and the science of reading (SOR) have been publicly disputed as oppositional views on teaching reading (Cook et al., 2017). The SOR leans toward a coding-based (phonics) approach to reading, and RR is more of a balanced literacy approach that follows the students' needs. Some educators have strong feelings about the methods used to teach students to read and believe that one approach is "right" and the other is "wrong." The researcher, however, has used both methods separately and in combination to facilitate

students' success in learning to read. This study did not account for educational preferences and values, such as good versus bad and right versus wrong (Friesen, 2023). Still, this capstone aimed to explore how incorporating explicit oral language teaching into the existing district curriculum affected teachers' attitudes and their perceptions of themselves as adequate educators of MLs. The researcher bracketed personal feelings about how to facilitate reading instruction and focused on incorporating oral language.

Some of the duties of the current position as an ELST include providing reading support to elementary teachers (K-5) by conducting demonstration lessons, coaching, assisting with lesson planning, and helping teachers navigate the curriculum and materials. At the participants' request, the researcher performed ELST duties, such as assistance with navigating the curriculum, coaching, and implementing oral language. The ELST provides services to schools and teachers through the Reading English Language Arts Department.

The researcher occupied multiple roles throughout this study, and the complexity of those roles requires explicit acknowledgment. Qualitative researchers engaged in participatory work often navigate the space between insider and outsider status with participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Weddle & Oliveira, 2024). This study was no exception. As the designer and facilitator of the professional development, the researcher made decisions about content sequencing, session pacing, and strategy selection based on both research on effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and ongoing participant feedback. The PD design followed the seven features of effective professional development identified by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) as a structuring framework, with particular attention to active learning, coaching and expert support, and sustained duration across multiple sessions. Decisions about content were also informed by the empathy interviews and informal conversations with district staff described in Section One, which revealed that participants needed foundational knowledge of oral language before moving to application. Adjustments

were made in response to participant feedback throughout the cycles. For example, when participants requested breakout rooms for peer discussion, the researcher incorporated them immediately. When participants requested a centralized resource hub, the researcher created a Padlet repository that was accessible both during and after the sessions. These decisions were responsive to participants' expressed needs and were documented in researcher memos during the data collection process.

As an Elementary Literacy Support Teacher, the researcher also provided ELST services to some participants upon their request during the implementation phase. This included coaching, lesson-planning support, and assistance with navigating the curriculum. The researcher negotiated this dual role carefully, recognizing that offering ELST support was appropriate to the position and responsive to participants' needs, while ensuring that such support was always participant-initiated and not used to direct or constrain the data collection process. Operating simultaneously as a trusted colleague, a service provider, and a researcher created both opportunities and tensions. One example of the tension that arose was when a participant asked the researcher to coach the teacher while the participant gave a demonstration lesson that included oral language strategies. The researcher was careful to ask open-ended questions like, “What do you notice?” so that the conversation about oral language was not influenced. The insider knowledge and established professional trust enriched the study by enabling authentic engagement and candid dialogue (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). At the same time, this proximity posed the risk that participants might moderate their responses or actions in light of the professional relationship (Weddle & Oliveira, 2024).

During the focus groups, the researcher served as both the facilitator and the primary investigator. A semi-structured protocol was used to guide the conversations, allowing the researcher to follow participants' responses and probe for deeper understanding without imposing a predetermined direction on the discussion. Maintaining a semi-structured approach

was a deliberate decision to balance rigor with responsiveness. The researcher was transparent with participants about the dual purpose of the focus groups: to gather feedback to improve the PD and to collect data for the study. Participants were informed that their responses would be recorded, transcribed, and used for analysis, and that participant numbers would be used in place of names to protect confidentiality.

The decision to administer surveys anonymously was a deliberate and significant methodological choice rooted in the researcher's awareness of her positionality. Because participants work directly or indirectly with the researcher in their professional roles, anonymous surveys were designed to create space for honest responses that were not influenced by the professional relationship or by a desire to demonstrate growth to a supervisor or colleague. Anonymity was maintained for all three surveys, including the follow-up survey administered after the formal sessions concluded. This decision is acknowledged to have trade-offs. Anonymous surveys prevent item-level analysis by individual participant and limit the ability to explore how specific demographic or professional factors (such as years of experience or ESOL endorsement) may have influenced responses. These tradeoffs were accepted because candor was prioritized over the ability to disaggregate data by individual participant.

The researcher is aware that transparency about these roles and decisions is necessary not only for methodological rigor but also for the integrity of the findings. Readers should understand that the data were collected and interpreted by someone who was simultaneously a trusted colleague, a service provider, and a researcher. These relationships enriched the study by enabling authentic engagement and deep contextual knowledge. They also introduced the potential for social desirability bias, which is addressed further in the Measurement Limitations section.

Justification

Language skills are the foundation of virtually all aspects of education, including literacy (Hjetland et al., 2020). This capstone examined the impact of a professional development program that explicitly incorporates oral language into existing lessons, as well as its effect on teachers' ability to implement oral language strategies.

Professional Development

Konza (2014) expresses concern that teachers may overlook the importance of developing strong language skills in children, as oral language was not among the five pillars identified by the National Reading Panel (2000). Teacher knowledge and quality instruction are fundamental to students' language and reading success (Goldfeld et al., 2021). The researcher developed a professional development series concerning explicit oral language teaching. Professional development focused on oral language development can impact literacy scores. Kim & Snow (2021) posit that teachers with more specialized knowledge of reading development and reading instruction provide higher-quality reading instruction, which predicts student literacy outcomes.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) define effective professional development as structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes, and includes "job-embedded activities that increase teachers' knowledge and help them change their instructional practice in ways that support student learning" (p. 2). Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) examined 35 studies on professional learning that have proven most effective in changing teachers' practice and improving student outcomes to identify elements of successful professional development models. The study identified seven characteristics of effective professional development: (1) is content-focused, (2) incorporates active learning, (3) supports collaboration in job-embedded

contexts, (4) uses models of effective practice, (5) provides coaching and expert support, (6) offers feedback and reflection, and (7) is of sustained duration (pp. v–vi). These findings emphasize the importance of hands-on modeling, ongoing coaching, and teacher engagement through reflection and inquiry.

Wei et al. (2009) found that professional development is most effective when it addresses the concrete, everyday challenges of teaching and learning specific academic subject matter rather than the abstract educational principles of teaching methods taken out of context. Wei et al. (2009) posit that professional development should be focused on educators' academic content knowledge and the need for mentor support. Professional development should also foster strong working relationships among teachers and create opportunities for shared learning. The professional development designed for this capstone followed the guidelines of Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Wei et al. (2009) as described.

Oral Language Professional Development

The professional development sessions created for this capstone focused on understanding the connection between oral language and literacy and how to apply the knowledge to existing literacy lessons (See Appendix C). The need for teachers to "understand the links between oral language and subsequent reading development" was highlighted, particularly to support the oral skills of all their students (Konza, 2014, p. 158). Konza (2014) states that failing to understand or ignore the role of oral language risks limiting some children's chances of becoming independent readers. The relationship between oral language and literacy means that effective reading instruction requires teachers to have explicit knowledge of oral language and the ability to apply this knowledge (Goldfeld et al., 2022). Despite research supporting the importance of language content knowledge, evidence indicates that teachers often lack the requisite explicit understanding of language and literacy, as well as the relevant pedagogical knowledge to teach language effectively (Goldfeld et al., 2022).

The pilot professional development targeted reading leaders in Pre-Kindergarten through third grade. Oral language competence is essential in the early years of schooling, as it is the foundation for the development of reading and broader literacy skills (Snow, 2016; Snowling & Hulme, 2012). The schools selected for recruitment had an EL population of 60% or above, as ELs benefit from more explicit instruction and information (Goldenberg, 2020).

This pilot study connected the three primary drivers in the theory of improvement (See Figure 5). The professional development (PD) focused on increasing educators' capacity. It also shifted educators' beliefs about structured literacy by taking responsibility and exploring ways to adjust the curriculum to create a more equitable literacy learning experience. Educators need to meet the daily oral language demands of ELs. The CPSD ES RELA curriculum does not include *explicit* instruction to develop oral language. The training allowed educators to explore upcoming lessons, identify entry points in the curriculum to incorporate oral language, and collaborate.

Implementation

This qualitative and quantitative capstone project followed the impact of a pilot professional development program. The PD involved two cycles with multiple sessions based on the research of Darling-Hammond et al. (2017). Mastery cannot be expected when professional development is delivered in a single session; it should be delivered over several sessions and provide support (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The professional development provided an understanding of the importance of explicitly teaching oral language, offered practical methods and strategies, and helped educators identify entry points in the current curriculum for learning opportunities in oral language development (See Table 3).

The professional development was organized into two PDSA cycles. Cycle One consisted of three sessions, each lasting no more than 90 minutes, delivered virtually over

approximately three weeks in fall 2025. Sessions were scheduled to allow participants time to apply their learning between sessions. Cycle Two consisted of one additional session, also delivered virtually, within two weeks following the conclusion of Cycle One. In total, participants attended four professional development sessions across approximately six weeks. The researcher facilitated all sessions. A complete outline of the professional development content, including session topics, activities, and materials, is provided in Appendix C.

Table 3

Session Objectives

PDSA Cycle One	Objectives
Session One Learning Goal: To understand what explicit oral language is and how it can impact the lives of children and adults	● Unlock common myths about OL ● Define oral language and learn what well-developed vs. poorly developed OL looks like in children and adults ● Why oral language is important, especially for our students learning English ● Review the pillars of the science of reading, noting that oral language is not explicitly included
Session Two Learning Goal: To explore new strategies for teaching oral language and how to identify oral language, teaching the standards and curriculum	● Review the Maryland standards for listening and speaking, noting that oral language is included and CPSD Speaking & Listening Toolkit ● Discussion re: the presence of oral language in the elementary RELA curriculum and *explicit teaching* of oral language ● Focus on learning and practicing specific strategies that will address explicit oral language development that go beyond “turn and talk.”
Session Three Learning Goal: Share created lessons with explicit oral language instruction	● Reviewed the components of OL ● Participants presented upcoming lessons with identified entry points for

and/or find district lessons with OL already embedded	explicit oral language instruction and update lessons ● Give/receive feedback on presented lessons
PDSA Cycle Two	**Objectives**
Learning Goals: To use the Record of Oral Language and to structure PD/collaborative planning sessions	● Participants gained an understanding of how OL can fit explicitly into the Reading Rope and the Simple View of Reading ● Participants learned how to implement the Record of Oral Language Assessment. This will help identify individuals with limited oral language and track their progress as the intervention is implemented. ● Participants learned methods to implement oral language with staff, such as in collaborative planning, grade level meetings, PLC's etc.

The sessions were conducted virtually. Research suggests that the face-to-face and online PD modes are equally effective (Li et al., 2023). Walz et al. (2022) suggest that online participant engagement declines after 90 minutes, so each session did not exceed 90 minutes. The first PDSA cycle consisted of three sessions facilitated by the researcher. The first session of cycle one reviewed common myths about oral language, defined it, explained its impact on literacy, and emphasized why educators should consider it alongside other reading skills. The second session explored the districts' speaking and listening toolkit and introduced two read-aloud strategies not included in the toolkit. The strategies were modeled, and educators had the opportunity to practice one or more of them. Session three explained the components of oral language, and then teachers shared lessons they had devised that included places with inserted explicit oral language strategies. Participants received support and feedback from the facilitator and fellow participants on the lesson.

Allowing participants to devise their own lessons was based on a recent study that found the most significant improvements occurred in language skills (d = .30) when teachers were trained and taught independently, devising lessons without scripts (West et al., 2024). The type of lesson was each participant's choice: either the whole class or a smaller focus group. The researcher recognizes that a Cohen's *d* score of 0.30 (West et al., 2024) indicates a small effect; however, this pilot study "tells part of the story" (N. Polat, personal communication, June 18, 2024) by indicating whether explicitly teaching oral language can affect literacy learning. Although research can indicate which instructional practices are most likely to be effective for a student, it is impossible to predict with certainty how any individual student will respond (Cook & Cook, 2017, p. 82). Educators had the autonomy to choose the oral language strategy they deemed best for their students.

Following the first cycle, a focus group was held to identify the group's additional needs. Two major themes emerged: determining whether students have limited language abilities, and participants' low confidence in supporting other educators in explicitly teaching oral language. The researcher developed cycle two based on these two themes. The second PDSA cycle included an assessment, The Record of Oral Language (Clay et al., 2015). This assessment reveals which oral language structures a student controls and which still require support. The ROL can also be used to track the progress of oral language development over time (Clay et al., 2015). Each participant was instructed on administering and scoring the assessment. Participants also had opportunities to practice on other participants before administering the assessment to a student.

To address the lack of confidence, the facilitator provided resources and specific steps for staff to follow during collaborative planning meetings or similar gatherings. Participants had an opportunity to practice various strategies, and fellow participants provided encouragement

and feedback. A second focus group was held following the second PDSA cycle. Additional information was gathered about participants' experiences.

Criteria for Participation

Bryk et al. (2015) emphasize that change should start with leaders adopting improvement principles. Targeted participants were reading leaders serving high-population schools with K-3 ELs. Reading leaders included Reading Specialists, Reading Instructional Lead Teachers, Reading Resource Teachers, and Elementary Literacy Support Teachers. All participants are required to have previously completed the science of reading training from one of the sources identified in the Maryland Comprehensive PreK-3 Literacy Policy (2024).

Participants were recruited in person at an Elementary Literacy Support meeting and at individual schools with permission from the principal or supervisor. All interested participants were screened and agreed to complete all sessions, pre- and post-surveys, and participate in focus groups. The focus groups provided a deeper understanding of how professional development affects participants' knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The ultimate purpose of this professional development is to increase the use of oral language throughout the district. Therefore, once participants had completed the sessions and lesson planning, the researcher, upon request, assisted with some lesson plans and observed participants as they implemented the lessons with students and educators. At the participant's request, the researcher assumed the role of an Elementary Literacy Support Teacher and provided additional encouragement to four reading leaders. This support included observing a whole-group lesson, coaching a teacher, assisting with lesson planning, and searching for curriculum documents. This support adheres to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who highlight the need for coaching as a follow-up to professional learning.

Participants

There were twelve participants, and each participant attended every session. All of the participants are literacy leaders who work closely with ELs in elementary schools with an EL population of 60% or more. Three of the 12 participants (25%) hold an English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement on their state certification. All participants support classroom educators and directly teach small intervention groups with ELs. The participants' teaching experience extends well beyond the novice stage, with a range of 11 to 33 years, and their experience with ELs ranges from 8 to 32 years. All participants work directly or indirectly with the researcher as a colleague, enabling them to be followed and supported throughout the learning cycles.

Consistent with improvement science principles (Bryk et al., 2015), the same group of literacy leaders participated in both PDSA cycles conducted in this study. Because improvement science emphasizes iterative testing, maintaining the same participants allowed refinements to be examined under stable conditions. This approach supported cumulative learning, minimized variability, and strengthened the study’s focus on capacity-building.

Participant Clarification

Two distinct groups of individuals contributed to this capstone, and it is important to distinguish between them. Improvement science emphasizes deep understanding of a problem before designing a solution (Bryk et al., 2015). As part of this approach, the researcher conducted empathy interviews during the study's problem-identification phase. Empathy interviews are a tool of improvement science used to surface the perspectives, experiences, and priorities of those closest to the problem (Bryk et al., 2015). The individuals consulted during this phase included educators, administrators, and researchers with direct knowledge of reading instruction, EL education, and CPSD. These conversations, cited throughout Section One as personal communications, were not formal research data collection. They were

conducted to understand the problem of practice from the perspectives of people working within the system and to inform the design of the professional development. Empathy interview participants did not receive professional development, complete surveys, or participate in any formal data-collection process.

The research participants in this study were a separate and distinct group. The twelve literacy leaders who participated in both PDSA cycles were formally recruited, screened for eligibility based on the criteria described in the Criteria for Participation section, and agreed to complete all components of the study, including pre- and post-surveys, professional development sessions, focus groups, and submission of lesson artifacts. All data reported in Section Three were collected exclusively from this group. The empathy interviews informed the study's design; the participants' experiences generated the study's findings.

Data Collection

This capstone used a qualitative and quantitative methods approach. Qualitative researchers engaged in participatory work often navigate the space between, occupying both insider and outsider status with participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Weddle & Oliveira, 2024). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) posit that combining both forms of data provides a better understanding of a research question than quantitative or qualitative data alone. The researcher operated as a facilitator and participant, collaborating with reading leaders to improve English learner oral language skills.

The researcher collected data from surveys, focus group sessions, memos, participant reflections, and session artifacts (see Table 4).

Surveys

A survey was given before the first cycle began and after the final session of the last cycle to determine the impact on self-efficacy. The survey used a five-point Likert scale, with

responses ranging from “Not At All” to “Absolutely.” Chyung et al. (2018) posit that respondents found Likert-type surveys easy to use and that they led to a higher completion rate. Lein & Gripado (2024) found that having response options enables a precise analysis (See Appendix B).

The pre-survey contained 13 items and was administered electronically before the first session of Cycle One began. The post-survey contained the same 13 items and was administered electronically after the final session of Cycle Two, enabling direct comparison of responses. A follow-up survey was administered approximately one month after the final session to assess whether participants had implemented the learned strategies (See Appendix F). All three surveys were administered anonymously. The decision to use anonymous surveys was intentional. Because the researcher held dual roles as both the professional development facilitator and an Elementary Literacy Support Teacher who works alongside some participants in their schools, anonymous surveys were designed to reduce the likelihood of social desirability bias and allow participants to respond candidly about their knowledge, confidence, and instructional practices. The professional development sessions themselves were not recorded; only the two focus group sessions were recorded for transcription and data analysis.

Focus Groups

Additional qualitative data were collected twice during the study, once after each cycle. The researcher presented the participants with questions for feedback on their experience with the training and implementation of explicit oral language teaching. The researcher attempted to uncover participants’ understanding of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The focus groups were designed to follow a semi-structured protocol. A semi-structured protocol allowed the researcher to outline the topics, but participants' responses to open-ended questions guided the study's direction (Stuckey, 2013). A semi-structured protocol revealed

additional information through a set of questions but allowed follow-up questions to probe deeper if needed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Stuckey (2013) posits that one of the benefits of using open-ended questions and probing is that it allows participants to respond in their own words rather than forcing them to choose between fixed responses. The semi-structured protocol can provide reliable qualitative data (See Appendix B).

Both focus groups were conducted virtually and lasted approximately 60 minutes each. The first focus group was held within one week of the conclusion of Cycle One, and the second was held within one week of the conclusion of Cycle Two. Participants were informed that focus group sessions would be recorded for transcription and data analysis. To protect confidentiality, each participant was assigned a number upon enrollment in the study, and those numbers were used in place of names across all data sources, including focus group transcripts, survey responses, session artifacts, and researcher memos. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy, and all identifying information was replaced with participant numbers prior to analysis. The researcher used the transcripts as primary data sources for thematic analysis.

Memoing

Memoing is the process of recording reflective notes about what the researcher is learning from the data (Groenewald, 2008). The researcher took notes in a journal before, during, and after each session to capture expectations, reflections, or any other relevant thoughts and observations. Memoing captured the researcher's thoughts during the research process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) posit that how the researcher produces their memos is inconsequential; it becomes vital only when they are made in a form that is indelible, secure, and easily retrievable. Memoing provided the researcher with a mechanism to record their perspective, which was later reviewed for critical appraisal and confirmation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher completed memos before each session to capture expectations and predictions, during each session to document participant responses and notable interactions, and after each session to record reflections and initial analytical impressions. Memos were also written following informal conversations initiated by participants outside of the scheduled PD sessions and focus groups. When participants reached out to share how they had applied strategies, describe challenges encountered during implementation, or ask questions about oral language instruction in their day-to-day practice, the researcher documented those exchanges in memos. This extended the memoing process beyond formal sessions, allowing the researcher to capture evidence of how the professional development influenced participants' thinking and instructional decisions in real time. Memos were stored in a password-protected document and reviewed systematically during the data analysis phase. Memo content informed the initial coding process and served as a data source for triangulation with survey responses, focus group transcripts, and session artifacts.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis examined the impact of targeted professional development (PD) on literacy leaders' self-efficacy, preparedness, and instructional practices to support the oral language development of English learners (ELs). Thematic and document analysis identified patterns and instructional shifts across multiple data sources. The qualitative data were collected through pre- and post-surveys administered before and after the professional development sessions. Two focus groups were held at the end of each PDSA cycle. Other qualitative data were collected from artifacts produced during the sessions, reflective notes, and memoing throughout the project.

A thematic analysis of the data was conducted using Braun & Clarke's (2006, 2019) approach and Bowen's (2009) document analysis. Thematic analysis was performed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which includes (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. This structured approach allowed for systematic identification of recurring themes and patterns related to confidence, instructional priorities, and leadership identity. The key features of Bowen's (2009) document analysis are (1) skimming, to gain an overall sense of the documents, (2) reading, for a detailed review, and (3) interpreting, coding, and identifying themes and patterns.

The researcher sought similarities and patterns across the datasets. First, reading through the data created a familiarity with the focus group transcripts, exit ticket responses, pre- and post-survey responses, the documents produced during the professional development, and all memos and reflections. Generated codes and themes emerged based on the data. The initial themes were derived from the researcher's expectations as the facilitator of each session, and the data were then reviewed and labeled.

Thematic Analysis

The researcher employed a similar approach to answer both research questions. The first research question: how targeted PD influences literacy leaders' confidence and feeling of preparedness, and the second question, examining how the PD impacted instructional practices, utilized the same types of data, as well as information from school meetings and observations of literacy leaders in action. This structured approach helped the researcher identify recurring ideas related to self-efficacy, teaching priorities, and leadership identity. Throughout the analysis, the researcher kept detailed notes to track insights, improve coding strategies, and reflect on how the data was interpreted.

Document Analysis

In addition to thematic analysis, the researcher examined artifacts such as exit tickets, lesson plans, reflective writing, and materials from school-based collaborative planning/PD meetings. Following Bowen's (2009) methodological approach, the researcher sought explicit and implicit evidence of changes in teaching practices, of how participants applied what they learned, and of their engagement with the PD concepts. By triangulating findings from the documents with those from the thematic analysis, the validity of the capstone was strengthened, and a deeper understanding of how literacy leaders implement PD strategies was gained.

By using this multi-layered approach to data analysis, the study ensured a thorough exploration of how targeted professional development influenced literacy leaders' self-efficacy, decision-making in teaching, and ability to support ELs' speaking and listening skills.

Table 4

Data Collection Sources and Analysis

Research Questions	Data Sources	Analysis Method
Q1. How does targeted professional development influence literacy leaders' self-efficacy and perceived preparedness to support teachers in promoting oral language development among English Learners (EL)?	Pre/post PD surveys Researcher reflective memos (include observations/noticings from the PD session- level of engagement, questions asked, etc.) Participant responses during focus groups Participant reflections (debrief, informal recorded conversations, captured in field notes) Field notes from informal conversations PD artifacts (exit tickets, lesson plans, reflective writing/discussion board post)	Research memos Thematic analysis (To code for recurring themes about confidence, preparedness, and leadership identity)
Q2. In what ways does targeted professional development shape the instructional practices of literacy leaders as they support teachers in developing English Learners' (EL) oral language skills?	Pre/post PD surveys Researcher reflective memo Focus Groups Participant reflections (debrief, informal recorded conversations, captured in field notes) Field notes from informal conversations Artifacts from school-based planning/PD meetings (agenda, materials, handouts) Observations of literacy leaders	Research memos Thematic analysis (to identify shifts in leadership practice, language use, or instructional priorities post-PD) Document analysis

Improvement Science

Improvement science is distinct because it prioritizes practical, real-time application over theoretical knowledge (Bryk et al., 2015). Improvement science is a systematic and disciplined approach to problem-solving that emphasizes continuous learning and the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle as a core method for testing, refining, and improving large systems, such as schools (Bryk et al., 2015). The researcher completed two PDSA cycles to test a pilot professional development program and determine the impact on educators' knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward explicitly teaching oral language development skills. A pilot study can help assess validity and reliability (Coughlan et al., 2007). Improvement science encourages small-scale, iterative testing in authentic settings—often with a small number of educators or leaders participating in change cycles (Bryk et al., 2015). The PDSA cycles (Figure 7) targeted Pre-K to 3rd-grade reading leaders who may want to assist with a district-wide implementation.

Cycle One

Plan

During the planning stage, the steps for carrying out the test are clarified (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). During this stage, CPSD reviewed and approved recruitment materials, including emails, scripts, and pre- and post-surveys. Prior to recruiting participants, the approval of each participant's principal or supervisor was required. Some of the principals requested an interview to gain a complete understanding of the project and its purpose. Once the participants were recruited, the delivery format was determined. The PD was delivered virtually for participants' convenience. The researcher obtained support from specialists in Elementary Reading, English Learning, as well as trusted, experienced presenters, to assist in developing and refining the presentations prior to delivery. Prior to delivering each session, the researcher shared draft presentations with the consulting specialists for review and feedback.

Revisions were made based on their input before each session was delivered. Session materials, including slide presentations, strategy handouts, and the Padlet resource repository, were made available to participants during and after each session to support continued learning and implementation.

Do

Hinnant-Crawford (2020) describes the do phase as a combination of implementation and documenting what is happening. Also, during this phase, initial data analysis began (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The researcher facilitated all professional development sessions. Before the sessions, the researcher administered the pre-survey and began taking notes to capture thoughts and predictions about the sessions. During the process, memoing continued to capture participants' discussions and actions as they engaged in professional development. All artifacts resulting from the work completed were analyzed.

The researcher made adjustments to the PD implementation based on needs expressed in exit tickets. Bryk et al. (2015) posit that improvement research uses iterative PDSA cycles to turn promising ideas into workable processes. For example, one commenter requested time in break-out rooms to discuss important points with fellow participants. The researcher immediately began using breakout rooms. In another example, one commenter requested a common place for resources. The researcher created a Padlet to place all resources, such as teaching strategies and presentations, for future reference. Participants engaged in a focus group to help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of individual learning experiences.

Study

The study phase is an opportunity to reflect on what happened during the do phase (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The researcher analyzed and compared data from the focus group responses, memos, and artifacts. Several themes emerged from the preliminary thematic

analysis, including the need for district and administrative support. However, two main themes emerged that the researcher could explore further: determining if a student had limited oral language skills and bolstering confidence in the newly acquired oral language skills.

Act

This phase impacts the next PDSA cycle. The researcher used information from the study phase to make adjustments that would deepen understanding of the topics explored in the first PDSA cycle. Cycle One was continuously adjusted as feedback from participants was processed. The changes were reviewed to incorporate into the next cycle. During this stage, new professional development ideas were developed that addressed two themes: how to determine whether a student has limited language skills and how to increase participants' confidence in delivering oral language strategies to staff.

Methods for assessing students' oral language skills and increasing educators' confidence were researched. CPSD currently uses the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, or DIBELS. The DIBELS assessment is used to measure how well students are developing early reading skills. The researcher has the unique position as an employee to access additional information regarding the DIBELS assessment. The researcher contacted a representative to obtain information about an oral language assessment. The representative provided information on an assessment entitled Oral Language Screener (T. Coleman, personal communication, October 15, 2025). The Oral Language Screener is based on Marie Clay's (2015) book T*he Record of Oral Language.* Other researchers believe that the Record of Oral Language (ROL) has merit (Doyle, 2018) and can adequately identify if students have a command of the English language. The ROL is an inexpensive assessment that can be administered in a few moments per child.

Figure 7

PDSA Cycle 1

Act ● Create presentation sessions, survey questions, and focus group questions ⇨	**Plan** ● Create the oral language presentation ● Create pre- and post-surveys ● Develop a schedule for sessions ● Secure a link for synchronous online sessions ● Recruit Pre-K - 3rd-grade reading leaders of high EL population schools ⇩
Study ● Review evidence of explicit oral language in lessons ● Review memos ● Analyze survey and focus group responses and comments ● Determine which oral language topics to expand upon ⇧	**Do** ● Complete pre-survey ● Facilitate information sessions ● Complete memoing before, during, and/or after each session ● Facilitate a focus group for a deeper understanding ⇦

Cycle Two

Plan

Cycle Two used the same 12 participants as in Cycle One to allow the researcher to gain insight into the participants' deeper learning needs and to extend their learning. Bryk et al. (2015) state that the purpose of PDSA cycles is disciplined, iterative testing within a defined system to strengthen practice over time. In this study, the defined system consisted of elementary literacy leaders supporting schools with high populations of English Learners (ELs). Retaining the same participants across both PDSA cycles ensured that refinements to the professional development were tested within an instructional context. A presentation was developed to introduce the ROL and to provide opportunities to practice before implementation.

Also, methods were researched to help increase teacher confidence when presenting newly learned information.

Do

The researcher facilitated the additional sessions during this phase. The researcher continued with memoing and collected exit tickets and assignment artifacts. No additional adjustments were requested other than a change in meeting day and time, which was granted. The post-survey was distributed to participants upon completion of the second cycle's final session. The participants were invited to a second focus group to assess the impact of the additional sessions and to gain an overall sense of the project's impact.

Study

The researcher analyzed and compared data from both of the focus group responses, memos, and artifacts. The researcher applied thematic and document analysis to develop themes. The capstone was designed to contain two cycles, and the results are described in Section Three.

Figure 8

PDSA Cycle 2

Act ● Revise presentation sessions, survey questions, and focus group questions ⇨	**Plan** ● Update the oral language presentation with revisions and develop extended sessions ● Update pre- and post-surveys ● Develop a schedule for sessions ● Secure a link for synchronous online sessions ⇩
Study ● Review evidence of explicit oral language in lessons ● Review memos	**Do** ● Facilitate information sessions ● Complete memoing before, during, and/or after each session

● Analyze survey and focus group responses and comments ⇧	● Complete post-survey ● Facilitate a focus group for a deeper understanding ⇦

Conclusion

This section provides an overview of the professional development the researcher implemented to answer the research questions regarding how targeted professional development impacts self-efficacy and instructional practices. The details of the improvement science method, Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA), were presented. The data sources and analysis methods were defined and described. Section Three will summarize the key findings from this project, discuss its limitations, and provide recommendations for future research.

Section Three: Results

Introduction

Throughout this capstone, the researcher sought to determine the impact of a professional development program focused on a change idea aimed at improving ELs' reading achievement. The literature reviewed in sections one and two revealed that oral language is an integral component of learning to read, though often undervalued. Two research questions were examined to determine if a professional development series could positively impact reading leaders in Crowne Point School District (CPSD).

Research Question 1: How does targeted professional development influence literacy leaders' self-efficacy and perceived preparedness to support teachers in promoting oral language development among English Learners (EL)?

Research Question 2: In what ways does targeted professional development shape the instructional practices of literacy leaders as they support teachers in developing English Learners' (EL) oral language skills?

The first research question (RQ1) was designed to determine whether reading leaders are confident in imparting their knowledge of oral language (OL) development to the educators and staff they serve. The second research question (RQ2) focused on the importance of OL practices for ELs and on identifying points in the curriculum where educators could strengthen them.

After reviewing the literature on the SOR and interviewing staff in the Crowne Point School District (CPSD), a problem of practice emerged. The problem of practice (PoP) addressed the lack of consideration of the EL population in the current elementary reading program. August and Shanahan (2007) concluded that instruction grounded in the science of reading (SOR) is necessary but not sufficient for supporting language-minority students in achieving proficiency in English reading and writing. Local data from CPSD appear to

corroborate these findings. In 2023, only 12% of English Learners (ELs) met established reading benchmarks, compared to 23% of non-EL students.

The identified problem of practice was that the current implementation of the science of reading does not equitably meet the literacy needs of early elementary English Learners (ELs). Three primary drivers were identified to address the PoP: (1) increase the capacity of pre-K through third-grade educators, (2) shift educators' belief systems regarding teaching ELs and structured literacy, and (3) create an equitable SOR curriculum.

This project focused on the first driver, increasing pre-K through third-grade educator capacity, by creating and facilitating a series of professional development sessions that focused on incorporating OL strategies into the current reading curriculum. These sessions, while focusing on building teacher capacity, also impacted the other two primary drivers by shifting beliefs about teaching the SOR and by recognizing and designing equitable adjustments to the reading curriculum. Section Three presents findings from two PDSA cycles conducted with 12 literacy leaders, followed by an analysis of how these findings address the Theory of Improvement, the study's limitations, and implications for practice.

Findings

Data Analysis Process

The findings emerged from analysis of pre- and post-surveys, two focus group sessions, exit tickets, lesson plan artifacts, and researcher memos collected across two PDSA cycles. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2019) thematic analysis framework and Bowen’s (2009) document analysis with triangulation across sources, strengthening credibility. What follows is organized by research question with themes presented in order of prominence across the data.

Twelve literacy leaders participated in all professional development sessions. All participants serve in elementary schools with English Learner (EL) populations of 60% or

higher, provide direct instructional support to classroom teachers, and facilitate small intervention groups serving ELs. Three participants (25%) hold an English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement. Participants' overall teaching experience ranged from 11 to 33 years, with 8 to 32 years of experience working specifically with ELs. This depth of professional experience positions participants as informed instructional leaders and potential agents of change within their schools, aligning with the Theory of Improvement's emphasis on building professional capacity through literacy leadership.

Analysis of Research Question One

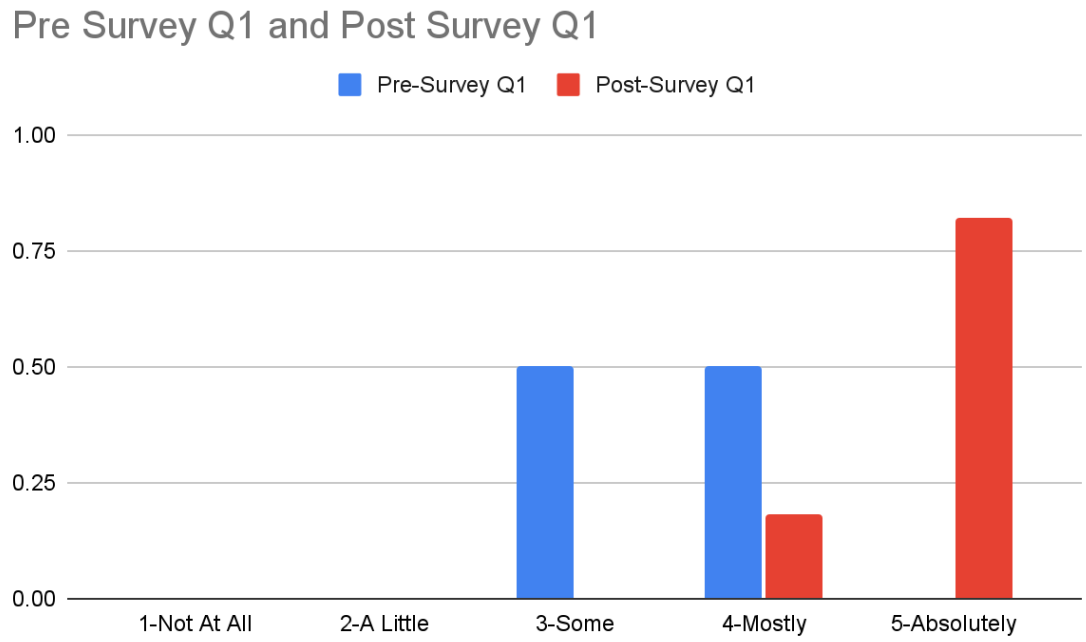
Research Question 1 (RQ1) examined how targeted professional development influenced literacy leaders' self-efficacy and perceived preparedness to support teachers in promoting oral language development among English Learners (ELs). The data revealed a significant impact on their ability to encourage OL. The analysis identified four major themes: a reframed understanding of oral language, improved professional confidence to support other educators, strengthened assessment literacy, and the impact of the professional development design.

Reframed Understanding of Oral Language

The survey revealed a substantial increase across all measures (See Appendices D, E, & F). Survey Question One (SQ1) showed that a deeper understanding of oral language was obtained as a direct result of the PD. Participants rated Pre-Survey Question 1, which stated, " I have an understanding of oral language," as a 50% split between 'Some' and 'Most' (See Graph 2). Following the PD, 82% of participants reported that they 'Absolutely' had an understanding of oral language in their knowledge of OL, and the remaining 18% reported that they 'Mostly' had an understanding of oral language in their knowledge of OL. This shift from a split between 'Some' and 'Most' to an overwhelming 'Mostly' or 'Absolutely' is significant not simply as a measure of knowledge gain, but as evidence of the first primary driver in action.

Literacy leaders who understand oral language are positioned to translate that understanding into coaching conversations, curriculum decisions, and instructional modeling — the exact mechanisms through which the Theory of Improvement envisions capacity building occurring.

Graph 2



Survey Q1: I Have an Understanding of Oral Language

The importance of oral language was reflected during the focus group sessions. One participant stated that,

> "Oral language is just as important as the others [pillars of reading comprehension], such as phonics instruction, sight word knowledge, and vocabulary building. It's just as important, and even more so, it's probably even a prerequisite item." (Participant #9, personal communication, October 13, 2025).

This recognition that oral language is 'just as important' as the established pillars — and perhaps a prerequisite to them — represents a meaningful departure from participants' prior orientation. Prior to the professional development, participants understood oral language as one component among many. Following the sessions, they began to frame it as foundational, a

reordering that has direct implications for instructional prioritization.

Another participant stated that,

> “ It [the PD] broadened my understanding that oral language is not just a conversation, it's the foundation to reading, writing, and overall academic success for the students.” (Participant #12, personal communication, October 13, 2025).

And still another said, “The list of reasons why oral language is important, or why oral language skills are valuable, talking about the research behind it, about the early gaps and how it creates barriers for our students [was a major takeaway]” (Participant #7, personal communication, November 3, 2025).

These shifts in understanding align directly with Konza's (2014) argument that oral language should have been included as the sixth pillar in the National Reading Panel's essential components of reading. Konza posited that teachers risk limiting children's chances of becoming independent readers by overlooking the role of oral language. The participants' recognition of oral language as a 'prerequisite' for other literacy skills is consistent with research demonstrating that oral language competence is the foundation of reading development (Snow, 2016; Snowling & Hulme, 2012). Furthermore, this finding confirms August and Shanahan's (2007) assertion that while instruction in the five core reading components benefits language-minority students, explicit attention to oral proficiency is critical yet often overlooked. These comments also highlight the shift in emphasis on developing oral language. Participants acknowledged that OL was important but did not fully understand its impact on literacy learning. Now they have a clear and explicit understanding that not developing OL can lead to limited literacy. Participant #8 described an “aha” moment that summed up the shift in learning.

> “I understand how extremely important oral language is. And it's almost that foundational piece. It's just as foundational a skill as the phonics piece is, and the sight word knowledge, if not more. And the fact that the stronger a child's oral language is,

> the more successful they will be in the other areas, because it helps the oral language piece helps them to be able to articulate, and for their brains to be able to put things together. So that was a huge, huge aha for me, and the fact that we can do this all the time." (Participant #8, personal communication, November 3, 2025).

OL is a foundational skill that every educator should be aware of and incorporate into lesson planning.

Improved Professional Confidence

This theme suggests that, in addition to increasing their awareness of explicitly teaching OL, reading leaders' confidence, ability, and willingness to support educators in teaching OL also evolved. During the first focus group, educators expressed a lack of confidence in helping other educators. Several comments reflected that they were unsure of how and what to do. One participant stated, "I feel a little bit more confident, but at the same time, I think I'm also very overwhelmed, almost, because it's… it's so open-ended, and I just want a more explicit roadmap." (Participant #12, personal communication, October 13, 2025). Another participant summarized the hesitancy by posing several questions during the midpoint focus group session.

> "How could we support, you know, the general educator in not making it a separate entity, but just a natural part of instruction, you know? Not to, you know, make it seem like it's something extra, but just how do you naturally incorporate those types of instructional activities in your day-to-day lessons?" (Participant #1, personal communication, October 13, 2025).

In response to these comments, sessions were created for PDSA Cycle Two to focus on implementing explicit OL instruction. To deepen participants' understanding and build confidence, the Cycle Two session provided specific strategies and time for practice in breakout rooms.

Following further instruction and discussion during PDSA Cycle Two, participants expressed increased confidence in assisting other teachers with OL. Feelings of comfort and confidence were described in the following statements: “I feel much more comfortable now than… you know, before.” (Participant #4, personal communication, November 3, 2025) and “I was a little wary about trying it, I feel a lot more eager to try now as well.” (Participant #6, personal communication, November 3, 2025). One participant expressed on an exit ticket a deeper understanding and willingness to share with the teachers she supports, “I always come away from these sessions with something to add to my practice and/or to share with the teachers that I work with.” (Anonymous, personal communication, October 27, 2025). These expressions of growth and confidence are necessary for effective reading instruction. Goldfeld et al. (2022) found that teachers must possess explicit knowledge of oral language and be able to apply that knowledge to effect a shift in literacy.

Following the completion of PDSA Cycle Two, some participants reported adopting new practices to support teachers with OL. Participants were visibly excited upon locating the researcher in the building and reported on how they applied their new OL knowledge. One participant noted, “I can now quickly identify opportunities for OL development when observing and supporting teachers. I am able to show teachers opportunities to incorporate OL during their lessons.” (Participant #11, personal communication; December 9, 2025). Another participant stated,

> “When I debrief or plan with teachers, I listen carefully to what they are saying, especially about ELD students, so that I can offer suggestions to support them and highlight opportunities to build oral language in the curriculum. During a colleague visit, I also offered specific suggestions to support a teacher with implementing turn and talk in a kindergarten classroom, including having students repeat an exemplar answer and providing times during their morning meeting for students to talk.” (Participant #4, personal communication, December 9, 2025).

Another comment not only reflects an incident of sharing OL practices with educators but also shows how the explicit sharing was transformed into direct instruction for students. “As I am doing my coaching sessions, I have been more intentional with sharing the benefits of OL strategies, and they have been able to share how the implementation of these strategies has enhanced their lessons.” (Participant #3, personal communication; December 3, 2025). This comment from Participant #3 is essential to the change idea explored in this project. The statement directly addresses building educator capacity and shifting belief systems about teaching through a curriculum grounded in the SOR. This reading leader has begun intentionally incorporating and sharing oral language strategies and notes that teachers are discussing the impact of OL in their lessons. This is the ripple effect the Theory of Improvement anticipates: a literacy leader whose capacity is developed in turn spreads that capacity and learning to classroom teachers, and ultimately to students.

Strengthened Assessment Literacy in Oral Language

During PDSA Cycle One, participants expressed a need to identify students with limited oral language skills. During one of the sessions, a participant asked, ”How do I know if a student is limited language or just shy? Is there a way to tell the difference?” (Participant #2, personal communication, October 8, 2025), and other participants agreed with this question by visibly shaking their heads. This question led to the creation of a session in PDSA Cycle Two to conduct an informal assessment to identify limited oral language skills.

The Record of Oral Language (ROL), developed by Clay et al. (2015), is an informal assessment used to identify limited language skills. Former Reading Recovery Teachers in CPSD have previously used this assessment. Seven of the twelve participants had prior training in Reading Recovery and were familiar with the ROL. However, they were not familiar with its intended use. “When I used it previously, like [Participant #6] was saying, I just felt like it was just, just a something to do, kind of thing, not a real purpose behind it. Well, at the time, I

didn't think about a real purpose, or it was never explained.” (Participant #7, personal communication, October 27, 2025).

During Cycle Two, participants were introduced or reintroduced to the ROL. The original purpose was explained, explicit directions for administering the assessment were provided, and ample time was provided to practice with colleagues. Following the session, participants were assigned to administer the ROL assessment to at least one student. The hands-on practice was highlighted as particularly helpful.

> “I really enjoyed when we practiced the assessment. That was helpful for me, just to get a chance to, you know, see how it was done, and then to practice. So, we could see how easy or hard it was. Because I then, like, I think the next day or so, I did it. So I was like, you know, I'm glad I had that chance to practice, or hear someone else practice, because it was very helpful.” (Participant #8, personal communication, November 3, 2025).

> “The ROL answers the question, does the child have the oral language capacity to do said intervention, because if the child doesn't, then we need to start there [with OL] first. So, it was very, very helpful. Very helpful.” (Participant #2, personal communication, November 3, 2025).

Participants who had previously been trained in administering the ROL reported a new understanding of its purpose and of how to analyze the results.

> “I used this assessment previously as a Reading Recovery teacher. Nothing about the administration has changed, yet the purpose of conducting the assessment and the next steps implemented after the administration are vastly different. Previously, I did not understand the purpose of administering the ROL; additionally, I did not use the results to intentionally plan any instruction to support the development of students' oral language. The assessment was not very difficult to administer; however, it took me a bit

> longer to administer because I was very careful with recording the notes and the student's responses." (Anonymous, personal communication, November 14, 2025)

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that participants strengthened their knowledge of the ROL and how to use it as designed. The participants appreciated the practice assignment, and the activity identified next steps for OL development.

> "…the assessment provided insight into how the student hears and grasps the language. Test results can provide an instructional guide to how much language a student can retain and which parts of language instruction to address, e.g., possessives, contractions, pronouns, visually similar words, etc." (Anonymous, personal communication, November 14, 2025),

Other participants expressed that they would incorporate this assessment into their instructional practices. "This is valuable information to have especially for those students we are trying to gather data on for MTSS (multiple tiered systems of support) purposes. I have ordered the book." (Anonymous, personal communication, November 14, 2025) and "I would definitely use this assessment in my practice. I think it gives a lot of information about our students that could better help me to build their oral language skills." (Anonymous, personal communication, November 14, 2025).

The data provide further evidence consistent with Doyle's (2018) claim that the Record of Oral Language (ROL) is a meaningful measure of oral language development. It is worth noting that participants' enthusiasm for the ROL should be interpreted within the context of this pilot implementation. Whether literacy leaders without comparable familiarity with or access to the ROL would perceive it as equally valuable, or whether additional scaffolding would be necessary, remains an open question and is addressed further in the Limitations section.

Influence of Professional Development Design

While the study was designed to examine shifts in knowledge and practice, participants

kept naming the design of the professional development itself as central to their learning experience. Including this theme is not about evaluating the quality of the sessions in isolation, but instead about what the feedback tells us. When literacy leaders described what helped them learn, they were also describing what they need as professionals. That information has real implications for how the district designs professional learning going forward. The format of the sessions was modeled on the approach described by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) in Section Two. Participants provided positive comments in almost every session of Cycle One and Cycle Two. The format is a hybrid of a college course and professional development, with several interactive sessions. The PD was iterative, making adjustments after reviewing each session's exit tickets. Participants reported that the format and assignments led to a deeper understanding of OL's explicit teaching.

> “It [the PD format] actually helped me, because it was in bite-sized pieces. When I get too much information thrown at me in a PD session. 9 times out of 10, I may take a little bit of it, and then I may not. I'll just put it aside and not deal with it at all, because it's just too much. And the way this was given, not only was it given in bite-sized pieces, but then we also had an assignment connected to it. So, it would have to stay with me, because I'm using exactly what I'm learning. I'm applying it, and the application helps me to learn even more.” (Participant #7, personal communication, October 13, 2025).

Another participant focused on the benefits of the application assignments given throughout the sessions.

> “The homework was like a silent coach. Because when you have a PD, and you have a coach that comes in and works with you, you learn to integrate it more into your instruction. Well, this was similar. Having the assignments was like having a coach, because now I gotta take this and actually apply it. And it just helped me to get a better

> understanding of the necessity of oral language instruction." (Participant #8, personal communication, October 13, 2025).

The 'homework as coach' metaphor is significant. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) identify coaching and expert support as one of seven features of effective professional development. These participants experienced the assignments as an equivalent of coaching, a way for sustaining learning between sessions that could be replicated in future cohorts without requiring additional facilitator time. One participant initially hesitated to complete the assignments but later recognized their benefits.

> "One of the things that I appreciated, that I didn't think I would appreciate, was the homework assignments and being expected to try this out. Like, look and find it in the curriculum, have the conversation with the child, like, put it into action, helped it stick more than just sitting and listening." (Participant #12, personal communication, October 13, 2025).

Participants reported that the concise 90-minute session structure and the incorporation of active learning supported their ability to process and internalize the information.

Connection of RQ1 to the Theory of Improvement

While this study was designed around the first primary driver, the findings from RQ1 went beyond what was anticipated. Although the focus of this study was increasing educator capacity, the themes identified in the analysis of RQ1 directly affected two of the primary change ideas: increasing educator capacity and shifting educator beliefs. The participants clearly indicated an increase in knowledge about OL, as evidenced by post-survey responses and comments made throughout the sessions. Two participants summed up the increased understanding of OL, "The fact that it's very important to have that [OL] foundation, I think that's the biggest takeaway for me." (Participant #10, personal communication, November 3, 2025) and "But, after participating in the sessions, you know, getting the additional understanding of

the importance of oral language and how it all fits and how it produces a stronger student in all other facets of reading. Now, it's making sense. This [OL] is the connection." (Participant #6, personal communication, November 3, 2025).

The professional development design developed by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) was a key factor in participant learning. Participants reported retaining the material because the information was presented in small increments across several sessions, rather than a massive amount of information in a single day. Participants repeatedly indicated that the sessions were well structured and that the setting fostered productive learning conditions. One participant expressed that the environment was conducive to learning, "I felt like it [the PD] was definitely a safe space for learning." (Anonymous, personal communication, October 27, 2025). The data indicate movement toward the Theory of Improvement's core aim of enhancing educator capacity by demonstrating *how* to develop an effective PD.

Measuring a shift in beliefs is more difficult. However, the participants' voluntary actions and willingness indicated a change in beliefs regarding the teaching of the SOR. One participant described the shift in thinking about oral language in relation to a reconceptualized Scarborough's Rope, "The rope that had the oral language piece [explicitly included], and how it's all woven in. I definitely want to swap out what I have posted [in my classroom]. It is very, very, very important for our ELs and our non-ELs, so it really did shift my thinking." (Participant #8, personal communication, November 3, 2025).

Following the professional development sessions, participants have a reframed understanding of OL, as evidenced by the importance of guiding educators to explicitly instruct students. Participants reported increased professional confidence when they shared their OL knowledge with teachers during coaching sessions and collaborative planning. All participants expanded their knowledge on assessing students for limited OL and determining the next academic steps to strengthen students' OL skills. Participants recognize the importance of

sharing OL strategies with staff; however, Research Question Two examines the instructional practices each reading leader incorporated into their work directly with ELs and their willingness to extend this knowledge beyond their schools.

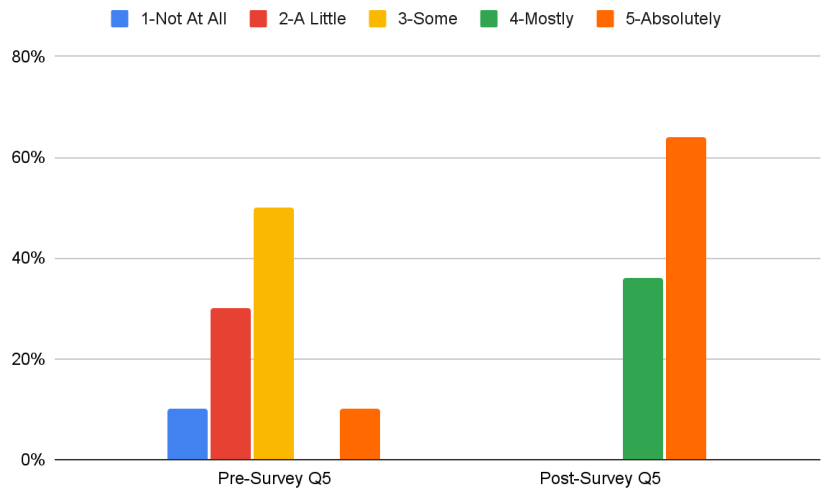
Analysis of Research Question Two

Research Question Two (RQ2) examined reading leaders' willingness to implement OL practices in their work with ELs. Educator leaders may hold different beliefs about a particular strategy the district is promoting. The researcher sought to determine whether the oral language practices introduced in the PD were implemented following the PD. RQ2 examined how targeted professional development has shaped the instructional practices of literacy leaders. The themes that emerged from RQ1, reframed understanding of oral language, improved professional confidence to support other educators, and strengthened assessment literacy, also impact the second research question, and some data overlapped. However, two significant themes emerged from the data that specifically addressed RQ2: a shift from incidental to intentional teaching of OL and a willingness to share information across the school and district.

Shift From Incidental to Intentional Teaching

All twelve participants have several years of experience teaching ELs, and three hold a state-level certificate in EL instruction. The participants work in schools with a minimum of 60% EL population. These educators had an understanding of oral language prior to the PD (See Graph 3 and Appendix D). However, following the PD, 100% of participants reported being ‘Absolutely’ or ‘Often’ confident in their ability to identify specific OL strategies to teach ELs. The data revealed shifts across two subthemes: the ability to identify OL strategies already present in the curriculum and the ability to add OL strategies where the curriculum lacked them. Another prominent subtheme that emerged as a barrier to implementing the two previously identified subthemes was limited time.

Graph 3: Pre-Survey Q5 and Post-Survey Q5



Survey Q5: I know specific oral language strategies to teach ELs.

Ability to Identify OL Strategies. Participants completed an assignment following Cycle 1 Session 3 to review an upcoming lesson in the curriculum and identify the places where OL strategies were present. One participant expressed their feelings about OL strategies included in the curriculum, “I knew they were in there [the curriculum], but I skipped them because of time. We don’t have a lot of time to do turn & talks or have discussions. When I run short of time, that’s the first thing I cut out.” (Participant #3, personal communication, October 9, 2025). Another also expressed a link between time and teaching OL, “There were just too many turn & talks, pair/squares, or whatever. I didn’t do most of them, but I see how important it is now.” (Participant #11, personal communication, October 15, 2025). These participant comments indicate that educators are aware of the OL strategies but intentionally omit activities due to time constraints or do not fully understand their importance. This finding corroborates the research by August and Shanahan (2007), who found that oral proficiency for ELs is critical but often overlooked in instruction. The participants' admission that they 'skipped'

oral language opportunities 'because of time' illustrates precisely the pattern of marginalization documented in classroom practice (Escamilla & Strong, 2024; Goldenberg, 2020). What changed during this portion of the professional development was not the presence of oral language strategies in the curriculum—they were already there—but rather the participants' understanding that these strategies cannot be treated as optional.

One PD assignment asked participants to identify OL strategies within the curriculum and to present a lesson plan. Participant #5 located and submitted a lesson plan artifact that included an OL strategy titled ‘Back-to-Back, Face-to-Face.’ (See Appendix G) In this activity, partners stand back-to-back, listen to a question, pause to reflect, then turn to face each other to discuss their responses. Participant #5 stated, “The kids loved it, and I enjoyed teaching the strategy to them!” (personal communication, October 6, 2025). As Participant #5 shared the lesson, other participants asked questions and commented, “You got *that* out of the curriculum?” “Has it always been in there?” “Where did you find that?” “I’ve never seen that before!” “That’s cute! I’m going to try that!” (personal communication, October 6, 2025). These findings indicate a shift from viewing OL strategies as incidental and less important to recognizing that effective OL strategies are present in the current curriculum. The participants expressed their enjoyment in listening to their colleagues present lesson plans and learning about the places in the curriculum where OL strategies emerge. One participant commented, “I loved listening to everyone's lessons- especially the use of the back-to-back.” (Participant #2, personal communication, October 6, 2025).

Ability to Add OL Strategies. Following Cycle 1, Session 3, participants were asked to complete a second component of the assignment. Participants identified points in the curriculum and during the instructional day where OL strategies could be incorporated. Adding OL strategies can make the curriculum more equitable for ELs. During each session in Cycle 1, specific OL strategies and resources were modeled, and participants had the opportunity to practice a skill and report their results. Participants located numerous opportunities in the

curriculum and throughout the school day to incorporate OL activities with ease. Participants noted that incorporating OL strategies need not be an immense undertaking, but it should be an intentional one. “I didn't have to plan anything extra. I'm giving them opportunities to use their oral language, or to expound upon it. So, that was a big takeaway for me, that I can just tweak it a little bit.” (Participant #6, personal communication, November 7, 2025). Another participant shared a minor adjustment they made in teaching, “I'm gonna say a sentence, and I want you to say it after me. So now, it's not just me saying the sentence, it's them having that oral language practice. So, just that little tweak.” (Participant #4, personal communication, November 13, 2025). Another participant shared how they had made adjustments, “I used OL today! We were going over vocabulary, and I required that they use the words in sentences.” (Participant #10, personal communication, November 4, 2025). These comments reflect the ease with which experienced educators can incorporate OL strategies into lessons.

The participants had the capacity to incorporate OL strategies, but did not know how OL impacted their students. Now that they had developed a deeper understanding of the importance of explicitly teaching OL, they shared, “We need to provide more opportunities for oral language development in the classroom. Oral language does not come naturally; it needs to be taught.” (Anonymous Participant, personal communication, October 9, 2025). Another participant shared, “Oral Language is already built into the CIM and can easily be added wherever students need more support. It’s important for teachers to recognize how valuable it is and plan carefully so those oral language parts don’t get skipped.” (Anonymous Participant, personal communication, October 9, 2025). These comments indicate that participants believe more opportunities to teach OL should be available to support ELs, and that educators should not omit OL instruction. This leads to the next theme that emerged, the willingness to present oral language strategies to the staff at their school and throughout the district.

Cutting across both subthemes was the persistent constraint of instructional time. Time functioned as a pressure in the background of participants' experiences, shaping how, when,

and whether they were able to put their new learning into action. The ability to identify oral language strategies and incorporate them into reading lessons was hindered. Participants consistently reported a desire to implement explicit instruction in OL within the schools they lead; however, time constraints were a barrier. Time is a precious resource, and there never seems to be enough of it in the elementary classroom. Participants were asked, 1 month after the sessions concluded, whether they had implemented OL strategies. Three respondents (25%) referenced the lack of time. When asked if they had implemented the learned OL strategies, three respondents stated, “Not yet, simply because time has not allowed. But, definitely in the future, now that I've received so much explicit exposure to this, I could definitely see myself doing that in the future.” (Anonymous participant, personal communication, December 19, 2025). “Only because of time, is why I haven't fully been able to implement it just yet. However, I plan to implement more upon our return from the holiday break.” (Anonymous participant, personal communication, December 19, 2025). The third respondent requests administrative support along with additional time. “It would probably just be the green light from the building leader, you know, making sure that they support you with it and allowing the time for it to happen.” (Anonymous participant, personal communication, December 19, 2025). These comments should not be mistaken for disengagement by participants or for the professional development being unsuccessful. The participants who cited time constraints were among those who expressed the strongest commitment to implementing oral language strategies; they had not yet had the chance to act on what they learned. The honesty in these comments is valuable. It names a common structural problem that professional development alone cannot solve. If the district invests in building literacy leaders' knowledge but does not create protected time and administrative support for implementation, the result will be educators who know more but can do little differently. Enthusiasm without opportunity does not produce change.

Willingness to Turn Key an OL PD

As the PD sessions drew to a close, participants became increasingly passionate about disseminating the message about intentionally teaching OL. One participant shared during the final session, “If we are supposed to be the experts and we don’t know this information about OL, then I know our teachers don’t know this. This is important to all of our students, not just the ELs. Are you going district-wide with this PD? You need to!” (Participant #1, personal communication, October 27, 2025). This comment reflects the similar ideas expressed by August & Shanahan (2007), who argue that oral language should be a focus of reading instruction for ELs. Additionally, this comment captures how change actually works. When people genuinely internalize new learning, they do not tend to keep it to themselves. Participants did not just leave the sessions with new knowledge. Within two PDSA cycles, they were already considering how to share that knowledge with others. Improvement cannot depend solely on top-down mandates. It needs people who believe in the work and want to spread it.

In a large district such as CPSD, a team of facilitators would be needed to effectively implement a PD on the importance of OL and its complementary teaching strategies. When asked whether they wanted to share the OL message with their schools and the district, all responded positively. Some of the comments were:

> “Presenting to teachers the research that we talked about earlier, I think they would really realize just how important it is for them to implement this throughout their lessons. We talked about how much time is allocated for ELD students, and we know it's not just ELD students or even SPED students. The students are not given a lot of time to talk. Some people just want the room to be so quiet, but you do need to have students engaging in conversation. Some people feel a good classroom manager has a quiet classroom, and that's not necessarily true. Students need to be engaged in

> conversation throughout the day." (Participant #8, personal communication, November 3, 2025).

Other participants articulated the points they wanted to emphasize to their staff during collaborative planning meetings or coaching sessions with teachers. "I can hone in on [OL] when I meet and plan with them, to say, please don't skip the turn and talk. Please, please make sure you do it, make sure that you're walking around monitoring the conversations, but letting them talk is so crucial. So, that's one of my next big steps." (Participant #9, personal communication, October 13, 2025). One participant felt that some Language Arts sections removed from the curriculum to meet recommended time allocations, such as Morning Meeting, should be reintroduced through a PD on OL. Morning Meeting was one activity that promoted oral language production and modeling. "I think some teachers may not know how to do that [OL], and some areas in the curriculum where it was taken away, like our morning meetings, some places that we did have it, you know, teachers who've been around, they can still implement this." (Participant #3, personal communication, October 13, 2025). Participant #3 is not just suggesting adding oral language strategies; she is identifying a place for OL in the school day that was removed. Identifying lost learning opportunities as a result of the recent shift to structured literacy and how it should be reconsidered is what Primary Driver 3: creating an equitable SOR curriculum, is referencing in the Theory of Improvement. This theme may be interpreted as a willingness to spread the importance of explicitly teaching oral language. Participants are not only willing to facilitate learning but also to critically analyze the curriculum and develop ideas beyond the project.

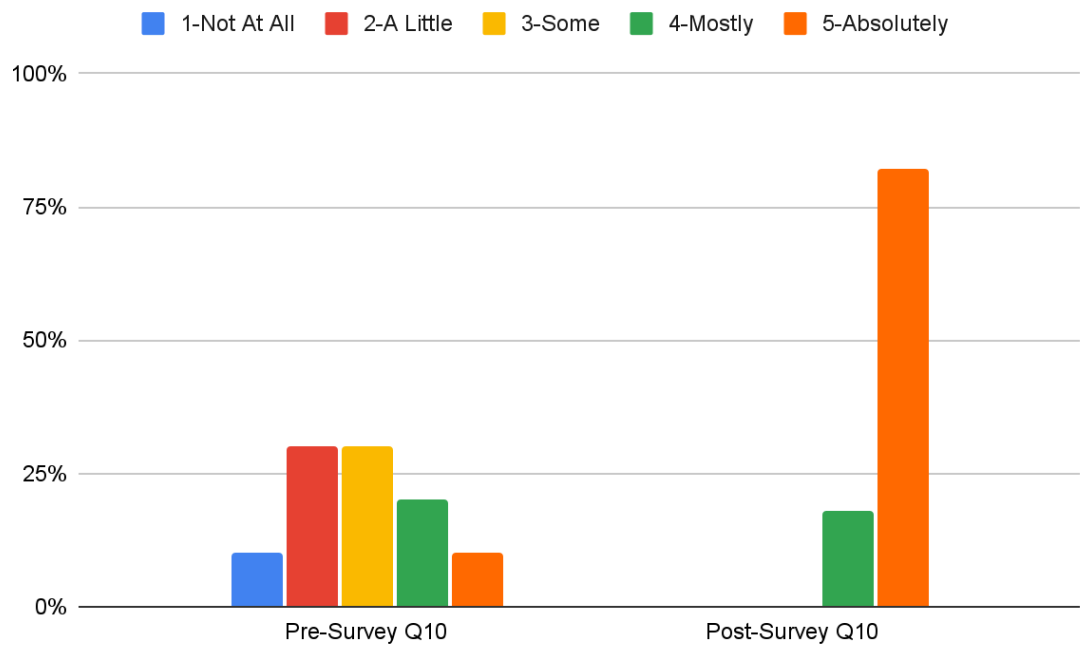
Connection of RQ2 to the Theory of Improvement

The three change ideas presented in the Theory of Improvement, increasing educator capacity, shifting educators' belief systems about teaching ELs and the SOR, and creating an equitable curriculum, are all supported in the analysis of RQ2. RQ2 sought to determine how

literacy leaders' instructional practices would be affected by professional development focused on oral language and appropriate strategies.

Although all participants reported having taught oral language strategies, only one participant “Absolutely” understood where to locate them in the curriculum prior to participating in the PD (See Graph 4). Following the sessions, 100% of participants reported that they “Mostly” or “Absolutely” understood where to locate OL strategies. These survey findings indicate a shift in participants' capacity to recognize oral language strategies. One participant's comment accurately reflected that participants knew the information but did not explicitly focus on teaching it. “We have been teaching oral language, but we just…I guess for me, just never looked at it like I was explicitly teaching oral language.” (Participant #4, personal communication, October 13, 2025).

Graph 4: Pre-Survey Q10 and Post-Survey Q10



Survey Q10: I can locate places in the current RELA curriculum to add oral language strategies

RQ2 addresses shifting belief systems towards structured literacy by equipping leaders

with the knowledge to determine if a lesson is equitable in meeting the needs of ELs. Participants identified areas of the curriculum with OL weaknesses that could be strengthened through strategies. Although beliefs are difficult to measure, the willingness to disseminate the OL message to staff in their schools and across the district indicates recognition that the structured literacy curriculum alone is insufficient for ELs. One participant is pondering how to get teachers on board with adding the explicit teaching of oral language, “I need some kind of buy-in from the classroom teacher, because a lot of people are not buying what, you know, we're selling. So, we gotta kind of find some way, you know, to get buy in, get some buy-in from the educators to let them know that this is a real thing.” (Participant #8, personal communication, November 3, 2025). The fact that this reading leader refers to OL as “a real thing” reveals a shift in beliefs.

The third primary driver, creating an equitable curriculum, was the focus of the session, during which the reading leaders closely reviewed an upcoming lesson to identify or add OL strategies that would fit easily. Creating an equitable curriculum does not require eliminating the current curriculum; rather, it requires enhancing it. Participants demonstrated the capacity to enhance the curriculum by developing lesson artifacts. Each submitted lesson plan included examples of explicit oral language activities. Participant #10 plans to implement a school-wide PD to help ease teachers into the idea: “I plan to host a small professional development with my own teachers just to open their eyes a little bit and implement some of the strategies.” (Participant #10, personal communication, November 4, 2025).

The subtheme of time constraints negatively affected the development of an equitable curriculum for ELs. Three of the twelve reading leaders reported that they have not been able to allocate time to implement explicit OL instruction, but they maintain their commitment to do so in the near future. Time was mentioned as a major concern for some schools in the district, as mentioned in Section One of this capstone. One reading specialist mentioned the challenges of ensuring each subject receives the allotted recommended teaching time, but

there simply isn't enough instructional time during a school day (S. Alston, personal communication, October 8, 2024). Support for resolving the time issues will have to be addressed with the district's direction and input.

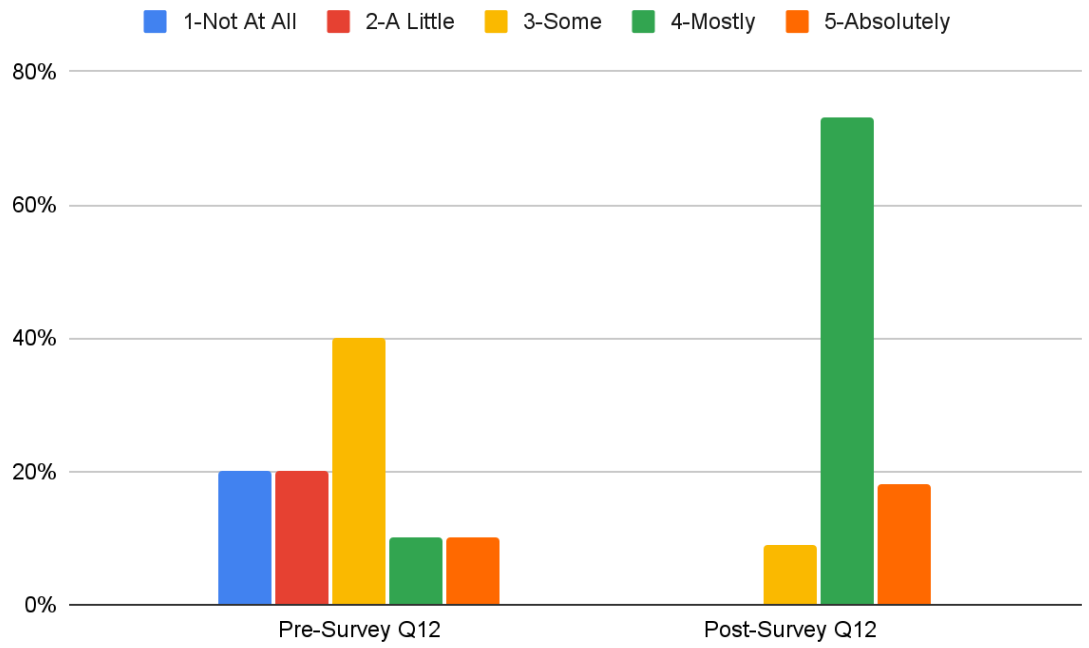
Analysis of Short- and Long-Term Aims

The short-term aim of the driver diagram was to increase educators' self-efficacy in supporting ELs with explicit oral language within 2 PDSA cycles. Prior to starting the PD series, only 20% of participants reported that they “Mostly” and “Absolutely” felt equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to ELs. Following the PDSA cycles, 91% of participants said that they “Mostly” and “Absolutely” felt equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills; an increase of 71% (See Graph 5). Participant #9 stated how their awareness of the various resources increased. “Something that I wasn't aware of, like, oh my god, there are these different things that we do, and that there are a lot of resources out there to help us to include building oral language within our instructional practice.” (Participant #9, personal communication, October 13, 2025). One participant spoke about some specific changes they have made to their practices with their intervention group.

> “I am more cognizant of opportunities to incorporate OL strategies. I allow students to talk about things that are familiar (home, family, animals, school, playground, zoo, park, field trip, etc,) which makes it easier to talk; I now allow students to speak in their own language during a Turn &Talk; I provide an exemplar sentence for students to practice as they are learning the English Language especially with more challenging content. (Anonymous, personal communication, November 7, 2025).

These comments reflect some of the new learning from the two PDSA cycles. Awareness of the available OL resources and specific examples of implementing some of the strategies provided in those resources led the literacy leaders to feel more confident in their craft.

Graph 5: Pre-Survey Q12 and Post-Survey Q12



Survey Q12: I feel equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to ELs.

The long-term aim of increasing end-of-year reading scores was indirectly affected by the professional development. The PD was just one of the change ideas that would impact reading scores. Researchers have found that addressing low reading achievement is a multifaceted problem that requires multiple solutions (Thomas, 2022). Although the long-term goal was not intended to be measured during these PDSA cycles, the evidence presented indicates a positive move in the right direction.

Synthesis of Major Findings & Conclusion

Crowne Point School District (CPSD) has seen its English Learner (EL) population grow each year. In 2023, CPSD reported that only 12% of ELs met English Language Arts standards, compared with 23% of non-ELs. The current science of reading implementation lacks explicit instruction in oral language for ELs. The intervention tested in this capstone was a professional development program for literacy leaders focused on oral language development.

Some of the key themes of this study revealed: (1) Participants experienced knowledge transformation, where participants moved from an implicit awareness of oral language to an explicit understanding. 82% of the participants reported that they “absolutely” understood that oral language is an essential part of foundational reading on the post survey, as opposed to the pre-survey, where 50% of the participants reported “some/most”. (2) Participants displayed a shift in their beliefs about oral language. Participants recognized that OL is critical and not optional. Participants said they would skip OL activities, mostly due to time constraints, but expressed a commitment to continuing them after the PD. (3) Participants demonstrated a shift in teaching practices. The move from incidental to intentional teaching was demonstrated in their ability to locate OL strategies in the curriculum and add them where they were lacking. (4) Participants' assessment knowledge improved. Participants were given a tool to identify students with limited OL and plan the instructional steps required to improve listening and speaking skills. (5) The leadership capacity of each participant was strengthened. 100% of participants were willing to share OL knowledge with teachers, and several began to apply the newly acquired knowledge in coaching and collaborative planning sessions. The idea connecting the two research questions is similar to the saying often attributed to Maya Angelou: ‘When you know better, you do better.’ These findings begin to address the Problem of Practice, though they do so indirectly. The PoP identifies a failure in the current structured literacy implementation to serve early elementary English learners equitably. Twelve

participants cannot resolve that failure on their own. What this study shows, however, is that the mechanism for change works. When literacy leaders understand *why* oral language matters, which was addressed in RQ1 through self-efficacy and preparedness, they change *what* they do and *how* they lead, which was addressed in RQ2, which was evident in their instructional practices. Ultimately, these changes by literacy leaders will reach teachers, who reach students.

Findings Alignment

These findings confirm August & Shanahan's (2007) work. These researchers found that oral language is critical but overlooked. Participants admitted to bypassing OL strategies before they understood the importance of explicitly teaching them. The findings support Darling-Hammond et al.'s (2017) findings regarding professional development format. Following the incrementally structured, content-focused segments, keeping the information content focused, providing support and practice assignments, and active learning were key to participants' learning. The participants' recognition that OL is a prerequisite for reading supports Konza's (2014) argument that OL should be recognized as a sixth essential component, alongside those identified by the National Reading Panel (2000). This capstone bridges the gap between the science of reading and the science of *teaching* reading, as found by Kim & Snow (2021). The professional development delivered in this capstone project translated the research knowledge into actionable practices. Finally, the evidence supports that a change in beliefs leads to a change in practices, as found by Richards et al. (2001).

Addressing the Problem of Practice

This capstone project directly addresses or impacts all three primary drivers of change. Primary Driver 1, increasing educator capacity, is directly addressed by building the capacity of 12 literacy leaders. These literacy leaders are now equipped with the knowledge about

explicitly teaching oral language and can support other educators with OL instruction. This also began to meet the short-term aim of increasing educators' self-efficacy in supporting ELs' oral language development.

Although Primary Drivers 2 and 3 were not the intended goals, they were still affected. Primary Driver 2, a shift in belief systems toward structured literacy, was affected as participants learned that the five pillars of structured literacy alone are insufficient for ELs and that explicit oral language support is foundational for reading achievement. Primary Driver 3 focused on creating an equitable curriculum. Although the OL support added by the 12 literacy leaders to the existing curriculum is not a permanent curriculum adjustment, these leaders are in a position to support curriculum writing and can offer their expertise by identifying gaps and creating permanent changes. This could move the curriculum forward toward greater equity for ELs.

By addressing the three primary drivers with this professional development, a ripple effect has been identified. The literacy leaders support teachers who directly teach ELs, potentially impacting hundreds of ELs across several schools. The reach of this work extends beyond twelve participants. Each literacy leader supports multiple schools and works directly with classroom teachers. If each participant coaches five teachers serving twenty-five students each, the indirect reach of this pilot is approximately 1,500 students. Investing in literacy leadership capacity is one of the most efficient leverage points available for improving outcomes at scale. This PD alone does not close the achievement gap, which is the basis of the long-term aim. This pilot study builds leadership capacity, and to impact student reading outcomes, explicit OL teaching strategies need to be continued and extended system-wide.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study cover five themes: (1) sample size and generalizability, (2) measurement, (3) temporal, (4) scope, and (5) implementation barriers not addressed.

Sample Size

This primarily qualitative capstone included a small, purposefully selected sample (n = 12), enabling an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and instructional shifts. While this design supported rich, contextualized analysis, the findings reflect the perspectives of 12 elementary literacy leaders and are not intended to be broadly generalizable to all CPSD literacy leaders or to districts with differing demographic compositions.

All participants volunteered to participate, which may introduce selection bias. Volunteers may have been more motivated, more reflective, or more open to strengthening their knowledge of EL instruction than non-participants. As a result, the degree of change observed may not be replicated with a less self-selected cohort.

Additionally, the study was conducted within a single large school district. Although CPSD serves a substantial EL population, that population varies significantly across schools. To ensure alignment with the problem of practice, the study focused specifically on high-EL elementary schools (60% or more EL enrollment). Consequently, it remains unclear whether similar outcomes would occur in schools with lower EL concentrations, where instructional priorities and contextual pressures may differ.

Measurement Limitations

All data collected in this study were self-reported and derived from surveys, focus groups, artifacts, and participant reflections. Although triangulation across data sources strengthened credibility, there was no independent observation or external verification of instructional changes. As a result, reported shifts in knowledge, confidence, and practice cannot be conclusively confirmed through direct classroom evidence.

Additionally, the researcher held a dual role as both the professional development facilitator and an Elementary Literacy Support Teacher who works alongside and supports some of the participating schools. This positionality may have influenced participant responses. Participants may have experienced implicit pressure to report positive outcomes or demonstrate growth, which could contribute to social desirability bias. Given the collaborative professional relationship between the researcher and participants, self-reported increases in confidence or implementation may have been overstated. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Finally, no student outcome data were collected in this study. Participants reported implementing oral language strategies with students, but whether those strategies produced measurable changes in student performance remains unknown. The findings speak to educator growth, not student outcomes. What happened in students' language and literacy development as a result is a question for future research.

Temporal Limitations

The PDSA model is designed to complete cycles quickly. The timeframe was limited to less than six weeks to implement both cycles, and data collection concluded five weeks after the final PD session. The limited timeframe made it unclear to the researcher whether participants would sustain OL practices over time. Three of the participants reported that they had not yet implemented explicit OL strategies due to time constraints, leaving implementation incomplete and the full impact of the PD yet to be realized.

Scope Limitations

The focus of this pilot study was on literacy leaders only. The study did not include the primary deliverers of OL instruction to ELs, classroom teachers. The study did not address curriculum revision. Participants identified entry points in the curriculum

to add OL strategies, but the district's curriculum was not officially revised. Also, only a single change idea was addressed during the PDSA cycles. Only one secondary driver, incorporating OL strategies into reading instruction, was addressed. This study did not address other drivers, such as combining English learner strategies with the science of reading strategies.

The ROL was introduced as a practical screening tool, but its use was not systematic. Not all participants administered it, and no data were collected on the consistency of administration. Future implementation should include calibration and norming across participants.

Implementation Barriers Not Addressed

During data analysis, a few barriers were identified that prevented the implementation of OL strategies with fidelity. Time constraints emerged as a barrier for some participants, but this study did not test for any possible solutions. Although principals and supervisors approved participants' engagement in the study, the study did not measure administrative support for OL implementation. Finally, the participants identified the following systemic barriers: scheduling issues, competing initiatives, and required programs. These barriers could stifle implementation, regardless of participants' knowledge of the importance of oral language.

Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable insights into how targeted PD can build literacy leader capacity and offer a promising model for addressing EL reading achievement gaps.

Implications of the Study

This study was grounded in a local problem with state-level roots. As described in Section One, Maryland's Science of Reading mandates have created urgency across the state, yet the policy infrastructure, state-approved training programs, and district curricula have not

adequately addressed oral language development for English learners. Within CPSD, only 12% of English learners met established reading benchmarks in 2023, compared with 23% of non-EL students; the data confirm that the current structured literacy implementation is not equitably serving this population. Because state-level policy continues to evolve, this capstone focused on what could be addressed locally. The implications described below reflect that same orientation, beginning with what literacy leaders and schools can act on now, moving to what the district can build over time, and ultimately pointing toward what the state-level policy conversation still needs to address.

Short-Term Implications (up to 6 months)

Literacy Leaders. The most immediate implication of this study is straightforward: twelve literacy leaders in the CPSD serving high-EL populations are now better equipped to support oral language development than they were before the professional development. In a district where oral language has long been acknowledged as important but not always prioritized in practice, having informed advocates positioned within schools is a meaningful starting point for change. They can begin coaching classroom teachers on the importance of oral language (OL) development and facilitate school-based professional development or PLC sessions to integrate OL across content areas. As instructional leaders, they can model OL strategies during demonstration lessons and co-teaching experiences, making practices visible and actionable for teachers. Additionally, participants can administer the Record of Oral Language assessment to identify students with limited language proficiency and use the resulting data to inform targeted intervention and instructional planning.

CPSD ES RELA Department. The ES RELA Department is now equipped with an evidence-based professional development model ready for implementation with a second cohort of literacy leaders. Drawing on insights from PDSA Cycles 1 and 2, the department can refine and adapt the model to support continuous improvement while maintaining fidelity to its

core design features. To sustain momentum, ongoing support should be provided to Cycle 1 and 2 participants through structured coaching, periodic check-ins, and refresher sessions that reinforce key concepts and practices. Continued data collection from participants will allow the department to monitor implementation, document impact, and inform future refinements to the professional learning model.

Elementary Schools. Literacy leaders can integrate OL focus into existing collaborative planning time and prioritize OL strategies in upcoming literacy instruction without a curriculum overhaul. Schools can begin using language from the reconceptualized Simple View of Reading and Scarborough's Rope that explicitly includes OL. Using this common framework can strengthen coherence across classrooms and reinforce the understanding that OL is foundational to skilled reading, not an ancillary component of instruction.

Intermediate Implications (6 months to 2 years)

District-Wide Scale-Up. CPSD should establish expectations for a dedicated time for literacy leaders to coach teachers on OL and reduce competing demands during the implementation period. It can expand PD to additional literacy leaders by facilitating two or three more PDSA cycles to reach all literacy leaders in schools with high EL populations, then continue with schools with moderate EL populations. CPSD can incorporate a train-the-trainer model by equipping the willing participants from PDSA Cycles 1 and 2 to facilitate future sessions. This process can build internal capacity. Once literacy leaders are proficient, expand the PD to reach Pre-K through 3rd-grade classroom teachers directly. The district can establish an ongoing PLC for literacy leaders focused on OL implementation, sharing successes, and troubleshooting challenges.

Curriculum and Materials. The ES RELA department, along with curriculum writers, should make OL explicit in curriculum documents. This can be achieved by revising the CPSD ES RELA curriculum to highlight existing OL strategies and add OL strategies where gaps

exist. The Speaking and Listening Toolkit, developed over a decade ago, should be revised to include a compilation of participant-created lessons and strategies into a resource easily accessible to all elementary teachers. OL can be incorporated into onboarding new literacy leaders and educators. Lastly, the curriculum should include oral language development as an explicit component in literacy intervention decision-making and progress monitoring.

Long-Term Implications (2-5 years)

Student Achievement. If explicit OL instruction becomes consistent and administratively supported across Pre-K through third grade, the research base suggests that EL reading benchmark performance could begin to move toward the long-term aim of 31% by 2028. This study alone cannot guarantee those conditions. August and Shanahan (2007) and Goldenberg (2020) provide the evidentiary foundation for this projection, but it should be understood as conditional on sustained implementation rather than as a direct outcome of this pilot.

Instructional Culture. As more educators understand the importance of OL, classroom culture should shift to valuing student talk and discussion. As oral language development becomes embedded throughout the instructional day across content areas rather than confined to designated ELD time, English Learners are afforded more consistent and meaningful opportunities to develop academic language. All teachers become empowered to select appropriate OL strategies while being accountable for explicit OL instruction.

System-Level Change. The success of this PD model could inform CPSD's approach to other instructional improvements (e.g., math and science). Improved expectations for PD should be established by ensuring it is iterative, job-embedded, and responsive to educator needs, as outlined in the Darling-Hammond framework. The process of identifying and filling curriculum gaps for ELs should become standard practice in curriculum revision cycles.

Scalability. Evidence suggests that the professional development model is well-positioned for scalability. The design is replicable, as the materials, session format,

and instructional structure are fully documented and can be implemented with fidelity across settings. Costs are manageable, particularly with a virtual delivery option that minimizes facility expenses; the primary investment involves facilitator and participant time.

Participant feedback further supports scalability, with 100% indicating a willingness to share the learning with colleagues and several expressing interest in facilitating school-based sessions themselves. Additionally, the format is adaptable and can be modified for various audiences—including literacy leaders, classroom teachers, and instructional coaches—while maintaining its core components. Finally, the model aligns with CPSD's existing professional development structures and Science of Reading mandate, increasing the feasibility of broader district-level implementation.

The initiative demonstrates strong potential for expansion, with an estimated 50–60 additional literacy leaders positioned to participate in subsequent PDSA cycles. Based on projected implementation capacity, all literacy leaders serving high-EL schools could be reached within one year, with full inclusion of all elementary literacy leaders achievable within two years. A train-the-trainer model would further accelerate this expansion by developing internal facilitators who can replicate the professional development with fidelity. This distributed leadership approach would maintain quality control while increasing reach and strengthening district-wide educator capacity. This model could transfer to other large diverse districts serving significant EL populations, particularly those districts implementing the science of reading.

Why These Findings Are Relevant, Meaningful, Usable, and Timely

These findings are highly relevant to CPSD's current instructional context. ELs comprise 26% of the district's student population (34,961 students), yet only 12% meet established reading benchmarks. This represents thousands of students whose literacy needs

are not being equitably met. The study directly addresses a documented research-to-practice gap identified by August and Shanahan (2007), who found that oral language is foundational to EL literacy development but is frequently overlooked in instruction. Local data confirm that this gap persists within CPSD. Additionally, the work aligns with district priorities, as the CPSD Strategic Plan names improving reading achievement for multilingual learners as a central goal. This study puts that commitment into practice through actionable professional learning.

The findings are meaningful because they demonstrate that well-designed, targeted professional development can shift literacy leaders' knowledge, beliefs, and instructional decision-making. Rather than replacing the district's Science of Reading curriculum, the study shows how to enhance existing structures to better serve ELs while protecting prior investments and advancing equity. The impact also extends beyond the 12 participating literacy leaders. Because these leaders coach teachers and support intervention groups, the potential influence multiplies across classrooms and schools. Additionally, limited empirical research exists on professional development explicitly centered on oral language within SOR implementation contexts. This study contributes to that emerging area by offering applied evidence from a district actively engaged in reform.

The work is usable because it is immediately actionable. Literacy leaders can implement structured oral language strategies without waiting for curriculum revisions or policy changes. Participants left with concrete tools, including the Record of Oral Language, dialogic reading protocols, sentence frames, and structured turn-and-talk routines, rather than abstract recommendations. The professional development model itself is replicable; materials, sequencing, and facilitation structures are documented and can be adapted for additional cohorts with minimal modification. Importantly, the model integrates into existing collaborative planning time, coaching structures, and intervention frameworks, eliminating the need for new systems or staffing.

Finally, the findings are timely. Maryland's Ready to Read Act (2019) and related teacher certification requirements have intensified the implementation of SOR practices statewide, creating urgency to ensure that these initiatives equitably serve ELs. At the same time, CPSD's EL population has grown 71% over nine years, from 20,369 students in 2015–16 to 34,961 in 2024–25, heightening the need for linguistically responsive instruction. National discourse surrounding reading reform has often marginalized multilingual learners. This study provides district-level evidence on how oral language can be centered in SOR implementation. As CPSD revises curriculum and professional learning systems, the district is uniquely positioned to embed this focus before practices become entrenched, making this both a strategic and opportune moment for action.

Final Thoughts

The journey from recognizing a problem to implementing sustainable solutions requires persistence, collaboration, and a willingness to challenge established practices. This capstone demonstrated that the achievement gap between English learners and their native-speaking peers is not predetermined by circumstance. It can be addressed through targeted, evidence-based professional development that equips literacy leaders with both knowledge and confidence. This capstone began with a well-documented problem in both the research and CPSD's own data: early elementary English learners are not being equitably served by the current science of reading implementation. Two PDSA cycles later, there is reason for optimism. Targeted professional development can increase literacy leaders' self-efficacy, shift their instructional practices, and position them to advocate for oral language instruction across their schools.

The research is clear: oral language is foundational to reading development, but it remains marginalized in many classrooms despite being explicitly mentioned in curriculum documents and standards. The twelve literacy leaders who participated in this study discovered

what researchers have long documented: that awareness alone is insufficient. Teachers need structured support, practical strategies, and ongoing encouragement to prioritize oral language instruction alongside phonics and decoding skills.

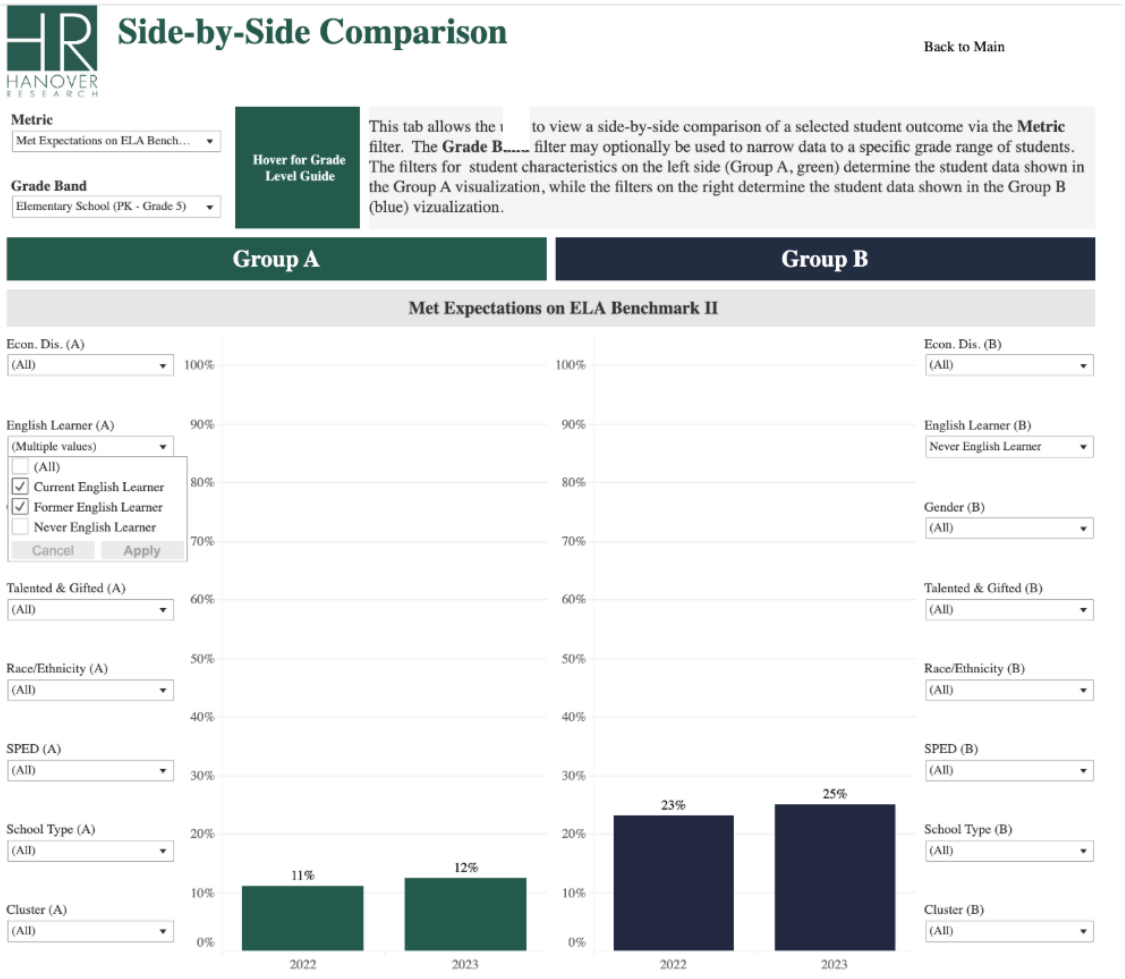
What emerged most powerfully from this work is that change is possible when educators understand the "why" behind instructional practices. When literacy leaders grasped the research connecting oral language to reading comprehension, they shifted from viewing oral language activities as optional enrichment to recognizing them as essential scaffolding for English learners. This mindset shift, coupled with concrete tools and collaborative learning opportunities, created momentum for implementation.

The path forward requires commitment at multiple levels. District leaders must protect instructional time and provide administrative support. Curriculum writers must make oral language explicit rather than implicit in reading materials. Literacy leaders must coach teachers with intentionality and confidence. Most importantly, classroom teachers must recognize that every student interaction, whether a turn-and-talk, a read-aloud discussion, or a vocabulary conversation, is an opportunity to develop the oral language skills that undergird all literacy learning.

This work is not complete. It is a beginning. This work positions the Crowne Point School District to begin closing achievement gaps and ensure that English learners receive the equitable, linguistically responsive instruction they deserve.

Appendix A: ELA Benchmark Data

Students Who Met ELA Benchmarks ELs vs. Never ELs



Appendix B: Survey and Focus Group Questions

Pre-Qualifying Survey for Potential Participants

1. What is your job title?
2. What is the population of ELD at your school?
3. Have you been formally trained to implement oral language/
    a. If so, describe the training.
4. Have you been trained in the Science of Reading?
    a. If so, which program did you participate in?

Pre- and Post-Survey Questions

1. I have an understanding of oral language.
2. I recognize signs of low oracy skills in native speakers.
3. I recognize signs of low oracy skills in ELs.
4. I know specific oral language strategies to teach native speakers.
5. I know specific oral language strategies to teach ELs.
6. I know more than two oral language strategies.
7. I regularly implement oral language strategies during lessons with native speakers.
8. I regularly implement oral language strategies during lessons with ELs.
9. I can locate places in the current ES RELA curriculum that direct me to oral language strategies.
10. I can locate places in the current RELA curriculum to add oral language strategies.
11. I feel equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to native speakers.
12. I feel equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to ELs.
13. I can support another teacher with explicitly teaching oral language skills.

Focus Group Questions

1. What was your biggest takeaway? Please describe.
2. What could be improved?
3. What questions do you still have?
4. Which parts of the session felt most engaging to you?
5. How did the format of the PD affect your learning?
6. What would you like to learn more about?
7. How confident do you feel about explicitly teaching oral language?
8. Did any portion of the PD change your thinking about oral language?
9. Did any portion of the PD support your learning and/or your ability to educate other educators/native speakers, or ELs about oral language?
10. How do you see yourself applying what you learned?
11. What support might you need to implement the strategies you learned during this PD?
12. What changes, if any, do you plan to make as a result of this PD?
13. Would you want to turn-key this session with the staff at your school? Why?

14. If you were formally trained in oral language, how would you compare this professional development to your former training?

Appendix C: Professional Development Outline

Each session was divided into blocks that did not exceed 90 minutes each and included participant activities and videos to enhance learning goals.

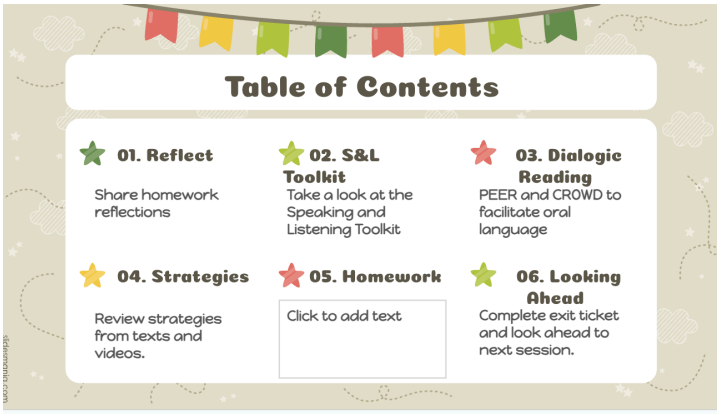
PDSA Cycle One

Session One Learning Goal: To understand what explicit oral language is and how it can impact the lives of children and adults



- Unlock common myths about OL
- Define oral language and learn what well-developed vs. poorly developed OL looks like in children and adults
- Why oral language is important, especially for our students learning English
- Review the pillars of the science of reading, noting that oral language is not explicitly included

Session Two Learning Goal: To explore new strategies for teaching oral language and how to identify oral language, teaching the standards and curriculum



- Review the Maryland standards for listening and speaking, noting that oral language is included and CPSD Speaking & Listening Toolkit
- Discussion re: the presence of oral language in the elementary RELA curriculum and *explicit teaching* of oral language
- Focus on learning and practicing specific strategies that will address explicit oral language development that go beyond “turn and talk.”

Session Three Learning Goal: Share created lessons with explicit oral language instruction and/or find district lessons with OL already embedded



- Reviewed the components of OL
- Participants presented upcoming lessons with identified entry points for explicit oral language instruction and update lessons

- Give/receive feedback on presented lessons

PDSA Cycle Two

Learning Goals: To use the Record of Oral Language and how to structure PD/collaborative planning sessions



- Participants gained an understanding of how OL can fit explicitly into the Reading Rope and the Simple View of Reading
- Participants learned how to implement the Record of Oral Language Assessment. This will help with identifying those with limited oral language and track progress as an intervention is carried out.
- Participants learned methods to implement oral language with staff, such as in collaborative planning, grade level meetings, PLC's etc.

Appendix D: Pre-Survey

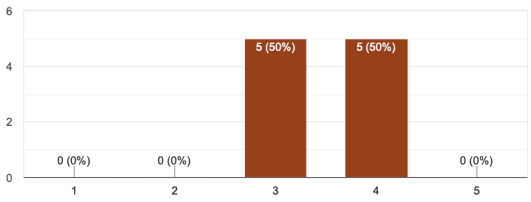
Oral Language Pre-Survey

10 responses

Publish analytics

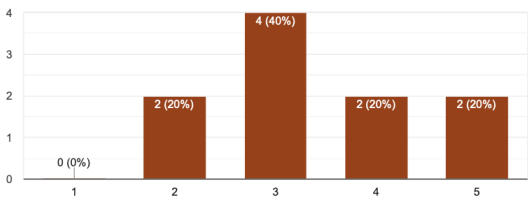
I have an understanding of oral language. Copy

10 responses



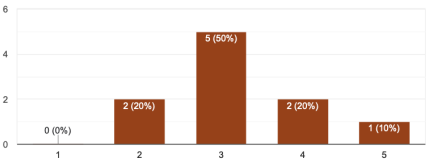
I recognize signs of low oracy skills in non-ELs. Copy

10 responses



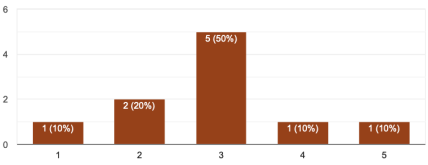
I recognize signs of low oracy skills in ELs. Copy

10 responses



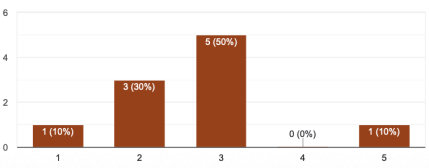
I know specific oral language strategies to teach non-ELs. Copy

10 responses



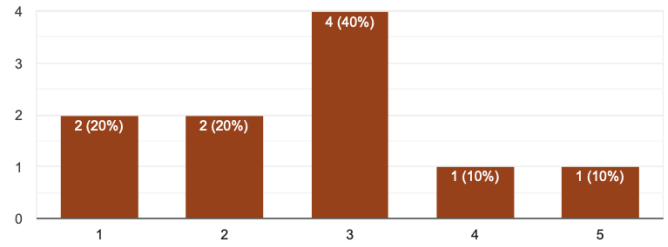
I know specific oral language strategies to teach ELs. Copy

10 responses



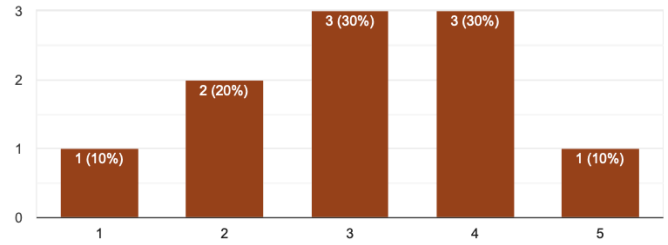
I know more than two oral language strategies. Copy

10 responses



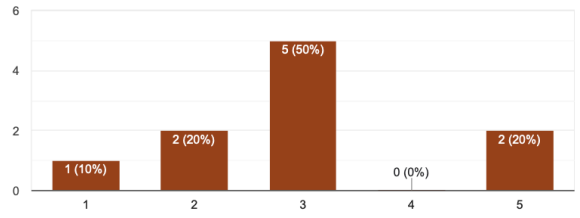
I regularly implement oral language strategies during lessons with non-ELs. Copy

10 responses



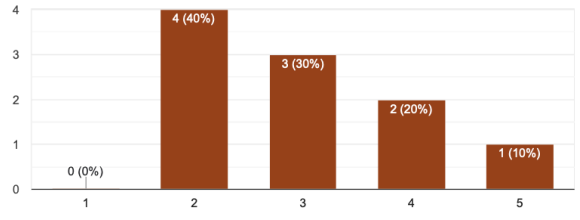
I regularly implement oral language strategies during lessons with ELs. Copy

10 responses



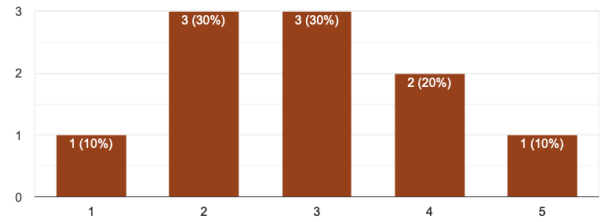
I can locate places in the current ES RELA curriculum that direct me to oral language strategies Copy

10 responses



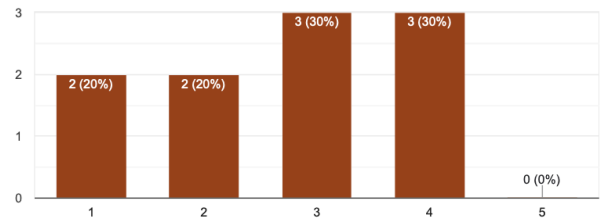
I can locate places in the current RELA curriculum to add oral language strategies. Copy

10 responses



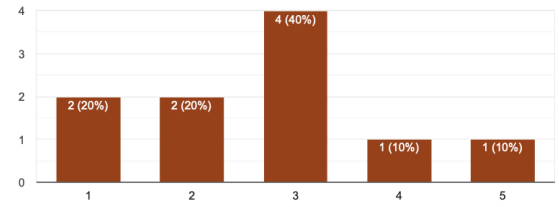
I feel equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to non-ELs. Copy

10 responses



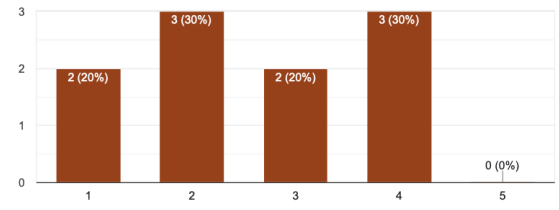
I feel equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to ELs. Copy

10 responses



I can support another teacher with explicitly teaching oral language skills. Copy

10 responses



Appendix E: Post-Survey

Oral Language Post-Survey

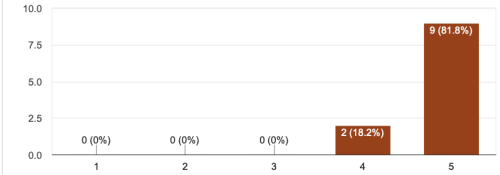
11 responses

Publish analytics

I have an understanding of oral language.

Copy

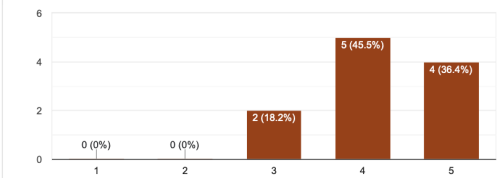
11 responses



I recognize signs of low oracy skills in non-ELs.

Copy

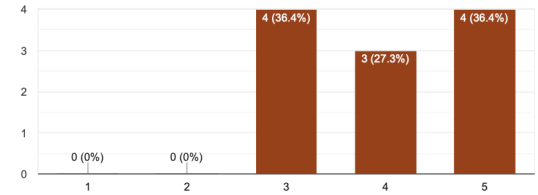
11 responses



I recognize signs of low oracy skills in ELs.

Copy

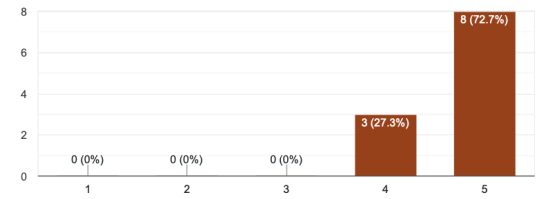
11 responses



I know specific oral language strategies to teach non-ELs.

Copy

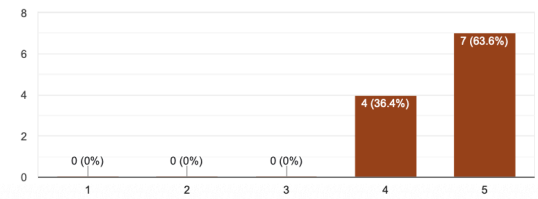
11 responses



I know specific oral language strategies to teach ELs.

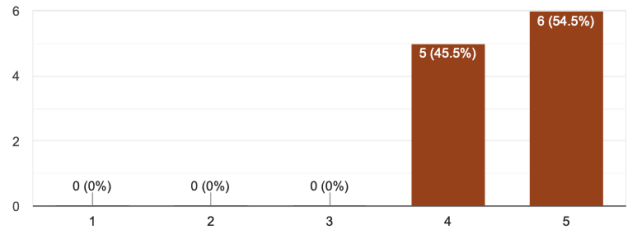
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11 responses



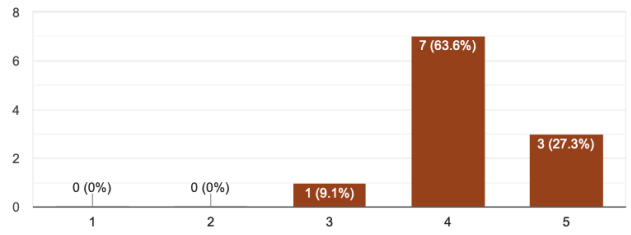
I know more than two oral language strategies. Copy

11 responses



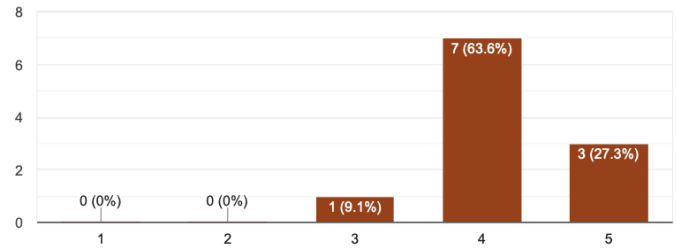
I regularly implement oral language strategies during lessons with non-ELs. Copy

11 responses



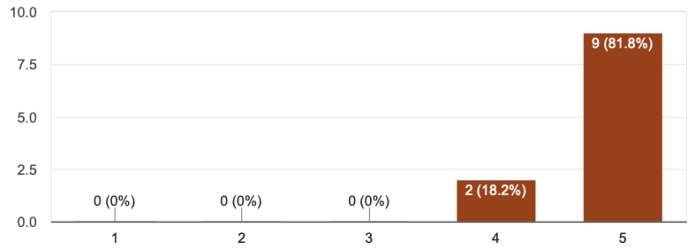
I regularly implement oral language strategies during lessons with ELs. Copy

11 responses



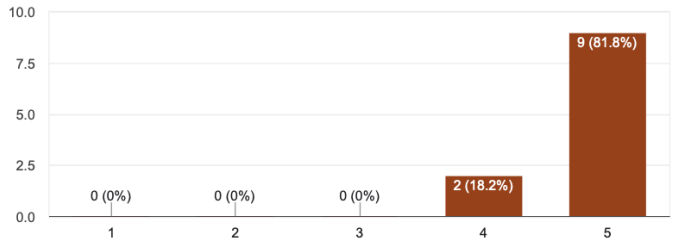
I can locate places in the current ES RELA curriculum that direct me to oral language strategies Copy

11 responses



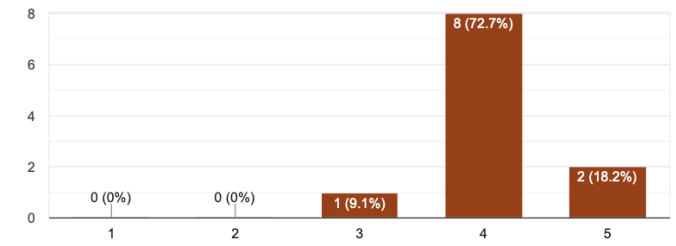
I can locate places in the current RELA curriculum to add oral language strategies. Copy

11 responses



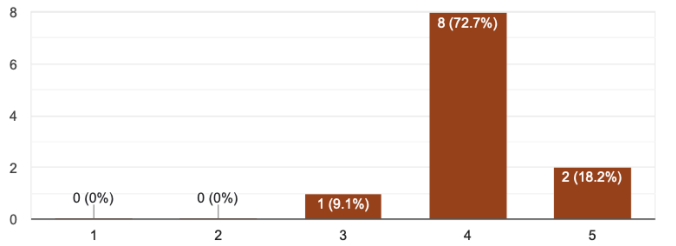
I feel equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to non-ELs. Copy

11 responses



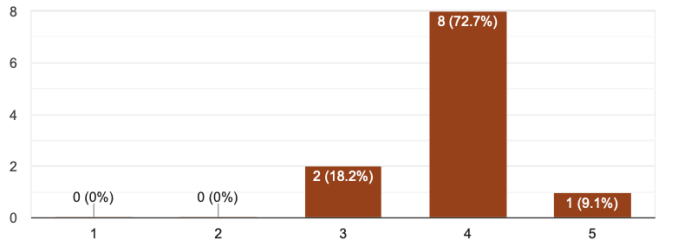
I feel equipped to explicitly teach oral language skills to ELs. Copy

11 responses



I can support another teacher with explicitly teaching oral language skills. Copy

11 responses



Appendix F: Follow-Up Survey

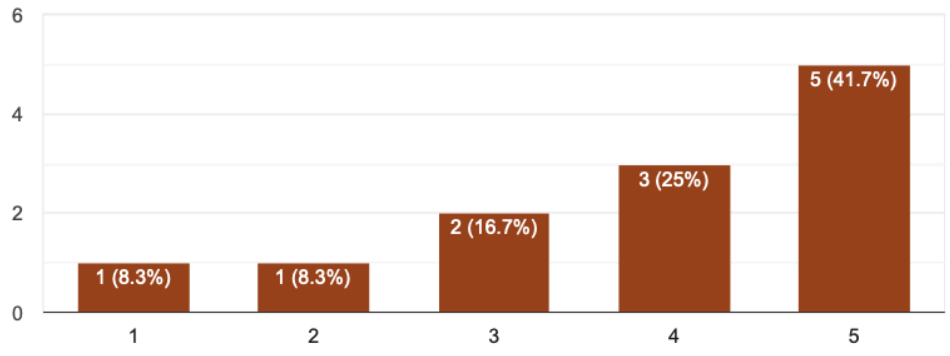
Oral Language Follow Up Survey

12 responses

Publish analytics

I have been able to implement the O.L. strategies learned in my teaching. Copy

12 responses



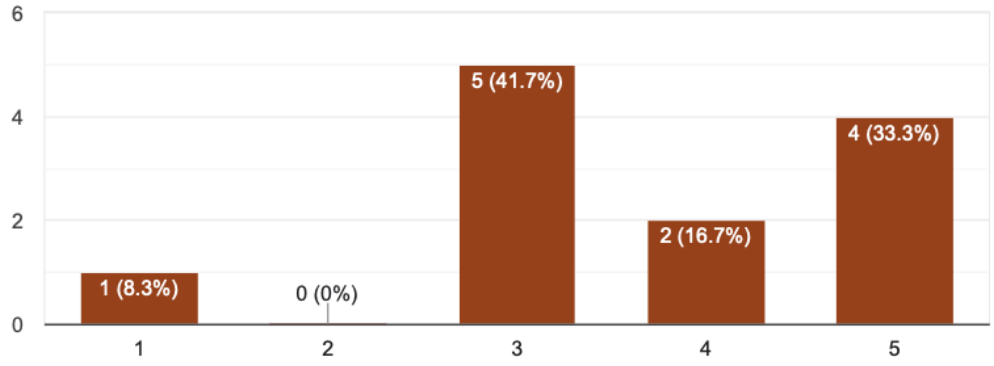
Yes, this professional development has had a meaningful impact on how I teach ELD students. It has helped me move from relying mostly on general supports to using more intentional, language-focused strategies throughout the day.

Overall, the professional development has made my instruction more intentional, inclusive, and responsive, allowing ELD students to better access grade-level content while continuing to develop their English language skills.

The oral language professional development sessions reminded me of the importance of being intentional when teaching ELD students. Now that I have a direct assignment to support first grade students daily, I am more attentive to their specific needs. The sessions provided me with additional supports to enhance my students' engagement and to encourage more use of oral language throughout their day; not just during reading instruction. the resources and strategies shared by the facilitator were explained clearly and were not difficult nor arduous to implement right away. Having opportunities to work alongside other reading leaders, added depth to the conversations. I was fortunate enough to hear and learn about challenges and successes as they relate to teaching ELD students.
When I am planning instruction, I utilize resources such as the Speaking and Listening toolkit; the ELD Key strategies and resources in the teacher's guide to ensure, I am addressing students' needs.

I have been able to incorporate the O.L. strategies while supporting other educators. Copy

12 responses



Please describe how the professional development impacted how you support other educators. (If it has not, please state, "No impact".)

12 responses

I can now quickly identify opportunities for OL development when observing and supporting teachers. I am able to show teachers opportunities to incorporate OL during their lessons. Many teachers have expressed frustration because student know little English. One example I show them is how to get students talking when writing, e.g. saying the created simple sentence 2-3 times before writing, reread the sentence after each word is added, and having the students read the sentence in pairs to each other. (Primary Class)

When I debrief or plan with teachers, I listen carefully to what they are saying, especially about ELD students, so that I can offer suggestions to support them and highlight opportunities to build oral language in the curriculum. During a colleague visit, I also offered specific suggestions to support a teacher with implementing turn and talk in a kindergarten classroom, including having students repeat an exemplar answer and providing times during their morning meeting for students to talk (about self-directed or teacher-directed topics) instead of relying solely on videos.

As I visit classrooms I look for opportunities where we can engage students in some oral language practice. Yesterday I modeled focus groups in a kindergarten classroom and the lesson was perfect for demonstrating how we can increase the oral language of even our most needy students. These level 1 students were able to echo and repeat 3, 4, and 5 word sentences with accuracy. Their confidence level at the end of the lesson was high!

Only because of time, is why haven't fully been able to implement all just yet. However, I plan to implement more upon our return from the holiday break.

As I am doing my coaching sessions I have been more intentional with sharing the benefits of O.L strategies and they have been able to share how the implantation of these strategies have enhanced their lessons.

I've showed teachers where to find oral language opportunities in the curriculum as well as given some tips on how to incorporate oral language in their current lessons.

No impact.

I have mentioned the importance of oral language and giving students opportunities to practice oral language during planning and coaching.

I make sure to explain that students must be able to express themselves orally to be able to write.

I have been more cognisant of incorporating moments to have significant conversational turns

with my students.

This professional development has strengthened how I support other educators by giving me a clearer framework and shared language for effective ELD instruction. With a deeper understanding of best practices, I am better able to model strategies, coach with purpose, and collaborate more effectively.

Overall, this professional development has enabled me to support educators in a way that is consistent, practical, and grounded in effective ELD practices, ultimately strengthening instruction and outcomes for multilingual learners across classrooms.

After attending the professional development sessions, I am confident that I am able to facilitate professional develop sessions. When I am planning lessons with teachers, I stress the importance of utilizing all available resources. I share resources with teachers. Additionally, I provide demonstration lessons that show how ELD students can be supported by providing multiple opportunities to increase and practice their oral language skills.

Appendix G: Example of Oral Language Procedure



Glossary

Term	Definition
English learners (ELs)	The term English learner or EL is used for a student learning to speak English. Multiple terms are used to describe students learning English, such as Multilingual Learner (ML) or (MLL), and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. For continuity, the term English Learner (EL) is used throughout the capstone.
Oral language	Oral language is the system of spoken words and communication that includes receptive language, understanding what others say, and expressive language, the ability to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings verbally (Durgunoglu & Goldenberg, 2011).
Professional development	Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) define effective professional development as “structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes,” and include “job-embedded activities that increase teachers’ knowledge and help them change their instructional practice in ways that support student learning” (p. 2).
Science of Reading (SOR)	The science of reading refers to the interdisciplinary body of research on reading that addresses its five essential components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Seidenberg, 2020). This capstone refers to this definition as opposed to using the term synonymously with phonics.

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