BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ESOL AND NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS IN A DIGITAL COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM

by

SHALANDER SAMUELS
B.S. University of Central Florida, 2009
M.Ed. University of Central Florida, 2011

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Major Professor: Carolyn Walker Hopp

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation in practice was to explore how to bridge the gap between ESOL students and native English speaking students in a collaborative learning environment in a middle school in Tangerine Florida. The gap in performance was highlighted because ESOL students failed to meet the same levels of academic achievement (based on the Florida Standard Assessment Test) as their native English-speaking counter parts. The intent of the dissertation was to design a framework that would meet the pedagogical needs of ESOL students and teachers who teach them.

A pilot study was completed that included teachers both ESOL-endorsed and those who were not to determine their needs in terms of professional development that would lead to increased achievement among ESOL students. The study focused on digital schools within one school district. A qualitative research approach was used because it was found to be rigorous, reliable and valid (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2002). Results of the pilot study were intended to inform teachers and school administrators about how to ultimately improve ESOL student performance. The data used in the pilot study were drawn from focus groups as well as information retrieved from reflective teacher and student tools. The conceptual framework that focused the pilot study included socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1986; Mercer, 2007), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997a; Pajares, 1997) culturally responsive teaching theory (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Freire 2000), situated learning theory (Davin & Heineke, 2016) and second language acquisition theories (Chomsky, 1965; Ellis, 1997).

The findings from the teacher focus groups suggested ways to bridge the gap between the ESOL students and native English speakers. A proposed framework to counter the problem and bridge the gap was designed as a pedagogical intervention (professional development) that would

provide the information teachers lack about how to teach ESOL students effectively. The framework also served as a platform to connect and collaborate with other ESOL instructors as a resource and support throughout the school year. Additionally, a teacher-proposed idea was a middle school technology transition (MST^2) beginner course for students entering a digital school to give them practice and build their self-efficacy on how to use the necessary applications for each core (FSA tested) class. The results also support the idea that concurrent ongoing professional development and a student introductory technology course throughout the school year could produce more favorable achievement scores of ESOL students, and reduce gaps between ESOL students and native English speaking students.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Basil Samuels and Monica Brown who have sacrificed everything to help me succeed. Their unwavering love and support is incomparable; I am blessed beyond measure. Finally, I dedicate this to Mrs. Eudella Clarke, the matriarch who fought and preserved through adversity. I love you.

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Problem Statement

Because of the failure to bridge the gap between ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) and native English language speakers on reading assessments in a middle grade digital Language Arts classroom, the problem of practice that this dissertation will address is: In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?

Introduction

Compared to many teachers I have not been in the education field very long. To onlookers I am a novice, but for the last seven years, I have seen a deictic education system, one where things are constantly changing. For the first six years of my teaching experience, I worked with exclusively low performing students who did not always have the resources that they needed to be successful. Many of them scored considerably below their peers at other schools that were more privileged and were constantly struggling to maintain appropriate reading levels. This school year was different; I began to hear more and more often the term "21st century literacy." It was clear that digital learning was happening all around me, as this school year each student had a digital device that they were expected to use in each class daily. Throughout this manuscript you will see the acronyms ESOL, ELL and ESL being used interchangeably to refer to the students who have another language as their first language and are learning English.

Today, how we read and how we approach literacy is much different than past times. Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek and Henry (2013) describe literacy as being both deictic and multimodal: neglecting this new literacy no longer seems an *option* when attempting to be

successful in the classroom. This is a new literacy that encapsulates online research and comprehension; it embodies a great fastidiousness and accuracy in learning today. Research has suggested that online comprehension possibly includes additional distinctive skills and strategies when compared to offline reading comprehension. Those browsers, emails, and search engines that are a part of online technology seem to better help in reading and writing and enhance student technology skills (Coiro, 2011; Castek & Coiro, 2015; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek & Henry, 2013).

At a middle school Tangerine Florida, digital literacy is the pedagogical platform for learning. All students are expected to use and engage in learning using technology, yet the ESOL students are still not performing to the same standard of their native English speaking counterparts. Many students at this school are taxed with having to develop overall literacy skills that are not in their native tongue. Literacy includes the ability to read and interpret media whether the form is through sounds, images or texts to reproduce data and images (Baker, Pearson, & Rozendal, 2010). Labbo and Ryan (2010) discussed the semiotic perspective as thoroughly analyzing the use of semantics, which deals with the meanings of signs and symbols in a text. This can be done through digital manipulation, and is used to evaluate and implement new knowledge gained from digital environments (Leu et al., 2013). This digital middle school is finding that there are ESOL students who are highly deficient in their skills in many subjects but especially in reading, and they consistently fall behind their native English speaking counterparts.

Twenty first century digital literacy and technology has allowed for the heightened intensity of the classroom environment. No longer can a teacher simply teach from a textbook as their only source of instructional information. The deictic nature of literacy allows the capability

to accommodate students with varying academic needs. Children are learning technological skills every day and for those who have not fully assimilated the digital culture they will have to adapt quickly. O'day (2009) suggested that instruction for ESOL students need to allow for the use of their native language; differentiation of instruction with deliberate focus on literacy development in academia because "one size does *not* fit all".

Definition of Terms

- ESL students: International students who learn English as a second language in places where English is a dominant language.
- ESL instructors: Both native and non-native English teachers who teach English to international students in English for Academic Purposes programs.
- ESL Programs: Institutions who offer classes for ESL students, whose native language is not English.
- Native English Speaker: A native speaker is someone who speaks a language as his or her first language or mother tongue.
- Native Language: The language that a person has spoken from earliest childhood
- ESOL: English Speakers of Other Languages
- FCAT: Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
- FSA-Florida Standards Assessments
- LEP: Limited English Proficiency
- EAL: English as an additional language
- GLE: Grade level expectancy
- SSS: Sunshine State Standards

- PD: Professional Development
- NCLB: No Child Left Behind
- Sheltered Language Instruction: ESOL students who learn their content in a separate class from other students.
- ESOL Pullout: Students receive Basic English language instruction while their classroom peers class takes Language Arts
- Two-Way Immersion Programs: Both native and non-native speakers learn the core subjects in the same class at the same time and subjects are taught in both languages
- Transitional Bilingual Programs: Students temporarily receive content instruction in their native language with the goal of moving to 100% instruction in English language.
- Language-Minority: Students who are able to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, as well as it is an umbrella term for students who 1st language isn't the majority language of instruction

Significance of the Problem

"Raising the quality of education in the United States for all is imperative for society's well-being" (Loveless, 2015, p.2). There is a critical reading deficit in secondary schools and a large gap between subgroups in the United States. The new Common Core Standards made literacy changes, including more complex standards for students (FLDOE, 2015). Many of the students fail to fill the academic gap because they are so low in their reading abilities and ill equipped for success. It is challenging for students who have consistently struggled over time to meet the levels of their peers due to their literacy deficiency. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE, 2015) acknowledges the existing gap in literacy. They also acknowledge the

lack of quality education for all students in addition to the fact that many students fall behind much earlier than expected. More than six million pupils in the U.S. fall under the expected reading level for their grade. Those same students fail to be successful when it is time to engage with more rigorous work and more complex text (Joftus and Maddox-Dolan, 2003).

The Rise of Immigrants

Immigration to the United States has continued to rise steadily for years because of many factors. Whether it is globalization, population movements, or change in immigration laws, the United States is accommodating, and is projected to accommodate, increased numbers of immigrants (Passel & Cohn, 2008). The increasing enrollment of a diverse student population in the classroom has created some challenges for todays' educators. The number of students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) is rapidly growing. By 2050, Passel and Cohn (2008) project that the population growth of immigrant students and families will rise to approximately 82% in the United States. This projected change in demographics is expected to continue to grow. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)Act made it mandatory to have an academic focus on achievement for all students, hence it as mandatory to accommodate ESOL students no matter their level of proficiency in English. Boyle and Peregoy (2005) noted that ESOL students' experiences are affected by policies, trends and reform efforts in schools. The classroom experience should be one that allows for exposure to different backgrounds and enlightening encounters. These classrooms should be encouraging, they should bring students together and allow them to analyze ideas and create solutions to build their developing skills. The teacher is not simply for lecturing but for guiding and facilitating the learning of the students as they formulate their own ideas. New laws about accommodating all students have left the mainstream

educator with the challenging task of appropriately serving diverse students in the public school setting. “Teachers must learn how to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies” (Gay, 2010, p.1). It is the educator’s job to make certain that each student is not only immersed in class and skillful with how they use the English language for speaking, but that they also have to ensure that they are proficient and competent in all content areas with their grade level peers.

Some teachers have proven to be more effective than others. The classroom teacher has a large responsibility regarding student achievement. The teacher’s abilities and capabilities can greatly impact how a student performs (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002). NCLB (2001) required having qualified teachers who have leading roles in the classroom, so school administrators made added attempts to ensure that teachers coming in to their schools were prepared for their students. Although measures have been taken to ensure the needs of the native English speakers are met, the teachers’ ability to handle ESOL students in the classroom has wavered over the years. There has been concern about programming and teacher education to allow for complete immersion of English learners in the 21stcentury, the era of new or digital literacies (Harris, 2015) .

Research shows web-based tools have the ability to support critical student learning, abilities to assess texts that are digital, and support authentic lessons (Baker, Pearson & Rozendal, 2010). Educators are aware that twenty first century literacy, social ideals and advanced technology require advanced skills for success (Baker et al., 2010). By making changes to how details are immersed, administered, and utilized, technology now influences how students read, analyze, communicate and collaborate. It is now up to teachers to find ways to engage those ESOL students because they are held to the same expectation as all other students. Baker et

al. (2010) found that teachers who "think about what helped their students learn that day and what they did not" (p.6) created a positive connection in the classroom as teaching practices were altered according to students' learning needs. Technology enhances the opportunities for educators to teach various strategies to gain knowledge as they create a space for blended learning. This allows for engagement in synchronous and asynchronous discussions and collaborative work on topics expected to be explored in the curriculum through multiple technological facets. In the New Literacies (2010), Hasselbring states, "Rapidly advancing technology offers a powerful way to scale up instruction and deliberate practice for large numbers of struggling readers" (p. 26). Hasselbring continues with the idea that if technology is used appropriately, struggling readers can reach high levels of both automaticity and fluency. This can be achieved through multiple facets in the classroom.

Performance of the ESOL Student

The National Education Association notes that closing the achievement gap for ESOL students is of high priority. ESOL students are from varying backgrounds and there are often many challenges that they face once they enter into the classroom. To add to the barrage of challenges in the classroom some teachers are not equipped with the basic practical skills, necessary research-supported knowledge, and sources required to educate, assess and cultivate productive ESOL students (NEA, 2008) especially in a digital classroom. Many schools have gone completely *digital* because they have their content area materials presented in an online setting, using some form of innovative technological device; each student has his own, personal device assigned for use each school year. Students who lack English proficiency will be at a disadvantage if they are not accommodated appropriately. The classroom teacher is tasked with

having to teach the subject area content along with having the skills necessary to guide the students' learning and differentiate instruction to meet them at their learning level while adding the technological component. In addition, they are required to make the lessons comprehensible and ensure that the students are getting the comparable academic attention as their native English-speaking counterparts. No matter the situation, those students are expected to reflect similar results as their grade level counterparts, regardless of whether or not they are proficient in English. Only 29% of ESOL students had a high level of proficiency in Reading compared to 75% native English speakers. Fourth grade ESOL mathematics students were 35 points behind their native English speaking counterparts, and eighth grade ESOL students were 47 points behind their peers in reading (NAEP, 2005). The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) published a report to the Florida Department of Education in 2013 showing a significant disproportion between ESOL students and native English speakers scores for students in grades ten and eleven in a small county in Florida. In that same year, only 18% of ESOL students scored at a level 3 or higher compared to 50% of the overall student population. In 3rd grade ESOL, 45% of the students scored a level or lower in Reading in one Florida County when compared to 22% of the total population (see table 1 below) (FLDOE, 2013).

Table 1. The 2013 Third Grade Data of a Small County in Florida

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (currently the Florida Standards Assessment) Reading	native English speakers	ESOL Students
Students who scored at level 3 or higher	50%	18%
Students who scored a level 2 or below	22%	45%

Thomas and Collier (2002) discovered that ESOL students who were only educated using English programs rarely achieved the success that their native English speaking counterparts did. Instead, they found that ESOL students who were placed into English only programs showed great disparity in reading and mathematics. These students would then eventually be a part of the excessive retention numbers and eventually a part of the dropout rates (Thomas & Collier, 2002). It is with this information in mind that this research will be conducted. The research results will help to address the gap in achievement between ESOL students and native English speaking students in a digital school. Those results will then allow for modifications to be made to strategies being used in the Language Arts classroom. The strategies can then be utilized and techniques can then be implemented with fidelity in the digital classroom, to aid ESOL student achievement.

The educational significance suggests that if institutions are effectively meeting ESOL students' needs equally, as they do the needs of native English speakers, while using the digital tools effectively, then the reading literacy gap between the two groups can begin to close. According to the Urban Institute, immigration is quickly transforming the ESOL student demographics of academia in the U.S, and school districts now become liable for the academic achievement (Capps, 2005). English learners, as a population, has increased exponentially in the United States; enrolment has increased over 150% since 1990 (NCES, 2003). The reading proficiency score for eighth graders was 14% compared to the 29% proficiency level for native speakers. In each age group, there is an average gap of 20 points in reading and mathematics (NCES, 2003). The Pew Research Center (2007) indicated that in 2005 ESOL students trailed students with English as a first language in Mathematics and Reading skills. That same research in 2005 found assessment scores indicated that ESOL students around the nation achieved below

grade level overall. When the scores were closely assessed, 73% of ESOL students in the fourth grade were below the basic level. In fourth-grade Math, the ESOL students scored 46% below basic grade level with 54% achieving higher or on target. Their English-speaking counterparts were at or above 89% on target grade level in math.

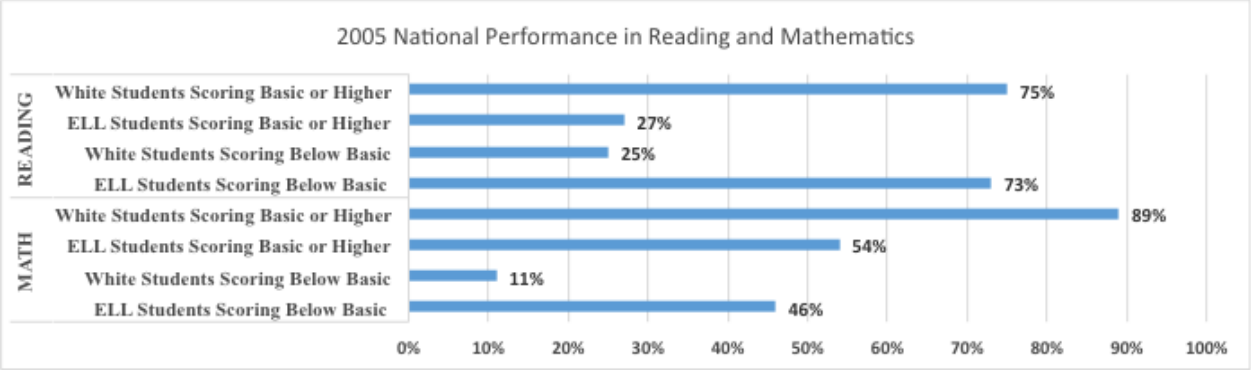

Figure 1. 2005 National Assessment Scores

Supporting Literature

Research has established the need for improvement in adolescents' literacy knowledge and skills (Edmonds, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch, Cable & Tackett, 2009). To show the distressing status of reading in education, the Language and Reading Consortium (2015) reported that overall reading comprehension in the United States decreased over time from 27% in grade two, 13% in grade four, and finally 2% in grade eight. The National Institute for Literacy (2008) revealed that 37% of U.S. fourth graders were unable to meet the basic reading achievement levels, which again shows the decline in reading achievement. Fang (2012) reported approximately 70% of students in grades 4– 12 currently experience trouble when reading and writing texts in subject areas in school.

Student reading deficiencies can be curtailed in great proportions if identified early enough. This gap in reading can also lessen if appropriate interventions and supports are provided to students (Torgesen, Schirm, Castner, Vartivarian, Mansfield, Myers, Stancavage, Durno, Javorksy & Haan, 2007). Interventions vigilantly created in the classroom encourage effective structures for student learning. Early literacy intervention is necessary for students because reading deficiencies become more difficult to correct the older the student gets (Torgesen et al., 2007). If conducted in a well-timed manner, a change in the performance trajectory should allow a smaller amount of students to receive special accommodations in their academic lives as they move along across grades (Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madeline, 2010). Edmonds, Vaughn, Wexler, Reutebuch, Cable, & Tackett (2009) conducted research that has indicated academic skills required to comprehend complex text in an educational process requires tactics that are multi-component interventions. Adolescents who struggle with reading, and the teachers who teach them are in need of curricular reading interventions that support the needs of both audiences and promote improved student achievement and learning. Students given multiple opportunities to utilize interventions received better scores and were more successful than those who had a minimal amount of time using any remediation programs (Swanson et al., 2015). When comparisons are made with other nations, the United States already has an overall reading deficiency gap; however now the gap between ESOL students and their native English speaking peers in secondary schools have to be considered as well.

Although ESOL students account for so many of our students in our classrooms, they are not as academically successful as their English-speaking counter parts. Among middle school students, the percentage performing at the basic level or above in 2015 was found to have decreased when compared to 2013 (NCES, 2016). Researchers note that ESOL students have had

a greater dropout rate than that of native English speakers. Some feel that society has excluded some English learning sub-groups, like Spanish speaking students from higher achievement because of limited access and focus on strategies that are specifically geared towards them (Salazar, 2008). Hispanic ESOL students might appear to have a higher dropout rate because so many of them are transient; there is not a constant, stable place to call home (Gasbarra & Johnson, 2008).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2005), which is considered the Nation's Report Card, stated that the ESOL achievement gap only widens as the students get to a higher grade. Fourth-grade ESOL students were behind their English-speaking counterparts by 35 points, by eighth grade they were 50 points behind their counterparts. These results are blamed in part on the composition of the ESOL population across schools, grades and classes as well as the higher achieving students being moved from out of that population once they "test out" as the ESOL status is not permanent. The American Youth Policy Forum (2009) found that "In 2007, tenth grade ELL students scored an average of 37 points lower on the math section of the National Assessment of Education Progress and average of 42 points lower on the reading section" (p.1). This could be an indicator that several schools are in need of ESOL student educational models.

Using the exploratory questions as a guide, kept the researcher grounded and focused on the intend of the research, therefore the questions were always at the forefront of each step in the pilot study.

Exploratory Question(s)

- In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase/impact the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?
- What learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?
- What specific learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?
- How does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?

Organizational Context

The Structural Frame

The Structural Frame, according to Bolman and Deal (2013), is a blueprint for formally sanctioned expectations among an internal part of an organization and those that are external forces. The structural frame highlights the traditional bureaucracy with a clear organization of people at various ranks, where work and effort is divided, and specific roles are assigned. In this frame, leaders guarantee that all stakeholders clearly comprehend the goals of the organizations and make them a priority. Structural leaders are often considered "task masters" who exemplify efficiency, structure and uphold policy. These leaders are dominant in their focus on data analysis, concise directions, holding members accountable, and engaging in deliberate problem solving structural advancements (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This frame assists in understanding the dilemma of low performance on the reading assessments for seventh grade ESOL students.

At the middle school being discussed, roles sometimes get crossed; this causes friction and confusion in the distribution of duties. “Division of labor or allocating tasks is the keystone of structure" (Bolman and Deal, 2013, p. 49). The power struggle and lack of communication between administrators and teachers have the potential to cause friction and lack of favorable results for the students and school. The problem reveals itself when it is evident that communication between the district/state administrators and the school administrators is lacking. The difference in opinions is revealed in discussions during weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). Most schools have a department coach, one who serves as the liaison to the teachers who are in need of support and answers. At this school, not every department has an individual who plays the role of a coach. Subject area coaches usually perform many roles; some include being the first contact that helps to rectify many miscommunications among teachers and give ideas on how to allow for the correct progression of the lessons being taught. This individual’s role at times involves giving suggestions on how to address student behavior. A coach helps to guide novice teachers through their first teaching years and serves as a source of information for lessons for all teachers in the department. If there are ESOL students in the classroom that need accommodations, then the coach would be a great source of information to help with strategies that would prove to be helpful to those students. Bolman and Deal (2013) mention that the easiest way to harmonize the efforts of everyone in the community is to have someone with formal authority as the head of the organization, which ensures that the goals and the objectives are aligned especially for ESOL students. Not having a coach for every department creates a deficiency in how the various departments perform. This deficiency leaves the ESOL students lacking the proper accommodations if they have a novice teacher who needs support in guiding them to excel.

Another structural issue is the process that is implemented for the elementary students as they advance to middle school. Those new sixth grade students have no formal training on how to assimilate into a fully digital classroom. They are propelled from their 5th grade class into 6th grade without a great deal of preparation for an entire digital curriculum. This leaves the new sixth grade teacher with the added task of instructing the students how to navigate their new learning equipment (classroom computer/laptop). This additional instructional time given to teaching students how to use the computer for basic user tasks detracts from the academic instructional time given to the students. For those students who are not native speakers they will have an even more difficult time attempting to learn what is being taught on a digital device of which they are unfamiliar and in a language that is also unfamiliar to them.

Laal and Laal (2012) describe *collaborative learning* as an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of leaners working together to solve a problem, complete a task or create a product. Dillenbourg (1999) describes *collaborative learning* as situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together. Due to the fact that the teachers sometimes incorporate utilizing small group instruction in the classroom, where the students are given the opportunity to work together in small groups, the teachers often refer to this method as a collaborative learning environment. In this environment the students are able to work together to complete different activities. They are able to learn from not only the teacher but from their peers as well. Often times they will practice enhancing skills using similar activities that are differentiated based on their skill level in the subject area.

Positionality

Table 2. Continuum and Implications of Positionality

Positionality of Researcher	Contributes To	Traditions	Specific Role
1. Insider (researcher studies own self/practice)	Knowledge base, improved/ critiqued practice, self/ professional transformation	Practitioner research, Autobiography, Narrative research, Self-study	I am an ESOL Language Arts teacher who will analyze how different strategies will affect students. I will use my own experiences and reflections to create and implement changes in the classroom.
2. Insider in collaboration with other insiders	Knowledge base, improved/ critiqued practice, professional/ organizational transformation	Feminist consciousness raising groups, Inquiry/Study groups, Teams	I am an ESOL Language Arts classroom teacher who will be collaborating with other ESOL Language Arts teachers of other grades and from different schools to create and implement change in the classroom.
5. Outsider(s) in collaboration with insiders	Knowledge base, improved/ critiqued practice, organizational development/ transformation	Mainstream change agency: consultancies, industrial democracy, organizational learning; Radical change: community empowerment (Paulo Freire)	I will play the role of a Researcher who is working with ESOL teachers to allow for improvement in student achievement, as well as create and implement change in the classroom.
6. Outsider(s) studies insider	Knowledge base	University-based, academic	I will play the role of a researcher who is observing the pedagogical

Positionality of Researcher	Contributes To	Traditions	Specific Role
(s)		research on action research methods or action research projects	aspects of middle school teachers and the impact it has on ESOL students. These observations will give insight on how to create and implement change in the classroom.

Note. Adapted from *The Action Research Dissertation,* A Guide for Students and Faculty, 2nd Edition (p.40), by K. Kerr and G.L. Anderson, 2014, SAGE Publications.

In order to truly gain knowledge of the process and product of this *Action Research*, one has to be considerate of the positionality of the researcher. Herr and Anderson (2014) states the definition of action research as "inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community but never to or on them" (p.3). As an English Language Arts teacher, one concept that helped to guide my examination of ESOL students and their achievement in relation to native English speakers in an era of technology is positionality. My perception of positionality was that as teachers enter the classroom they have perceived notions about the classroom and the students that are the audience. Those thoughts and ideas are manifested in their perception of their roles, their students, and the learning that will occur in the room. What I later learned was that there are multiple positionalities that can occur. As a teacher, my position and outlook will be different when I take on the role of a researcher even if it is in the same setting. Examining the research process in the context of my positionality was *not* one that was reflexive. I wondered how my position/role in this dissertation in practice might affect my approach and results. I needed to ask myself some questions about the research process and the journey on which I aspired to embark. For the duration of my teaching career I have worked with students

who were of low socio-economic status (SES). Many of those students were ESOL students who mostly spoke French and who needed deliberate accommodations to assimilate in the Language Arts classroom. As an immigrant, whose native language was British English, I was still given a concerned look because of my thick accent; many wondered what language I spoke, because even though I spoke English, the words were pronounced and sometimes even spelled slightly differently. Later my position in the classroom was challenged when I received my first group of ESOL students because I had strong sense of self-inadequacy. I felt ill-equipped to accommodate them with the books and strategies that I found and researched. Years later I found myself in a similar position, but instead of pondering how to effectively help students whose native language was French (or who spoke Creole) I was now in angst while watching my current ESOL students who spoke Spanish. My experience working with diverse students in k-12 led to my interests in conducting research on those students who actually need accommodation so that they are as equipped as their native English speaking counterparts.

My current role is a 7th grade ESOL Language Arts Teacher at a digital school, but I am also a researcher whose plan was to study how I could use my role and the information that I received from the study to help English learners become successful. As I continued my research I found myself being able to fit in multiple positions, one being Herr and Anderson's (2014) level 1, *Insider*. This position would be befitting to me because I am an ESOL Language Arts teacher who has students who need accommodations and who is working on seeking knowledge on how to improve their performance with this research. To add to that role, I am also as an *Insider in collaboration With Other Insiders* (Herr & Anderson, 2014). I collaborated with other insiders (6th ,7th ,8th grade ESOL teachers) to do research at the middle school site. Together we examined student scores and analyze how their performance can be improved. I will be able to facilitate

focus groups, and lead discussions about strategies that have and have not worked for the students to achieve success. As I considered the process in my research I realized that in addition to being an insider in collaboration with other insiders, I was also an *Outsider in collaboration with Insiders* (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Although I am a Language Arts ESOL teacher, I am a 7th grade teacher and I collaborated with 6th and 8th grade teachers whose experience is different than mine. I facilitated the interviews and that put me in a different position, even if simply for a short time. Finally, in addition to the above areas in which I find roles in this research, I was also able to meet the criteria positionality for level six of Herr and Anderson Continuum of Positionality, or *Outsider studies insider.* Technically, I am an outsider because I conducted multiple observations of teachers, seeking to gain knowledge on how different grade level instructors accommodate ESOL students and implement strategies that are considered successful in their classroom. I also analyzed their data to determine if their results correspond with the strategies that they are implementing. In that aspect, I am an outsider seeking to gain knowledge on those who are insiders in the field and subject areas being researched. I also found that each position that the researcher has provides the teachers a different perspective or outlook of him or her and that might change the outcome of different areas of the research.

History and Conceptualization

International

An international outlook allows readers to gain perspective for a larger academic problem that is plaguing immigrant students (young adults) across the world. When assessing education through an educational lens, there are notable similarities in performance deficiencies with native

speaking students and non-native speaking students in countries that are known for their academic results. When other countries were examined and their student performance scores were assessed, one is able to see how well students who speak another language from the native tongue of that country in which they reside (ESOL students or immigrants). The analysis shows some differences but some very distinct similarities to those issues in the United States. Between 2005 and 2014 Sweden's population increased by 7% as a result of immigration. In 2013, it was found that the once homogeneous Sweden currently had 15% of their population that was born overseas (OECD, 2015). Sweden's Education Act points out that every child should enjoy the equal rights to education no matter the gender or socioeconomic status. They promote the development of learning for all students in their school system, one where all students have the same opportunities, where learning brings strength to the individual student and society and help to contribute to economic and social growth. Though Sweden has stated that their increase in immigration has had only a small impact on their decrease in academic performance, there has been an obvious gap. The gap in performance between the immigrants and non-immigrants has become a challenge for this country. They state, "Almost one in every two immigrant students in Sweden (48%) performs below the baseline level in mathematics, compared with 22% of non-immigrant students" (p. 34). A part of the challenge that Sweden has is that school administrators are unfamiliar with how to appropriately accommodate the student needs of those whom are unfamiliar with the Swedish language (OECD, 2015).

Finland

Along with Sweden, Finland is known as having one of the best educational systems in the world. According to Dervin, Simpson and Matikainen (2014) Finland sees education as a

"key to competitiveness and well-being of the society" (p. 2). Their education system values quality and equality regardless of nationality, race or background and shows this by giving immigrants the same educational opportunity as other students. In Finland, students who are immigrants are integrated into the classroom and their growth is supported. Some classroom teachers are given the responsibility for managing and negotiating the instruction of those students who are not native Finnish speaking students. Immigrant students to Finland are given an individual curriculum that is tailored to their deficiencies and based on their previous schooling history, which is created by a teacher after collaborating with the students' families. Upper secondary school students do not often go on to further their studies, therefore in 2014 Finland's legislation addressed this concern for preparatory education. With this concern in mind they now ensure that the backgrounds and knowledge of the immigrants are kept in mind when the students arrive to class. In addition, Finland's teacher education is being enhanced to accommodate immigrant students into their classroom. In 2014, guidance counselors were given a training that allowed them to be organized, and aware of the young immigrant students in each class. Although Finland's schools are not required to employ teachers who have a background in migration they are making attempts to fulfill this need as they urge the teachers to be "language aware" (Dervin et al., 2014).

Britain

What the United States refers to as ESOL, Britain describes as English as an additional language (EAL). Arnot, Schneider, Evans, Liu, Welply and Davis-Tutt (2014) reported that in 2013 there were over 1 million students from elementary to primary whose first language was one other than English. The authors noted that there was a level of concern about the disparity

between EAL learners and native English speakers. It was reported that this varying group of EAL teenagers who did not originally speak the main academic language at home were usually behind their native speaking counterparts in achievement. The authors reported that elementary EAL students scored slightly below those who were native English speakers in England: the EAL students scored at 81%, whereas English speakers scored an 85% on overall achievement for England (Arnot et al., 2014). "Forty-four percent of pupils recorded as having EAL achieved a good level of development (GLD), compared to 54% of pupils recorded as FLE (First Language English) children" (Malmberg & Hall, 2015, p.6). The authors found that those students who did not have as much exposure to English on a regular basis achieved less.

National

Murphey (2014) reported on the data in the United States and provided an overview of the current situation with ELL students in the school system. He reported that ESOL students are represented in the NAEP assessments but all states do not accommodate that subgroup the same way, especially when taking assessments. Nationally, other than the state of South Carolina, ESOL students have lagged behind non ESOL students on many assessments. To accommodate these students ideally there should be assessments that measure up with sensitivity to their culture and based on the amount of exposure that they have had to English at the time of the test. It has even been suggested that "conceptual scoring" be considered where the students' tests would be written in both their native language and in English to allow for the opportunity for them to respond to whichever one is the most comfortable (Murphey, 2014). Nationally, in 2013 fewer than one-third of ESOL pupils (31%) scored at a proficiency level for fourth grade Reading, this is in comparison to approximately two-thirds (72%) of native speakers. The

differences were obvious when Louisiana and South Carolina showed a significant difference in performance between the ELL students and the non-ELL students. South Carolina, Maryland and Ohio were the three states that had a majority of their ELL students reaching the basic level in reading. In ten states (AK, AZ, HI, ID, IL, MT, NM, RI, TN, UT) less than 20% of the ELL students met these criteria, and some states did not come close to meeting the NAEP reporting standards (Murphey, 2014).

Local

Locally, according to the Tangerine County School district, since 2014-2016 there were rules created for ESOL students and attempts made to ensure equal access to the programs and accommodations available to native English speakers. According to the ESOL plan, states are required to follow all procedures that are documented. In addition, Tangerine County Public Schools have five District Compliance Specialists who serve approximately 43 schools. These Specialists conduct technical assistance; they visit schools, and monitor to ensure that teachers are compliant with ESOL principles in each school. They verify that instruction is provided to ESOL students in equal amounts of time, sequence and quality equivalent to native English speakers. It is required that teachers document all ESOL strategies that will be utilized in their lesson plans. The teachers are asked to have proof of mastery of applications taught of core curriculum. The schools' administration is key in supervising that teachers are providing instruction that is comprehensive by conducting observations and documenting results.

If an ESOL student is not showing progress the 2014-2016 ELL District Plan indicates that there is a committee who is responsible for immediately identifying the problem. This committee will then discuss students' deficiencies, both academic and linguistic, and will

develop an action plan and monitor to ensure that they evaluate the effectiveness of the changes that were made for the student. If the ESOL students have been in the country for less than 2 years then they will receive services from the Date Entered United States School (DEUSS) by the Good Cause Exemptions rule. If the students are tested as ESOL, it was mandatory for them to participate in the Florida statewide annual proficiency assessment program with the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA) based on guidelines through the Student Achievement Language Acquisition Bureau. Recently that has to been changed to the WIDA ACCESS test. Many countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, have been attempting to improve writing and overall ESOL performance. The results suggested that measures be taken to expose the EAL students to "good writing" and that specific, effective feedback on the writing is given by the instructing teachers(Arnot et al., 2014).

Legislation and Judicial Effects

According to Wilson-Patton (2000) the Florida Consent Decree is a document that was signed in a U.S. District Court on August 4, 1990. The Consent Decree gave power to the court that allowed for the forging of an agreement with some minority organizations, namely:

- League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
- ASPIRA of Florida
- The Farmworker's Association of Central Florida
- Florida State Conference of NAACP Branches
- Haitian Refugee Center
- Spanish American League against Discrimination (SALAD) and,
- American Hispanic Educators' Association of Dade (AHEAD)

The Haitian Educators' Association represented by Multicultural Education, Training, and Advocacy, Inc. (META), were the plaintiffs in one case. The plaintiffs alleged that the State Board of Education did not comply with required obligations under the law that ensures that equal instruction is provided to English Speaker of Other Languages students (Wilson-Patton, 2000). The Consent Decree focused on six issues, namely:

- Identification and Assessment
- Equal Access to Appropriate Programming
- Equal Access to Appropriate Categorical and Other Programming for English Limited Learner (ELL) students Personnel
- Monitoring, and
- Outcome Measures.

The second section of the Consent Decree focused on equivalent access to appropriate programming. This particular section's focus is to develop a proficiency in English and academic ability. These programs were established to promote positive reinforcements of those students who were involved and promote cross-cultural tolerance and opportunities that are equal to all students. Equal access to appropriate programming means that there is intense English Language instruction in core subject areas (math, science, computer literacy for digital schools etc.) that is understandable to ESOL students, and that is also equal in comparison to the amount and sequence of their native English speaking peers (FLDOE). In September 2003, District Judge Frederico Moreno signed the Consent Decree that revised the State Board of Education and the League of United American Citizens (LULAC) through representation of META to further strengthen the document in the school system. The revisions did not weaken the original agreement; however, it did add more specific components to ensure that the ESOL students

would be accommodated in schools. One change made in the revision was that it gave the certified teacher more options to fulfill their ESOL certification obligations. In addition, the revision required training for everyone who was is in an administrative and guidance counselor position. Those individuals need to obtain at least 60 hours' worth of training after their certification hours. In addition, access was made available to the ESOL teacher if necessary to enhance the test design. To be compliant with the Consent Decree, every district must submit a Limited English Proficiency Plan (LEP) to the FLDOE.

Brown vs. Board of Education

History has shown many states' unwillingness to provide appropriate educational opportunities to ESOL students and other minorities. This unwillingness caused grave controversies over students who are English learners and other minority subgroups. Due to this, many lawsuits have been filed to change education and its approach to those being discriminated against; one such lawsuit is *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954*)*. Brown v. Board of Educations' intent was to ensure that all students are free of discrimination no matter the race, national origin, immigration, or citizenship status. Even with the progress that Brown v. Board of Education made, it was still more than twenty years before many states began their integration process (Brown v. Board, 1954).

Lau vs. Nichols

Another case that had much impact on the education system was Lau vs. Nichols (1974). This case was brought into the spotlight when Chinese American students in San Francisco were placed into mainstream classrooms without proper support and were left without much guidance even though they had limited proficiency in English. Initially, the school district was adamant

that they did nothing wrong and were treating all students fairly, but later repealed their stance after the court's decision. This case forced San Francisco and other districts to implement programs for bilingual students.

No Child Left Behind (2002)

In 2001, the No Child Left behind Law commanded schools to examine their ESOL dropout rates. With this, attention was brought to previous situations about prejudice and stereotypical viewpoints, assumptions and interventions in the community and school, which might cause some changes to ESOL students' education (Reyes, 2008). Kindler (2002) noted that language plays a factor in assessment results and achievement tests that are developed for all students as ESOL students usually fall behind in these results. Forty-one states reported their scores and only about 18% of ESOL students scored at or about the required reading comprehension level (Kindler, 2002). Researchers call for an examination of the current ESOL educational programs in language acquisition, school capacity and teacher preparation (Verdungo & Flores, 2007).

Assessments

Historically, the ESOL population has scored lower than their native English speaking counterparts on academic performances. Abedi and Dietel (2004) found that ESOL students' achievement gap widened following a comprehensive assessment conducted from 1998 to 2003 by the Center for Research Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST). In 2007, Peter Zamora, the Co-Chair of Hispanic Education Coalition reported that over the last ten years ESOL student enrollment has increased greatly. He also predicted that by 2025 one-quarter of the population would be made up of English Learners. Language-minority students who exhibit

low proficiency in the English language sometimes fail to graduate high school. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES)(2004), 51% of those who had a deficiency in English were unable to graduate high school, and only 18% of those who did not speak English well graduated. Even when ESOL students move on to college there is also a high rate of failure or requirement to enroll in remedial classes (Harklau, Losey & Siegal, 1999). There is great support and encouragement for educators to respond to cultural and linguistic diversity to meet ESOL student needs from early on, to restrain the problem before they extend further into the student lives (Scanlon, 2007).

Although research has been done for years to aid in understanding the key issues around serving the educational needs of ESOL students in secondary classes, little has been confirmed on addressing how the middle school language arts digital classroom can help ESOL students raise academic achievement and better prepare them for state assessments. Therefore, addressing this issue is pragmatic and timely within the education field and will be vital to the success of ESOL students in the classroom.

Theoretical Framework Foundations

Theoretical frameworks were chosen to guide the pilot study because they help when providing context for the problems and solutions being discussed. Utilizing the frameworks below gave the researcher the ability to hypothesize, guide the research with observations, make generalizations, make interpretations and create a solid foundation for the research. The following theories were useful when sifting through complex ideas and situations that are not easily accounted for. The theories allowed the researcher to utilize multiple lenses to address the problem being discussed and to form a conceptual framework to analyze data.

Socio-Cultural Theory

The Socio-Cultural theory evokes the idea that learning and language are manifested through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1986). These ideas have been used to gain insight on how an individual develops assessment of their social world and context in which the individual interacts frequently. How the ESOL student participates in activities allows for social learning and functioning and helps them to build as individuals. To truly learn, the individual needs to interact with people, knowledge and events occurring around them (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky proposed that a child's intellectual development is shaped by how they acquire language. This language is what creates the communication between the child and other members of society (Mercer, 2007). Vygotsky felt that a child's thinking is developed as they interact with others. The child sees a modeled behavior and then uses those identified processes to create their own thinking and reasoning (Mercer, 2007).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura (1997) introduced this idea of self-efficacy as a theory to justify perceived capabilities in individuals. Self-efficacy has been described as "an individual judgment of his or her capabilities to perform given actions" (Schunk, 1991). This extension of a social-cognitive construct is theorized to impact motivation and the acquisition of academic knowledge. Researchers have found that students with high self-efficacy are more highly motivated and tend to be more successful in their overall academic achievements (Pajares, 1997). Although self-efficacy is not the only influence on behavior, it does have some impact. These students are self-regulated and are able to set goals and follow through as well as they are able to make evaluations and changes to ensure that goals are progressing. Individuals experiencing this tend

to be persistent through difficult tasks and have been characterized as having a greater extent of persistence to succeed (Bandura, 1997a). This level of motivation is often times molded based on the impact of the family as well as academic influences and successes. To add to that, social and cultural impact on the individual being analyzed have to be considered. This idea can be interpreted as individuals who have succeeded at particular tasks should have high self-efficacy where as those who fail repeatedly at specific tasks may have a lower self-efficacy.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory

For many years there has been research done to analyze and assess the characteristics that make a good teacher in terms of those who are culturally subscribing to students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Freire, 2000). This is in comparison to those teachers who do not meet the criteria of being culturally responsive in their teaching beliefs and methods. Culturally responsive teaching was designed to prepare students to "build up and fill in the holes that emerge when students began to use critical analysis as they attempted to make sense of the curriculum" (Laden-Billings, 2006, p. 32). Researchers banded together to create culturally responsive characteristics that they believed teachers should have. These characteristics include challenging students to strive for excellence; they validate their students' cultural identity in the classroom based on their strategies and materials used; and they help create within their students a sense of political and social consciousness. In addition, culturally responsive teachers acknowledge students' differences and similarities; they use valid assessment instruments to make judgments about students' abilities and achievement; they educate their students about the diversity that exists in the world. These teachers foster a culture of mutual respect and tolerance among students; they promote progressive relationships among the student, family, their

community and school; and these teachers encourage students to think critically as they learn (Gay, 2000; Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006). It was teachers with these characteristics who were able to be successful with students (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Today's classroom requires a large scale of instruction that caters to diversity. Teachers have an increased responsibility to address that diversity in their class population. Moreover, some are not effectively equipped to handle diverse cultures on a daily basis. Many children enter the classroom with a plethora of preconceived notions and it should be that the teachers feel an obligation to create a diverse perspective of the world through their curriculum. This is what Ladson-Billings (2006) describes as a culturally relevant instruction. This instruction is one where students are empowered to be intellectuals, socially, emotionally, and politically with their cultural identity to gain knowledge. The activities that accompany this instruction are learner-centered, where students' achievement is promoted and culture is supported (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007).

Situated/Situational Learning Theory

Hwang, Chen, Shadiev, Huange and Cheng (2014) discuss the interlocking associations between real-world events and academic acquisition. Students learn when they are able to acquire information in a familiar context. Once they can apply the knowledge they are receiving to their daily lives they will be more inclined to make progress. Situational theory says that knowledge has to be presented in a way that is authentic and application of that knowledge would be appropriate (Hwang et al., 2014). Experiences are what mold an individual's learning when analyzing through the Situated Learning contexts lens. Learning occurs when there is

collaboration between the individual and their active social environment, instead of being created in an objective or subjective way (Davin & Heineke, 2016). This theory contends that cognition includes having practical activities with real world, relatable situations that allows the students to be in a meaningful learning environment (He, 2014).

Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) note that situational learning calls for a gradual release of acquiring the knowledge and skills. This allows the students to learn from the teacher through collaboration and interaction on a frequent basis. Hwang et al., (2014) points out that situated learning can allow for creativeness and maintaining academic information. The situated practice encompasses constructing on the world experiences of students, situating meaning or creating meaning in real life contexts. Activities are being created to ensure that a deliberate gradual release of information and learning is taking place. The authors suggest that learning English is significantly influenced by the situations that the learners are in (Hwang et al., 2014). Each activity is deliberate in its applicability to guiding ESOL students through the immersion process.

Second Language Acquisition

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is an academic field of inquiry that analyzes a person's ability to learn other languages, after they have developed their first language (Ortega, 2007). Research that involves SLA not only focuses on the explanations of the concept, but also the learner and the learning process (Ellis, 1997). Ellis (1997) examines second/foreign language acquisition, and states that the process is an individual experience for all learners. Each learner takes on different learning strategies, different learning styles, as well as different linguistic and motivational skills that are more comfortable for them. SLA looks at a variety of outcomes that

can occur as the individual engages with academic content in a new language. Chomsky (1965) notes that any human being is born with the ability to acquire language from their immediate environment. Second Language Acquisition according to Collier (1995) is based on the following four components: Sociocultural process, language development, academic development and cognitive development. This Language Acquisition for school model shows these components are dependent upon one another and are the foundation for language acquisition. If one component is neglected the others will be negatively affected.

The socio-cultural process plays a role because the student's experiences (future, current and past) including their home and community lives have the potential to build or distract from the language acquisition process. Collier (1995) noted, "To assure cognitive and academic success in a second language, a student's first language system, oral and written, must be developed to a high cognitive level at least through elementary-school years" (p. 3). She noted the importance of continuing as a child's academic development in their first language as they go through the second language acquisition process. The academic skills, literacy development, concept formation, subject knowledge, and learning strategies that are developed in the first language will guide each learner as they transfer knowledge to the second language (Collier, 1995).

Pilot Study

Conceptual frameworks were utilized to inform the dissertation plan. To receive informative input from the students, the methodology included creating a survey that was used throughout the teachers' classes to help inform the researcher about what the students believe they need help with to be successful. The questions asked also focus on the learning goal or the

Florida State Standards being taught at the time. Informative input gathered through two focus groups were held to allow the teachers to disclose what they believe is needed for both their ESOL students and themselves to succeed in the classroom. In the focus groups the teachers were given the dissertation plan which includes the Digital Professional Development plan to gauge their ideas on the benefits of such a program. In addition, they will be given the opportunity to ask their own questions and share their ideas and suggestions all of which will be considered when a revision of the plan is being made.

Survey

The purpose of the survey is to assess participants' own behaviors, knowledge and attitude with regard to their pedagogical perspective on ESOL students in their classroom. The survey consists of statements related to ESOL students and the impact of technology on the students' achievement. The survey included a five-point Likert scale that will range from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" concerning each of the statements.

Observation

The researcher observed and took hand written notes of participants as they presented their lessons or conducted meetings with other teachers. These observation notes were analyzed for recurring themes that might be helpful to all stakeholders in this study. In addition, selected teachers were chosen to take notes based on lessons they utilize in class and record the results of different strategies and the outcome when they had to make adjustments on each lesson. The personal reflections of these teachers based on their observations on their own classroom lessons gave insight into how the different strategies are working and what else needs to be done to get a better result.

Focus Group

The focus groups were conducted to reflect on working with ESOL students in the classroom, and tools that are necessary to ensure their success. Participants met in a secure location away from the school of the study. A separate location outside of the participants' working environment was chosen to allow them to feel comfort in sharing their true feelings about the problem of practice in their work environment. Choosing a separate location allowed the participant to feel relaxed knowing that there would not be any negative repercussions of their input in the discussions. There was a mediator available to ask the questions and to ensure that the time was utilized efficiently while focusing on the study. These discussion groups will be recorded, either by audio or video. All questions were reviewed and revised to get insight on the attitude and behaviors of all stakeholders. It was explained to the participants that the information discussed in the focus groups will only be heard by the investigator and her Chair, it was not be necessary for participants to say their names or the schools they are affiliated with. Their ideas were considered and utilized when revising the dissertation plan to fit their needs.

Prior to the focus group sessions, data was analyzed at Corner Carver middle school. The data showed a gap in the achievement between the ESOL students and the native English speakers on the Reading FSA test. The discussions from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups indicated if there are specific areas in which the students are lacking and potential strategies to help improve their skills.

In 2005, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) noted that only 29% of ESOL students scored at or above the basic level in reading compared to 75% of those who were native English speakers. In grade Four Mathematics, ESOL students were 35 points behind and in eighth grade 47 points behind in reading. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test

(FCAT) published a report to the Florida Department of Education in 2013 showing a significant disproportion in ESOL students and native English speakers scores for students in grades ten and eleven in a small county in Florida. In that same year, only 18% of ESOL students scored at or above the level 3 achievement goal in comparison to 50% of the student population. Of the ESOL students, 45% scored below a level two on third grade reading in one Florida County when compared to 22% of the total population (FLDOE, 2013).

The NCLB act was meant to allow every student to be treated equally in the classroom, but because of compliance with this law, there has been a disservice done to the ESOL students. In some cases, ESOL students are unfamiliar with academic content or language presented in state assessments, thus causing the students to misunderstand and misinterpret the information (Pitoniak., Young, Martiniello, King, Buteux, & Ginsburgh, (2009). To accommodate the students, many schools include sheltered language instruction, and ESOL pullout programs. In addition, there are the two-way immersion programs along with the transitional bilingual programs. These are all examples of ideas used to address the linguistic, socialization and assessment challenges that ESOL students have to contend with yearly. According to the U.S. Department of Education Biennial Report (2008) to Congress, approximately 50% of the states reached the English proficiency goal.

Many of the programs they suggested by educators are with good intent but there are times when the drawbacks are evident. Many teachers are capable of giving quality lessons in some of these pull out programs, yet not all teachers get effective training with ESOL strategies and content to support the student language learning integration process for classroom content (Snow, 2002). Teachers have to be aware of the results when there is an assimilation of language and content instruction. They need to understand that the student's ability to gain subject

knowledge is dependent on their instructor and how they are taught to speak and write. Snow (2002) noted that currently there are a large number of teachers who instruct second language learners but do not effectively address the challenges with students' reading comprehension.

"Research on second language learning has shown that many misconceptions exist about how children learn languages. Teachers need to be aware of these misconceptions and realize that quick and easy solutions are not appropriate for complex problems. It has been stated that Second language learning by school-aged children takes longer, is harder, and involves more effort than many teachers realize" (p. 2) (ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1992). If asked, many teachers are aware of the difficulty that ESOL students have with acquisition but they might be unaware of the extent of that difficulty (Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly, Driscoll, 2005). Explicit attention to vocabulary and comprehension in each lesson for ESOL students is necessary. Snow, Porche, Tabors and Harris (2007) found that even students who were good initial readers have a need for comprehension instruction that is rich and explicit, especially in secondary grades. Teachers must be trained how to not only teach effective comprehension instruction, but also on how to better approach discourse, and contextualized communication on student learning. Many schools simply delegate work to "ESL teachers" because they believe that they have all the knowledge and capability necessary to address the ESOL student need, but *all* teachers need to act in awareness. Olah (2014) found the best results were long term when both preservice and in-service teachers received appropriate professional development. This training would include teachers getting practice and training with diversity in different subject areas and specificities in multiple student population.

Dissertation Plan

This action research dissertation assumed a chronicled approach, which provides researchers the opportunity to reflect on not only the findings but also the process (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The pilot study was conducted is a significant component of the action research because the information that is received will be included in attempting to find a solution for the problem being addressed. The action research will be based on Stringer's (2008) action research cycle, which includes: designing a pilot study, collecting data, analyzing data, communicating outcomes and taking action and repeating that process, if or when it is necessary.

No teacher should stand alone, not even if they are the only ones with the ESOL endorsement or the credentials to teach English learners (Olah, 2014). Every teacher of all grade levels, subject areas, and various populations teach language daily. Consequently, *all* voices should collaborate when a curriculum, any assessment and lessons for English learners are being designed.

Literature to Support Pedagogical Intervention

Teachers in Florida are now expected to complete the ESOL endorsement or certification so that they are qualified to educate that population of students. Unfortunately, many states do not have the same requirement and therefore have less teachers who are qualified to cater to the ESOL students in their room.

Table 3. Mainstream Teachers of ELL Students

1	It is likely that a majority of the teachers have at least one ESOL student in their classroom.
2	Only 29.5% of ESOL teachers have training to help them be effective.
3	Less than 25 states require state training for teachers working with ESOL students.
4	Only 26% of teachers have ESOL training in their staff development programs.
5	57% of teachers believe they need more ESOL training to be effective.
6	Less than $1/6^{th}$ of colleges offer sufficient preparation/training for pre-service teachers.

Note: Adapted from Ballantyne, K. G., Sanderman, A. R., & Levy, J. (2008). Educating English Language Learners: Building Teacher Capacity. Roundtable Report. *National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs*.

Continuing the child's academic development through their first language as they transition to the second language acquisition process is vital. The academic skills, literacy development, concept formation, subject knowledge, and learning strategies that are developed in the first language will guide the learner as they transfer knowledge to the second language (Collier, 1995). Vygotsky (1986) noted that to truly learn, an individual needs to interact with people, knowledge and events occurring around them. Nordmeyer (2008) noted that ESOL educators need to ensure that "language and content are related in today's classroom" (Nordmeyer, 2008, p.35). This allows for the increase in student achievement in content areas and effective assimilation into the classroom. There is an important relationship that must be built between the ESOL student and the ESOL teacher as they begin to work together. Ladson-Billings (2006) described culturally relevant instruction, where the students are socially, politically and culturally empowered to gain knowledge.

Based on the results from the focus group discussions and the survey, the researcher will develop a professional development training with pedagogical interventions for the teachers and

propose an elective introductory technology class for ESOL students. Teachers will be asked to identify qualities of an effective ESOL transition plan to aid non-ESOL teachers in effectively accommodating ESOL students. Teachers will be asked to identify qualities of an effective Pedagogical Intervention/Professional Development/ Professional Resource Folder to aid all teachers in effectively accommodating ESOL students.

Evaluation was conducted through using qualitative methods: Two Literacy coaches and six to ten reading and Language Arts teachers will be interviewed and surveyed. These educators were asked to identify strategies they feel are missing/needed in their school or grade level to improve achievement for ESOL students.

Student Knowledge of Technology and Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) maintained that self-efficacy could affect performance through cognitive processes such as self-appraisal or performance feedback. Metacognitive strategies are enhanced when self-efficacy is heightened. When learning new things individuals sometimes experience reticent learning due to lack of ability and experiences (Campbell & Lee, 1988). Karsten and Roth (1998) found that mastering different experiences influences learners' abilities with computer self-efficacy. Students are often able to increase their competence with consistent practice. They also found that computer training enhanced students' computer self-efficacy. Self-efficacy would be enhanced even if it were a basic course with introductory skills available. The integration of such a course allows for refinement in student achievement and performance.

As students practice they will encounter difficulties that will give them opportunities to improve their abilities with computers or on computer related tasks and activities. A traditional introductory computer class offers the opportunities to observe, and gives the students the chance

to observe successes and failures on different activities. Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala and Cox (1999) noted that students with less intrinsic motivation would spend less time reading; therefore, they will be less likely to be successful in comprehension in traditional texts and have even more difficulty in online comprehension. An introductory class allows the student to use the instructor as a guide and a model for behavior, skills and practices associated with computer related activities. Attitude, according to Mathewson (1994), is proposed as one of several factors that influence an individual's objective to engage in reading. A student's perceived self-efficacy and attitude towards computers is indicative of their performance in a computer class (Coffin & MacIntyre, 1999). Coffin and MacIntyre (1999) completed research which found that self-efficacy in computer skills and academic performance in computer classes were strongly correlated when discussing learning and learning potential and abilities.

Design A: ESOL Middle School Technology Transition (MST^2)

The objectives include:

- To sustain the core curriculum and teaching in the standard classroom as is seen suitable for development of the ESOL student.
- To support ESOL students in showing growth in Reading and Language Arts using technology.
- Creating an environment that will provide for affective, cognitive and linguistic needs of all ESOL students.

The rationale includes:

- By increasing the opportunities to utilize and practice the different technological tools available in every subject area, ESOL students will be better prepared to access the class

assignments, along with the Florida Standard Assessments and perform at or above grade level expectation. Gradually giving ESOL students the tools they need to practice their abilities on specific tools and applications will improve and strengthen their skills and enhance and positively affect their academic performance.

- By supporting development of English Language Acquisition, ESOL students will become equipped to succeed and perform at grade level expectancy (GLE).

The targeted need and goal:

- Develop a beginner/transition ESOL technology class where the students gain knowledge of differentiated instruction by establishing an individual pace to create the foundation for middle school. This class will give the students an opportunity early in the school year to practice the skills that they will need for their core classes and using the applications and programs necessary for academic success.

MST^2 Plan:

- This is an elective course that is proposed to allow new students to have access to a computer manual (that can be translated into multiple languages). Each manual will include all core subject areas and the apps and programs that are used in each class (e.g. Newsela for Language Arts). There will be step-by-step directions on how to download and sign into each of these applications and be registered for that subject area teachers' class. It will be the instructor's responsibility to ensure that they are in correspondence with the subject area teachers to ensure that the correct applications are being utilized and are appropriate.
- This class will include opportunities to practice standards based activities for each core subject area.

- This class will include individualized timelines for implementation (ESOL students).
- It will include assessments and evaluations to ensure and guide comprehension.
- Each course will be for 2-9 week periods; students will be placed into one of the available classes once they register at the beginning of the school year (August to December and January to June).

Online Professional Development for Teachers

Ed Tech Leaders Online (ETLO) (2004) describes online professional development as use of the internet to provide activities and interactions with mentors that services and allow educators to advance understanding with professional practices. This service usually occurs through the World Wide Web where the instructor and the student are in separate places and need to easily communicate and collaborate. To simplify, it is distance learning offered over the internet using courses to educate professionals.

Online professional development has increased over time in many school districts (Ally, 2004; Tyre, 2002). Northrup and Rasmussen (2002) states, "Adding an online perspective to professional development activities provides an individual with the chance to participate in education and training opportunities at times and places that are convenient (p.1)." Many school districts prefer this method and have internet access to support it. Taking measures to prepare and certify teachers has proven to correlate with student achievement in reading (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Online professional development has the predisposition to allow for continuous, intensive, and detailed focus on teacher needs, thus meeting state requirements on teacher learning and growth. Professional developments that are face-to-face and intensive, but expand over a period of time often are unsustainable. One reason for this is time constraints for

educators, especially those in k-12 settings, and can be the demise of such a program (Galland, 2002). Online professional developments allow the participants to be in an array of places at different times, yet still have access to the same knowledge and opportunities to collaborate, discuss, and share with one another (Benson, 2004).

Brown and Green (2003) noted, district administrators view digital or online professional development as a "cash cow" meaning that there are great opportunities for flexibility and accessibly to deliver information to a large group without additional expenses like, space, parking, travel, trainers etc. In addition, a wide variety of digital professional development courses give way to new approaches in education because there are connections that are built and resources that are available (Tinker, 2002; Killion, 2002; Riddle, 2004). These opportunities lessen the burdens that teachers face when they have to find extra time out of their sometimes-arduous daily routines.

Design B: Teacher PD: Online Professional Development

The objectives include:

- To provide online professional development (with pedagogical interventions) on comprehension skills and strategies that content area teachers can incorporate and use for ESOL students within their particular content area.
- To learn how to collect, effectively analyze, and utilize classroom data to drive and improve ESOL instruction. Finally, content area teachers will also learn how to utilize the school's technological applications to help them differentiate their content for ESOL students.

- To provide staff development in appropriate instruction and assessment strategies of all teachers in middle school.

The rationales for the pedagogical intervention include:

- Mainstream/Core subject area teachers play a pivotal function in the education of ELL students. Most Core subject areas teachers might not even be aware that they have any ELL learners in his or their class, but it is their responsibility to ensure that the students are successful academically.
- Professional development is for both teachers who are and those who are not ESOL endorsed but need to ensure that their students are receiving the appropriate attention, especially in a digital school setting.
- By being a part of this professional development, Core subject area teachers will be more culturally responsive of those ESOL students in their classroom and cater to their individual needs (regardless if they are an ESOL teacher or not).

The targeted need/goal:

- Provide all teaching practitioners with relevant professional development in the areas of technology, modeling, coaching and co-teaching. The pedagogical intervention will provide follow-up support with observations, content area lesson planning, and collaborative communication. This will give the teaching practitioners the opportunity to promote these pedagogical techniques in their daily lessons.

Table 4. English Language Arts and Reading Teacher/Student chart

Standards	Students need to know…	Teachers need to do…
LAFS.7.RI.2.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.	• How to analyze words and phrases being utilized in multiple context • How to differentiate between denotative and connotative (technical meaning of words). • How to assess mood and tone of specific words	• Learn ways to teach Cross-cultural communication and utilize effective language and literacy strategies to teach the students about multiple meanings of words and phrases used in online and offline texts. • Learn where to find, and be familiar with resources on ESOL curriculum and materials.
LAFS.7.W.3.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.	• How to effectively utilize digital resources using appropriate terms and sites • How to assess the credibility of digital sources • How to avoid plagiarism and use citations	• To learn how to identify best practices for ESOL students so that they can gather relevant information from multiple digital sources and use appropriate terms when teaching the students. • Learn how to teach the students about citations and plagiarisms.
LAFS.7.W.2.6 Use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing and link to and	• How to effectively use technology/internet for each subject area. • How to cite sources	• Learn strategies on cross Teaching and Learning methods of English Learners as well as teach

Standards	Students need to know…	Teachers need to do…
cite sources as well as to interact and collaborate with others, including linking to and citing sources.	appropriately • Interact and collaborate using technology	the ESOL students how to effectively use technology for their content area. • Learn ways to show students how to effectively cite sources

Pedagogical Intervention/Professional Resource Folder (PD)

The objective includes:

- Ensure that all content area teachers are equipped with the knowledge to assist all students in their classroom and provide interventions to ESOL students based on need and competency level or level of ability.
- To ensure proper tools are afforded to teaching practitioners that will be necessary to implement lessons that demonstrate their cultural awareness. These teachers will be given practice in embracing the different levels of ESOL learners in their classroom and know where to find strategies and lesson plans as needed.

ESOL Domains

The following is a list of domains that will be available to teachers through the Professional Development (Adopted from the Florida Department of Education, 2016).
very Classroom Teacher, paraprofessionals, classroom aid (any full-time instructor) will complete the Florida Teacher Standards for ESOL, this includes continuous training on all five domains. These domains were created to give attention to specific areas that are needed for a

teacher to be successful with ESOL students in their classroom. They were meant to cater to specific needs of students and to address deficiencies. The domains include:

Domain 1: Culture (Cross-Cultural Communications)

Teachers will be given the opportunity to apply knowledge of theories related to culture and cultural awareness and effectiveness in the classroom, especially when analyzing through the context of teaching English Learning students (ELL). Teachers will have the opportunity to understand a wide variety of cultural groups and how they view education, teaching and learning. Each teacher will be given multiple opportunities to practice applying knowledge about cultural values and beliefs in the context of teaching ESOL (English Speakers of Other languages) students. There will be lengthy discussions and practice with scenarios about racism and its impact, and the effect of stereotypes and discrimination in academia, especially with a myriad of diversity and varying proficiencies. In the process, there will be multiple cultural resources utilized about English learners and guides to aid instruction and academic success.

Domain 2: Language and Literacy (Applied Linguistics)

Teachers will be able to demonstrate their understanding of the basic reading components along with phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. They will learn how to support ESOL students' acquisition of the language effectively to enhance progress in communicating in English through reading and writing. The teachers will get opportunities to demonstrate their mastery by modeling for ESOL students, including knowledge on appropriate forms. There will be the opportunity to identify those characteristics that are the same and those that are different between languages in the ESOL population.

Domain 3: Teaching and Learning Methods of English Learners

Instructors are able to build a foundation on historical content as well as valid, current research on the 21st century learning practices. This familiarity educating ESOL students and the application of knowledge will help in advancing the education of English learners. Each teacher will learn how to apply real-world knowledge and strategies that helps to develop and integrate ESOL students listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Consistent support will be available to guide on curriculum and teaching practices. In addition, instructions based on the Florida Standards and the varying English proficiencies of the ESOL students will be at the forefront of the lesson planning and implementation.

Domain 4: ESOL Curriculum and Materials Development

The teacher will learn how to apply concepts and best practices, and use evidence-based strategies to create engaging lesson and environments conducive to ELL learning. The teacher will have support in planning for students with varying abilities and background while using a curriculum that is based on the Florida standards. Lesson planning must be conducted intentionally based on the students' need. These plans will include differentiated learning experiences based on assessments, proficiency, and integrating their ESOL background knowledge, learning styles, and prior educational experiences. Scaffolding, re-teaching methods, enrichment opportunities, and small groups integrating in lessons in the classroom will be included in the objectives.

Domain 5: Assessment Issues for ELLs

Teachers will apply knowledge of assessment deficiencies and impact on the learning of ESOL students from various backgrounds and efficiency levels. Instructors will effectively

utilize the district and state guidelines to inform proficiency and instruction. Teachers will be prepared to communicate the appropriateness of ESOL assessments to all parties involved. Multiple tools and methods will be utilized to assess content-area learning for ESOL students at varying levels of English language and literacy. (Adopted from the Florida Department of Education, 2016).

The table below contains the initial content for the proposed online professional development. This was intended to create a feasible way to cater to the teachers who needed training to allow them to effectively educate ESOL students. It gives a sample period of approximately three to four months. This is due to the attempts to be fully invested either the first half of the school year or the second half of the school year (only because everyone is not able to take it all at the same time). This proposed plan allows teachers to reflect on the process as well as their lessons and share artifacts from students anonymously, this creates the opportunity to model good teaching.

Table 5. Initial Teacher Online Professional Development Plan

Activities	Time Frame	Pedagogical Intervention	Artifacts
1. Focus Group (6-8 teachers)	2 hours (late September)		• Personal reflection
2. Professional Online Development	2 weeks 09/19-30	• Introducing ways to gradually release technology with ESOL students • Read article #1 excerpt from, what great teachers do differently by Fred Jones.	• Journal • Self-reflection- how can you improve student learning? • Student artifacts

Activities	Time Frame	Pedagogical Intervention	Artifacts
2b. PD	2 weeks 10/03-14	Domain 1: Cross Cultural Communication	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2c. PD	2 weeks	Domain 2: Language and Literacy	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2d. PD	2 weeks 10/17-28	Domain 3: Teaching and Learning methods of English Learners	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2e PD	2 weeks 10/31-11/11	Read article 2 – excerpt of Classroom instruction that works by Robert Marzano	• Self-reflection
2f. PD	2 weeks 11/14-25	Domain 4: ESOL Curriculum and materials development	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2g. PD	2 weeks 11/28-12/09	Domain 5: Assessment Issues for ESOL students	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2h. PD	2 hours 12/12-23	Focus group – discussions on strategies/results/insight on cultural awareness and assessment results/discuss artifacts collected	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2i. PD	2 weeks 12/26-01/06	Class wrap up – best practices for ESOL student improved achievement	• Self-reflection • Exit quiz

Note. Adapted from the Programs: ESOL for Language Teachers. Beacon Learning Center.

Plan for Implementation

The rationale behind this process is to create a transition plan for students who lack the technological skills and abilities necessary to be successful in a digital school setting. This can include students entering the school where their previous school does not have a digital set up. It can also include students who are not familiar with the digital equipment necessary to be successful in their classes (especially the classes that include a state test at the end of the year). This course will include practice on how to use the digital device effectively (e.g. the computer, tablet, iPad being used in the classroom).

There was a plan in place to guide students who need assistance with technology. There will be a simultaneous plan created to allow teachers to receive the training. This was to allow them the resources they need to aid ESOL students with their immersion and mastery of materials in the classroom. This was an online program that gives teachers the platform required to share, collaborate, and find resources as well as to find engaging academic support for the betterment of themselves and their students.

Plan for Data Collection in Pilot Study

All the focus group data and survey data was transcribed and coded to seek common themes to inform all stakeholders of areas that require improvement. These stakeholders include school administrators and teachers, all of whom might benefit from bridging of the gap between ESOL students and native English speakers in a digital, middle school setting. The survey was sent to the participants electronically and the focus groups were conducted in an agreed upon location that is away from all participants' working sites.

Plan for Documenting the Process

When each focus group was conducted, the teacher participants were audiotaped throughout the discussions. For each focus group, notes on the discussions were taken by both the researcher as well as by another facilitator/researcher. These notes were only reviewed by the researcher and the facilitator who is supporting and guiding the researcher throughout the study. Once the information is collected, it will be stored in an encrypted space with password-required security.

CHAPTER 2: PILOT STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of the pilot study, and the problem of practice that held the reins for this qualitative research was to gain insight on how to correct the predicament of ESOL students who fail to meet the same levels of academic achievement (based on the Florida Standard Assessment Test) as their English-speaking counterparts in middle school. Qualitative research was used because it was found to be rigorous, reliable and valid (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2002). For qualitative research to be effective, the researcher has to be skilled, creative, sensitive, and flexible in all aspects of the research being done. Goldenberg (2008) has noted that English learning students are increasing in numbers in our school and the demographics in classrooms is quickly changing. There is a projection of a vast increase by 2050 (Goldeberg, 2008). Across the nation, ESOL students fail to perform at the level of their native English-speaking counterparts. According to Manken (2010) despite of the NCLB act, there is still a very large gap between the two groups. The American Youth Policy Forum notes that "In 2007, tenth grade ESOL students scored an average of 37 points lower on the mathematics section of the National Assessment of Education Progress and an average of 42 points lower on the reading section" (2009, p.1). ESOL students were on average scoring around 20-50% lower than their peers on assessments including Language Arts and other core subjects (Menken, 2010). These scores are also reflected in graduation rates. In New York, there was a 41% graduation success rate among ESOL students compared to the 76% rate of English speaking students. There are currently few studies that focus on addressing both the needs of the teachers and the needs of the students simultaneously. In addition, there is little research that analyzes the gap of ESOL

students when they are in digital setting and how this setting contributes to their success and closing the achievement gap.

Figure 2 below is a visual of what the entire process looks like and the outcomes. It sums up the purpose of the proposal and the expected end results. The figure explains that if the constructs (socio-cultural theory, self-efficacy theory, second language acquisition, cultural responsive teaching theory and situational theory) are used as a guide, then the online professional development and the technology course as well as feedback from both the teachers and student when working simultaneously has the opportunity to create student academic achievement.

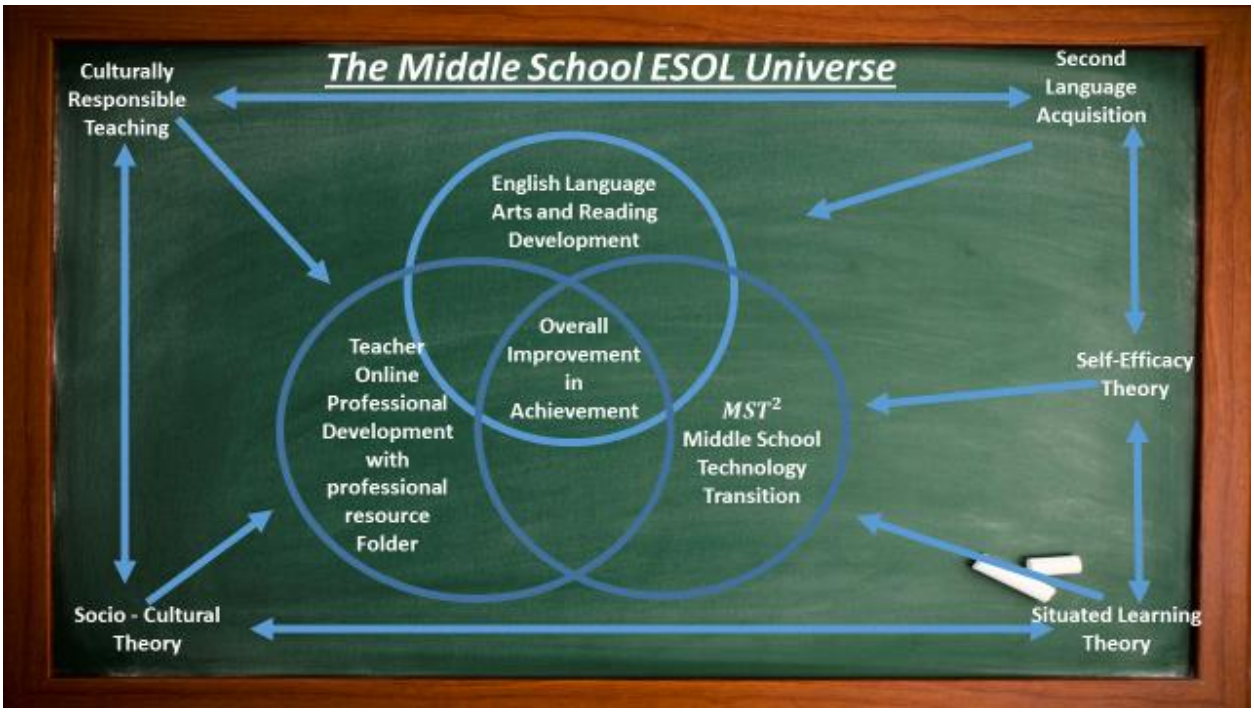

Figure 2. The Middle School ESOL Universe

With the introduction of 21st century literacy, there is an increase in digital literacy that is included in the learning process for students. The 21st century also brings with it a rapidly

growing diversity. This vast change might produce challenges for both ESOL students and teachers . This challenge might include teachers being unable to adjust and contend with the litany of diversity in linguistics and culturally diverse backgrounds and academic abilities. "A fundamental barrier to conceptualizing linguistic diversity from an asset-based perspective is the capacity of teachers to teach students who are ELL" (Scanlon, 2007, p. 3). In the book, New Literacies , Hasselbring (2010) states, "Rapidly advancing technology offers a powerful way to scale up instruction and deliberate practice for large numbers of struggling readers" (p. 26). Hasselbring (2010) notes that if utilized appropriately, technology can aid students who struggle, enabling them to excel in both automaticity and fluency in the classroom through multiple facets.

ESOL students have to become critical thinkers, as do all of the students in the classroom. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2013) explains that in order to be successful in the 21st century individuals must be able to develop fluency and proficiency, build cross-cultural connections and design and share information for multiple reasons. Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek and Henry (2013) found that technology is influencing the path of literacy instruction and advancements in the classroom. Being a proficient reader in the 21st century means being able to use technology and digital tools to aid in reading and writing (Alber, 2013). Twenty-first century readers have to be able to apply offline reading skills along with other cognitive skills to be proficient in reading and to gain comprehension in an online setting. Rosell, Kress, Pahl and Street (2013) note that the skills that were needed years ago to comprehend online text are different; they are more complex today than before. All students have to be given the correct learning tools for them to enhance their skills with online platforms.

The school at which this study took place is a "digital school," meaning that all the students have a digital device that they use in class daily. This device allows them to utilize the

digital curriculum available for all of their classes. The digital curriculum is similar to the traditional texts because there are levels of complexity that are involved, but many allow the opportunity to utilize interactive activities included in the text as well as attach itself to outside links related to the subject being discussed. There are other features as well that the students find helpful such as: text to speak, listening and viewing words simultaneously, pronouncing words, making sounds, allowed manipulatives etc. Researchers state that the internet will "increase, not decrease, the central role teachers play in orchestrating learning experiences for students as literacy instruction converges with internet technologies" (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013, p. 1173). Web-based tools are capable of supporting student learning, development, and creating the opportunities to excel in critical reading skills, evaluating online texts, and providing opportunities to construct meaning in text with authentic purpose (Baker, Pearson & Rozendal, 2010). ESOL students need to be given the opportunity to analyze complex text as often as possible. Technology and technological skills can create the opportunity for these students to practice academics with success; however, there are problems that persist when students struggle with the technology.

Rationale for Pilot Study

The school district that is being discussed in the study is a large district in the central area of the state of Florida. This school district according to the Florida Department of Education (2016), is the 10th largest district in the United States and the 4th largest in size in the state of Florida and caters to approximately 200,000 students. This district breaks down their demographics for students as such: 37% Hispanic, 30% Caucasian, 26% Black, 4% Asian and

3% of multi-cultural and Alaskan native. To add to that, the ESOL students (English Speakers of Other Languages) represent almost 10% of the population.

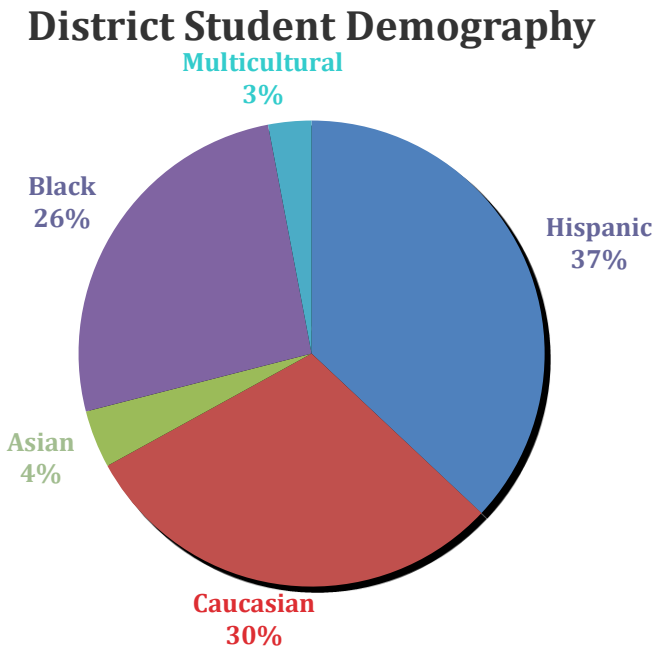

Figure 3. School District Student Demography

The research site was a large middle school in Tangerine Florida. This school was the pilot school for a digital platform for learning (all students have a device for learning, in this case a laptop) in middle schools in this school district. According to the school's 2015 Executive Summary, this middle school is located in East Tangerine County Florida. There are approximately 1000 students enrolled from grades six through grade eight. As it stands, the demographics of the student body are Hispanic 46%, White 35%, Black 10%, Asian 5%, Multi-Racial 3%, and American Indian at 1%. Included in the student demographics are students with specific learning disabilities and Emotional Behavioral Disabilities.

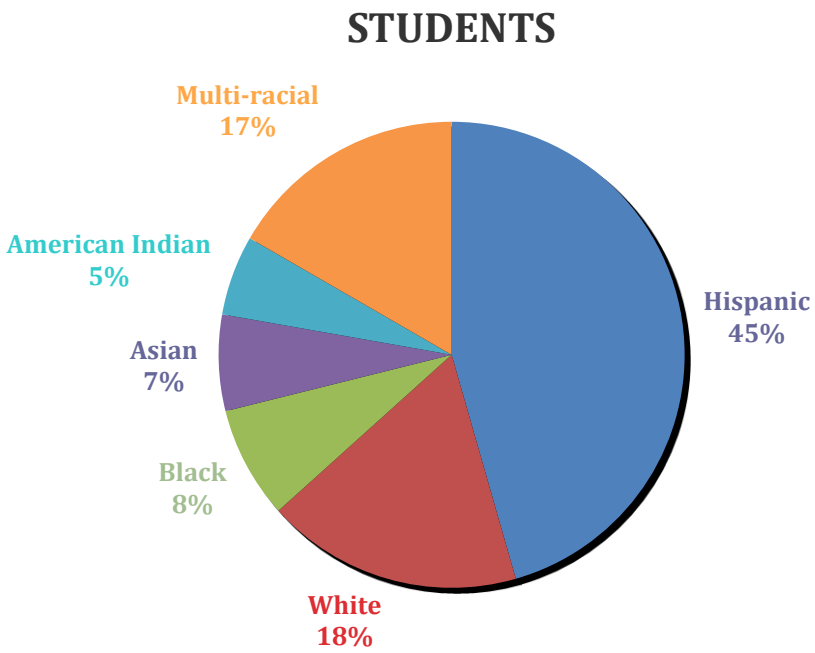

Figure 4. Corner Carver Lake Middle Student Demography

The staff totals approximately 70 individuals, which includes a Principal, two Assistant Principals, three Deans, and two resource teachers, instructional teachers and paraprofessional teachers. The staff's demographic was broken down as such: 46 % White, 17% Hispanic, 14% Black, 2% Asian, and 21% classified as Other.

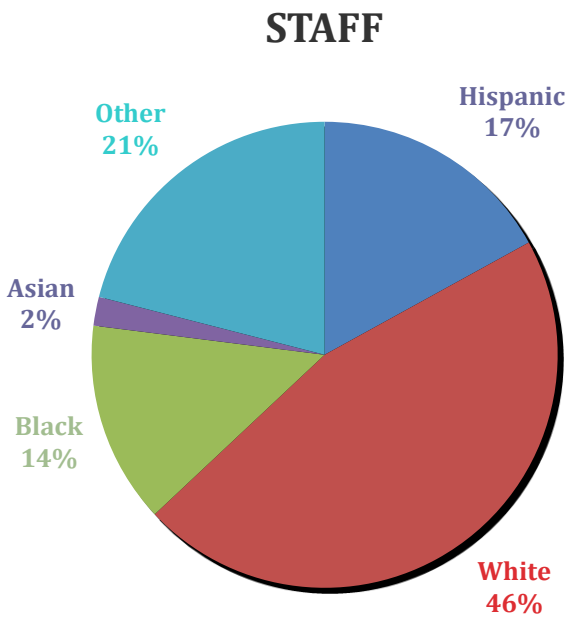

Figure 5. Corner Carver Lake Middle Staff Demography

The sources from which data was extrapolated included demographic background information (general background from the teachers and the students) which the researcher collected via a questionnaire, a student reflective tool or the students, and focus group questions. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology, research design, and procedures to collect data and to analyze the data received.

Approach to Pilot Study

The researcher designed a pilot study to determine how to provide both the students and the teachers in the classroom the opportunity to teach and learn. The goal was to find ways to allow for a positive impact on ESOL student achievement results. This pilot study was intended to unearth the overall problem for ESOL students and find a solution to aid all parties directly involved. This chapter contains the design of the study, methodology, implementation plan and

the results of the pilot involved in the study. The approach taken by the researcher was of a qualitative method to allow the opportunity to identify the components that are involved (or lack thereof) in the success of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Creswell (2007) says this of qualitative research,

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call of action. (p. 37)

Further, Creswell (2007) states that qualitative research is done when we want the individuals sharing their stories to be empowered, for their voices to be heard, and to minimize the power relationship that can exist between a researcher and those who participate in a study. The following exploratory questions were used as a guide to direct the pilot study.

- In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?
- What collaborative learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?

- What specific collaborative learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?
- How does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?

Intended Goals of Pilot Study

When this pilot study was being developed, some goals were created for the pilot. They included the following:

- To develop a course that allows students to practice academic skills utilizing the digital platforms available in their core classes. This course will allow the students direct instruction that is individualized based on the student need. This course will also allow the instructor to scaffold difficult tasks to allow the students opportunities to excel from the entry level of knowledge into where they can maneuver through the curriculum sites and work at a grade level pace on their own.
- To develop a course that will reinforce deficient skills in the four core classes in their schedule (Mathematics, Language Arts, Science and Civics) using the digital tools in each digital curriculum being utilized in their classes.
- To develop an online professional development for teachers to participate in that has the ability to increase their capacity to provide instruction that is not only culturally responsive but also impactful on the ESOL student.
- To provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect on current achievement and analyze various ways of growth.

The intent of this pilot study was to design two programs, one for the ESOL and one for the teachers that would allow them to be successful with these students in their classes on a daily basis.

Although I am a teacher, I did not want my personal feelings to decide the direction of the research. With that in mind, I sought feedback from the teachers about what they believed they needed and then used their inputs to guide the development of a program that would be considered helpful. It was my goal to also find a solution for the new middle school students who had just completed their elementary school experience and needed guidance as they entered a new phase in their lives, middle school.

The researcher focused on developing two plans: The MST^2 for the students and the Online Pedagogical Intervention (PD) for the teachers.

Middle School Technology Transition (MST^2)

This plan will allow the students who have just entered into middle school to slowly immerse themselves into their core classes with confidence. This class is created so that the students can practice the basic computer skills they did not learn in Elementary School and master skills necessary to function in all of their core classes . Those skills include being able to efficiently maneuver from different tabs and apps and perform the necessary functions needed in all of their core classes. These skills also include the ability to type at a moderate pace as needed in each class, which is intended to enhance their confidence in using the technology devices. Bandura (1997) maintained that self-efficacy could affect performance through cognitive processes, such as self-appraisal or performance feedback. He defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given

attainments" (p.3). Through understanding self-efficacy, the English learner can recognize their abilities when making attempts to succeed in any class or at any task. The ESOL learners will develop confidence to empower themselves in a class such as the one being suggested because they can practice and become skillful at tasks that they normally feel insecure about or areas in which they lack skill. According to Bandura (1999), children pay attention to those by whom they are surrounded by and they imitate these individuals. If the ESOL students observe other students like themselves in the computer class practicing their skills and abilities then they will be more prone to do so as well. This may also result especially if the outcome is rewarding for them. For example if the students are getting better grades in their classes or are able to maneuver through the sites effectively like the other students they could feel more inclined to continue to try new apps, and programs which could therefore result in better grades in class.

This instructor will scaffold by giving specific support to learning content and enhance learning. They will then use the gradual release model to help the students immerse into the new digital community with ease. This means that they will work through the thinking process aloud with the class and slowly release the practice responsibility to the students, first with the teacher's help, then with a peer and them by themselves so they can work on achievement. Karsten and Roth (1998) found that mastering different experiences influences learners' abilities with computer self-efficacy. The authors completed a study that revealed that multiple consistent computer experiences would heighten how the student perceives their own skills. Even though there is a significant correlation with the computer classes enhancing student achievement, caution must be taken to ensure that the experience that the students have enhances the specific skills being discussed. When those skills are being tended to often, then will the course affect the student performance (Karsten & Roth, 1998). This would mean that once each student has

multiple opportunities to engage with and practice using the different programs from each of their core classes, they would be able to show mastered skills. According to Duke and Carlisle's (2011) research, it is important for teachers to understand how comprehension is developed for children in a variety of learning stages and abilities so that they can have a better understanding of how to engage them in their comprehension knowledge bank. Alderman (2013) states, "We are more likely to undertake tasks we believe we have the skills to handle, but avoid tasks we believe require greater skills than we possess" (p. 60). She noted that people are more prone to attack a problem they feel they have the skills to handle but will avoid those they feel ill prepared for. If students have strong self-efficacy then they will not be paralyzed with doubt about their abilities to accomplish certain tasks. This knowledge can help them focus more on specific subject area content versus focusing on the basic functions of the digital device, which they are expected to use and be knowledgeable about.

The MST^2, Middle School Technology Transition course is based on the Florida State Standards Initiative-CPALMS. Reading is critical in all subject areas, it is a vital entity in every subject, hence the need to include the other subject area ESOL standards. Table six below highlights specific ESOL standards and breaks down items that the students need to be successful. The table then divulges what the teachers have to do to allow this to happen and then those connections are combined with the ESOL standards in the appropriate ESOL domain. This ensures that during planning opportunities all teachers are aware of the expectation for both themselves and their students.

Table 6. Student and Teacher ESOL Standards Chart with Domains for ESOL Endorsement

Standards	Student Expectations	Teacher Expectations	Domain of ESOL Endorsement
ELD.K12.ELL.SI.1 English language learners communicate for social and instructional purposes within the school setting.	Students are in needs of technology transition assistance to maneuver through the digital texts in each instructional class period.	Teachers have created access to the digital texts that are user friendly and easy to use.	Domain 4: Standard 2 Teachers will know, select, and adapt a wide range of standards-based materials, resources, and technologies.
ELD.K12.ELL.SS.1 English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content (Social Studies).	Students are in need of assistance to use the technology applications attached to Social Studies.	Teachers have to utilize and practice the use of application that is ESOL appropriate in Social Studies.	Domain 4: Standard 2 Teachers will know, select, and adapt a wide range of standards-based materials, resources and technologies.
ELD.K12.ELL.MA.1 English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Mathematics.	Students are in need of practical examples for foundational mathematics practice with technology applications.	Teachers have to create practical examples that can be helpful in creating a foundation for mathematics using technology.	Domain 4: Standard 1 Planning for Standards-Based Instruction ELLs. 4.1E: Plan for instruction that embeds assessment, includes scaffolding, and provides re-teaching when necessary for individuals and small groups to successfully meet English language

Standards	Student Expectations	Teacher Expectations	Domain of ESOL Endorsement
			and literacy learning objectives. • Do teachers know how to embed assessments in their curriculum? • How are center rotations utilized?
ELD.K12.ELL.SC.1 English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Science.	Students are in need of scientific elaboration with technology to enhance comprehension in Science.	Teachers have to utilize scientific programs based on students' academic levels to achieve comprehension in Science.	Domain 4: Standard 1-Planning for Standards-Based Instruction of ELLs Domain 5Assessment5.1a Demonstrate an understanding of the purposes of assessments as they relate to ELLs of diverse backgrounds. 5.1bIdentify a variety of assessment procedures appropriate for ELLs of diverse backgrounds. 5.1c Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate and valid language

Standards	Student Expectations	Teacher Expectations	Domain of ESOL Endorsement
			and literacy assessments for ELLs of diverse backgrounds. 5.2c Use multiple sources of information to assess ELLs' language and literacy skills and communicative competence. (center rotations)
ELD.K12.ELL.LA.1 English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts.	Students are in need of the equipment to understand the words and phrases being discussed in class.	Teachers have to use technology to discuss critical information in Language Arts using multiple ESOL friendly applications.	Domain 4: Standard 2 4.2c Select technological resources

Middle School Technology Transition (MST^2)

This middle school Technology Transition class will be specifically created with the intent of assisting ESOL students, so lessons would be created with the accommodations necessary to be proficient in the Language and culture as fast as possible. This class will be open to all students but the first preference will be given to ESOL students as they enter the sixth grade. This course will be one semester long (4.5 months), with classes beginning in August and ending January (after winter break in the first and second quarter). The class will begin again in January and end in May (in the third and fourth quarters of the school year).

Online Professional Development (Pedagogical Intervention)

An additional goal of the pilot study was to provide professional development that would be an online digital component for teacher intervention. Professional development is useful to educators because it allows them to enhance their knowledge and skills and provides opportunities for the teacher to help their students achieve higher. The idea of this online pedagogical intervention is that it is easily accessible to educators and can be completed conveniently over time. To allow for current knowledge to constantly flow for educators, many engage in professional development. Sometimes these experiences, although useful and helpful to those involved, has proven to be costly to the individual or the school supporting the learning. According to Anderson and Anderson (2009), online professional development has been around for over ten years but was more popular amongst higher education educators. Recently, technology and twenty-first century literacy ideas have allowed for more thought and effort to be placed into online professional development. Authors have noted that online components of professional development create an advantage of accessibility for teachers. For those extremely

busy teachers, with families and other obligations, online professional development can be accommodating. The cost tends to be much lower than a face-to-face class and many have been proven to be as high quality as much as the traditional offline professional developments. Online professional development have proven to have longevity. While it is often difficult to conduct an offline, traditional, face-to-face professional development over long periods, online provides the outlet to allow this to occur and often works for many educators.

New literacies, social practices, and technologies are some of the things that educators need to be aware of that are necessary for knowledge to grow and become successful in contemporary life (Baker et al., 2010). If changes are made to how knowledge is immersed, administered, and utilized then technology influences how students are taught to read, write, listen, and communicate. Baker et al (2010) found that teachers who "think about what helped their students learn that day and what did not" (p.6) created a positive connection in the classroom as teaching practices were altered according to students' learning needs. ESOL teachers have to be effective teachers, not only on their instructional evaluation but also in the classroom with the students. Baker's idea that *effective teachers* are the ones who make the difference versus the teaching method that they use is prevalent in his research. Ruddell and Unrau (2004) found that responsive teachers promote literacy engagement and have an impact on students' mastery of concepts and task-oriented goals. They are influential in allowing for "self-improvement and engagement of meaningful tasks of the students. Teachers have the ability to promote literacy engagement for students (Ruddell & Unrau, 2004).

The online professional development will be an ongoing online class that will last over a school year. This online class will have different domains with available lessons and curriculum for accommodating teachers. Each domain will contain detailed information and lesson

examples, strategies and samples of how to effectively accommodate ESOL pupils, regardless of their proficiency when they enter the classroom. It will also include opportunities to journal, self-reflect; and work on, keep, and share artifacts used throughout the class and the school year. After that one-year period of direct instruction and practice, there will be an online resource folder available to the teachers who participated in the class. The folder will contain all of the materials used to discuss and practice skills for student improvement. It will contain resources for access containing information for specific questions, concerns or otherwise assistance. There will be videos and lessons being modeled, as well as best practices that have been proven to work. These folders will contain ESOL strategies for different topics, as well as stories, articles and activities for different grade levels. The ESOL and Reading standards will be available and lessons that connect the standards to student learning will be highlighted.

Online Professional Development ESOL Structure

The following is a list of domains that will be available to teachers through the Professional Development (Adopted from the Florida Department of Education, 2016).

- Domain 1: Culture (Cross-Cultural Communications): Teachers will be given the opportunity to apply knowledge of theories that are related to culture and cultural awareness and effectiveness in the classroom, especially when analyzing through the context of teaching English Learning students (ELL).
- Domain 2: Language and Literacy (Applied Linguistics): Teachers will be able to demonstrate their understanding of the basic reading components along with phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.

- Domain 3: Teaching and Learning methods of English Learners: Instructors will be able to build a foundation on historical content as well as valid, current research in the 21st century learning practices.
- Domain 4: ESOL Curriculum and Materials Development: Teachers will learn how to apply concepts and, best practices as well as use evidence-based strategies to plan instruction in a supportive learning environment for ELLs.
- Domain 5: Assessment Issues for ELLs: Teachers will understand and apply knowledge of assessment deficiencies as they affect the learning of ESOL students from various backgrounds and efficiency levels. (Adopted from the Florida Department of Education, 2016).

Expected Results of the Pilot Study

Pilot studies are a foundational piece of a research process. "A pilot study is often used to pre-test or try out a research instrument" (Baker, 1994, pp. 182-183). This portion of any research allows the researcher to explore an intervention or an aspiring innovative idea (Leon, Davis & Kraemer (2011). Pilot studies are used on a smaller scale to test out methods and procedures with the intent of a larger, more complex study. Many researchers may choose to do a pilot study before embarking on a larger study to test how feasible the research will be and to analyze the methodology and implementation of the research if it were to be utilized in a larger scale. The information that they receive then allows the researcher to make modifications needed to embark on a larger scale study (Leon, Davis & Kraemer, 2011). A notable advantage is that the pilot study can give the researcher advanced notice about the future of the study, including: areas that might fail, protocols being followed, and analysis of the methods and instruments

being used can all be tested. Based on the researcher's experience in this study, multiple outcomes are expected from this pilot study:

- The teachers will perceive that there is a gap between ESOL students and their English-speaking counterparts.
- They will collaborate across grade levels and across subject areas to think critically about their roles in the students' achievement.
- The teachers will utilize the tools that are available for them in the online Professional Development (resource folder) and be continuous users as they would now be more aware of the problems and how they can make a difference in their roles as instructors for ESOL students.
- The teachers will see growth in ESOL students after accommodations are implemented on a daily basis.
- The new ESOL students will find the MST^2 helpful and valuable to their learning.
- The ESOL students will perform better on the technology class and be able to better understand how to efficiently use not only the device but also all other resources available to them in their classes.
- The ESOL students will be able to reflect on the growth they made compared to their previous year after the strategy has been implemented. They will be able to track and explain their own personal academic growth.

Researcher Positionality

Herr and Anderson's (2015) ideas on positionality was the approach taken by the researcher in this dissertation. The researcher who is also a teacher currently sustains

employment in this school district and the school that is being studied. Through multiple lenses, the researcher found commonalities in numerous areas in the positionality continuum . Through these lenses, the researcher was able to assess the organization being discussed and attempt to approach the problem through the appropriate context with the hopes of finding pragmatic solutions. The areas in which the researcher was compatible were Insider, Insider in collaboration with other insiders, Insiders in collaboration with outsiders and Outsiders studying insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As an *Insider* in this institution, the researcher was able to observe the struggles of the students in their environment. The researcher was able to make observations of the ESOL students by observing and analyzing their implicit and explicit struggles and the impact that preventative strategies had on their achievement. Throughout the focus group discussions, the researcher was able to make multiple connections with the circumstances being discussed by the teacher participants about the happenings in the classroom with the ESOL students such as assessments, scores, remediation, differentiation, collaboration etc. The conversations highlighted similar experiences and confirmed some of the ideas that the researcher initially had about the impact of teacher knowledge, implementation with fidelity, cultural awareness and responsive teaching.

As an *Insider in collaboration with other insiders* the researcher was given the opportunity to collaborate with the other ESOL teachers from grades six, seven and eight. Together we were able to collaborate on direct strategies for specific lessons, discuss more effective strategies that can be attempted for students, and share ideas on the outcomes of each strategy. This collaboration allowed recognition of the problem by the entire grade level and disrupted the idea that the current strategies alone were working; it allowed for positive impact on the entire organization (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Being a part of the study put the teacher

researcher in a position where she might anticipate and encounter challenges, yet be prepared with a solution based on her experiences. A few meetings were observed, although they were done quickly (usually in the mornings before classes began and when all the ESOL teachers were available) there were definitely attempts to ensure that ESOL accommodations were being utilized in the class. In one meeting with the ESOL teachers about how to affect ESOL student achievement the researchers observed frustration from all of the subject area teachers. One teacher noted "I know that we can use the WIDA (World-class Instructional Design and Assessment) site for the teachers to help ESOL students advance diverse language development and academic achievement, but it looks just like everything else I am using, so how is that any different than what we have been doing all year?" Another teacher agreed stating, "Can we create a google doc of strategies and websites being used in everyone's classes? The facilitator sensed the level of frustration and quickly asked, "Would everyone be open to having a day when we work together to make sure we are using these websites and strategies correctly?" Her objective was to get all the ESOL teachers involved using the strategies they found successful in the classroom, and to play the role of the expert by presenting to the ESOL teacher group to allow the others to get the knowledge of the tools and the experience utilized for student success. Everyone nodded in agreement, as many were feeling deficient at some point during the school year with what to do with that sub group of students. This type of frustration and angst seemed the theme of the meeting. Eventually it was decided that there would be a workshop that would allow all the teachers involved who had specific apps, strategies or ideas they have tried and mastered, to use the workshop as a place to share as well as practice with the hopes of being successful in the classroom.

Throughout the study, the researchers' position as an *Insider in Collaboration with Outsiders* allowed for processing the information being discussed through the lens of the researcher but also through the teacher lens to seek pragmatic solutions. Working with the teacher participants not as a teacher but as a researcher was difficult for the researcher because there were times when it was difficult to place personal ideas to the side and work with the other teacher experts. There were times when the researcher felt bias for or against certain strategies or ideas discussed due to personal experience. Some of the teacher participants who did not have direct ESOL experience felt as though they were outsiders when compared to the participants who had some form of knowledge or experience, and who felt more like they were insiders. This did however allow the opportunity to self-reflect on the entire process. In this pilot study, the researcher-teacher role allowed for the observation of the daily struggles in the organization as well as the successes of both the teachers and the students.

Finally, the *Outsider studying Insiders* position allowed for an open discussion amongst the teachers and the researcher. Some teachers felt they needed the take the opportunity to share their insights on the topic with hopes that solutions could be found. One teacher said, "Most of my students are Haitian Creole but lucky for me in that class I have a student who can translate for me, if it weren't for him I don't know what I would do". In this case, she felt like an *outsider* in her own classroom, because she was unable to connect with those students directly. This was the case for many of the ESOL students, many frequently used google translate to get simple messages across; however, things got more complex when the assignments were more complicated and detailed. The application, Google Translate, however useful to allow for simple conversations, can sometimes misguide the student when assignments are more complex. Like many of the ESOL teachers, the researcher found that they all depended on other students to help

the non-English speaking student understand the class tasks. The possibility of bias had to be taken into consideration as the researcher fell in so many areas of positionality according to Herr and Anderson (2015).

Self-reflection was a constant practice needed to ensure and guide the researcher in following good research practices and methodology. Reflections can be useful to learn in a variety of experiences (McAlpine, 1993). When reflections are deliberate and well-structured they become integral in the pedagogical success. Both the teacher researcher as well as the teacher participants constantly reflected on their experiences throughout the course of this study. It is through this reflection that they were able to assess the successes as well as the struggles in the process and find ways to flexibly make adjustments. The awareness of these successes and failures allowed for an urgency in gaining knowledge on how to correct the issue at hand. "An awareness of our origins and of the persistence of ethnicity and cultures is a crucial element in American education" (Zawatsky, 1992).

Methodology

This dissertation in practice pilot study analyzed the gap between ESOL students in a middle school and their native English speaking counterparts based on their FSA. Unlike traditional dissertation research, this dissertation in practice was completed in the action research tradition. As action research, Herr and Anderson (2015) define the research study as "inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community but never to or on them" (p.3). The purpose of action research study is that the research is relevant and appropriate to me as the participant, who is an educator in the classroom. Action research helps educators to be more effective in that the researchers care most about teaching and developing the students. "The

process of this action research cycle is; designing the study, collecting data, analyzing data, communicating outcomes and taking action" (Stringer, 2004, p.5). Action research is a systematic inquiry that seeks to make improvements on issues affecting everyday people. This includes a repeated cycle of planning, observing, and reflecting. The teacher researchers, school administrative staff and other stakeholders in the teaching and learning environment are involved in the process. In my case, I am looking at a school situation and will attempt to understand and study to improve the educative process and make a valuable change or adjustment.

A Qualitative Approach

Creswell (2013) discusses a *phenomenological analysis and representation* process that was adopted for this study. This allows for the researcher to effectively approach the analysis of the data received and to conceptually analyze the information given in the study. The following approach was utilized:

- The researcher begins by detailing her personal experience in engaging with the impending problem. The aim is to deter the researcher from being a biased participant and focuses on the other participants in the study for their learned experiences and input.
- The researcher will then note significant statements based on the input from the teachers who are participating in the study. These statements will be vital and equal in worth in creating or adjusting the plan for improvement for the ESOL students.
- "Meaning Units" or Themes will be created based on the analysis of the data extrapolated by the researcher after the focus groups have been completed.
- A description of the participants' experiences will be carefully documented, including verbatim examples.

- A structural description will be utilized which will allow the researcher to document how the experience occurred for participants based on the context in which the experiences occurred. This will help to determine the relevant themes occurring based on the setting and context of the experience.
- A composite description of the phenomenon will be written. This will allow the participants' recollections and explanations to be represented and to inform the designed pedagogical and professional development models.

For this pilot study, a qualitative method was used to gain knowledge and get feedback from the participants. A qualitative approach was appropriate because in this study the researcher was able to collect data in the setting where the problem was occurring. The information needed is gathered up close and is directly connected with those involved. For example, conversing with the teachers at the institution, and observing their day-to-day strategies, as well as considering the structural elements of the institution allows for a personal, first-hand accounts of the results in the study. Moreover, a qualitative approach would be fitting for this research because the researcher is a key instrument. The researcher has the ability to ask open-ended questions, and observe the precise behaviors of those involved in the study (Creswell, 2013). "Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. They may use an instrument, but it is one designed by the researcher using open-ended questions. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers" (Creswell, 2013, pp. 45). A focus group was conducted to acquire information from the teachers about what specific professional development they might need to meet teaching standards. The researcher will explore the experiences of the teachers as they grapple with the questions presented in the focus group.

Qualitative research allows the researcher to document the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Further, the participants can focus on the significant questions that guide the research. In this pilot study, the teachers' discussions focused on their needs in terms of professional development that would provide needed resources to effectively teach ESOL students, and in turn, affect their achievement. Although the researcher intended to discuss and get feedback on both the teacher professional development and the model for the student course, the focus group participants felt that the success of the course would predict how well they were prepared to teach the ESOL students. Consequently, "Action researchers should not feel that they are prohibited from pursuing new lines of inquiry simply because they did not constitute the original plan (Mertler, 2017, p. 117). Mills (2011) also states, "That is the very nature of action research; it is intimate, open-ended, and often serendipitous. Being clear about a problem is critical in the beginning, but once practitioner-researchers begin to systematically collect their data, the area of focus will become even clearer" (p. 93).

The focus groups were decided upon to enlighten and inform the researcher on what the teachers truly believed they need to be successful and for their students to become successful. Qualitative research empowers the teachers to share their stories, and reduces tension and power of control amongst the researchers and the participants (Creswell, 2013). Once the focus group was complete, the researcher would have better idea what to do to accommodate their input. The professional development would then be revisited to make adjustments based on comments, suggestion and experiences presented by the teachers involved. According to Morgan (2012), focus groups are utilized as a way of interviewing but more than it allows for the observation of individuals and their interactions with the study or discussion topics. He notes that focus groups create the possibility to explore for meaning of subjects through interactive processes. A deeper

look into use of focus groups reflects that the data received from such a style can offer insight on not only interaction amongst individuals but it can provide knowledge on society's perceptions through basic conversation (Morgan, 2012).

In addition to the focus groups, an anonymous reflective tool was used to get feedback from the students that allowed them to gauge what they believed they needed in their classes to be successful. Philosopher John Dewey (1933) says that, "we do not learn from our experiences, we learn from reflecting on those experiences" (p.78). Hence, the reflective tool that would be based on the standards that the teacher is expected to use as their guide to teach. This will inform the researcher about the disconnected ideas between what the teacher believes the student needs and what the students believe that they need to be successful. Critical reflection allows for teachers to "reflect on the moral and ethical implications and consequence of their classroom practices" (Larrivee, 2008, pp. 90). This strategy allows teachers to critically analyze their impact on the students either through the lessons or through the strategies that they implement. Self-reflection however is not limited to only teachers; students are able to use these tools as a way to give their input, give feedback and to self-reflect on the lessons being discussed as well.

Self-reflection is effective for the teachers as they teach because this allows for the possibility of addressing nuances attached to each lesson. It also allows attention to be given to micro details that will increase student achievement. Many may see reflective tools as a way to document an experience or to reflect on an experience that they incurred. However to encourage an ongoing habit, it is good to make this an ongoing idea, where the students are given multiple opportunities to share their experiences and their responses to those experiences. Reflective tools have the capability to enable powerful learning for the students involved. Such a tool can be utilized to guide self-assessments, to evaluate current situations and possibly entertain new

solutions and possibilities. It provides a framework for equitable student learning and achievement (Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003). This reflective process helps to support the teacher and students and provide the opportunities for students to metacognitively connect with the lessons they encounter every day. Reflection allows participants (teacher and student) the opportunity for growth and for taking responsibility for their own learning. Powerful learning is evident once the students are given the opportunity to monitor themselves or reflect on the lessons they were involved in to build their knowledge (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 1993). Students are sometimes not aware of all things that they are learning, as they learn. If teachers are giving the students the opportunity for them to raise this consciousness through using the reflective tool, then it is probable they will have a better possibility of retaining the knowledge that will help them succeed.

Understanding the Environment of the Pilot Study

The principal for the school has been aware of the study from the beginning. He has expressed interest in the study due to the large amount of ESOL students that need accommodation at this institution. His willingness to participate is an indication that the administration is open to embrace the proposed changes for suggestions made by the researcher at the end of the study. He has made it clear that the teachers who participate will not be in danger of any disciplinary action or reprimanded for participating in this study. He welcomed the idea of having the focus groups in his institution however, an alternate location is available. The alternate location is recommended to allow for complete comfort in giving the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their experience with the phenomenon without hesitation. The alternate location will be the University of Central Florida, the institution the researcher attends.

It will be a single conference room with supervision by the Chair of the study. One person (the chair) will facilitate the discussions, which will enable the researcher to take notes. As the researcher is taking notes there will be an audio tape available to record every detail of the discussion conversations. Multiple participants (approximately 8-10 teachers) will be in the room at the time of the audio recording and the discussion.

Teacher Demographics

A mini survey was sent out to the participants to gain knowledge on their demographics. There were eleven teachers, six were African American, three were Hispanic, one was mixed race and one was Caucasian. Based on their previous year's end-of-year instructor observation all of the teachers were rated, *Effective* or *Highly Effective*. Based on conversation all of the teachers had a detailed understanding of what a digital school was and what ESOL students were considered. Hycner (1999) notes the phenomenon that decides what methods are utilized in a study. To choose the participants, the researcher chose to use a "purposive" or "convenience" sampling approach. This approach allowed the researcher to choose individuals that were qualified to provide the information most necessary to assist with the study. Teachers were asked to suggest with permission and at their discretion, the names of other teachers that they believed met the qualifications for the study. To ensure that everyone was safe and the rules of research were being complied with, ethical precautions were taken. Informed consent was utilized to acquire permission from those who were potentially eligible. They were aware that they were participating in the study and knew what the study entailed. There were areas of the procedures, the potential risks (there were very little), in which they knew what would be discussed. In addition, they were aware that there would be audio (no videos) and that the information

discussed would be confidential and only utilized by the researcher and supervisor of that study. The researcher received an approved IRB from the University of Central Florida and from the School District.

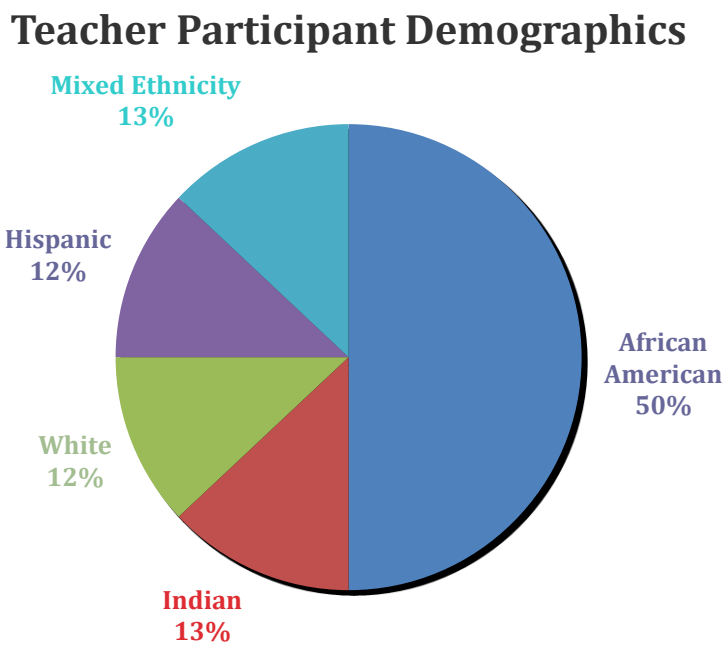

Figure 6. Teacher Participant Demographics

Participants

Participants for Pilot Study (Focus Group)

"Pilot studies are a crucial element of a good study design" (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001, p.1). The researcher used a pilot study to inform the research. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) note that an advantage of a pilot study is that it can be pivotal in obtaining an advanced warning about areas that might be of concern, especially when the researcher needs to know where failure might be present. A pilot study also indicates where protocol is not being followed and highlights where the methodology and the instruments in the research may be flawed. The

purpose of this focus group is to gain knowledge and get insight from those who are directly affected by the problem being discussed. This input will be valuable to the researchers and other stakeholders because this information can be utilized as a part of the ongoing professional development for all teachers, and it will also be used to inform the researcher on the impending platforms created for teacher resources and support.

The focus group allows for those involved to freely discuss and give their input on the problem, their experiences and what they feel would be suitable solutions with the intent of student academic success in mind. Focus groups were chosen because they have the potential to elicit meaning (Morgan, 2012). Focus groups will be useful in this study because the researcher has the potential to process the meaning of the knowledge and interaction amongst the members in the study. According to Morgan (2012) focus groups enhance disclosure, allow participants to create their own agendas and allow participants to share elaborated accounts of incidents as they engage in discussion. The focus groups are helpful because they are discussions with individuals with similar traits and characteristics. It is imperative that these individuals have a similar connection, hence the survey done to find similarities in their eligibility for the study. The individuals were then sought out based on the researcher's judgment and purpose for the study.

The participants invited included middle school instructors in the Tangerine County School District; some had coaching experience as well as experience with teaching multiple subjects. There were eleven subjects who decided to participate after meeting the requirements, all of whom have been teaching for at least two years and all were considered "effective" or "highly effective" on the Marzano evaluation scale. Three of the teachers have been teaching for over fifteen years, three have been teaching for over ten years, four have been teaching for over five years and one has been teaching for two years. All teachers have a National Board

Certification; five teachers have a Masters, two of whom are currently seeking Doctoral degrees. Of the participants, eight teachers have an ESOL endorsement, six teachers are at digital schools, and all of the teachers at some point teach or encounter ESOL students in their classes. Of the group of participants, five of the teachers have had official training on how to teach ESOL students. No names were requested as those who participated would not be identified and associated with responses to questions in the focus group. Table seven below indicates their level of academic accomplishments as well as their demographics.

Table 7. Participants in Research (Focus Group)

Teacher	Years of Experience	Ethnicity	Digital School (Yes/No)	Highest Degree	ESOL Endorsed
Teacher A	15+	Hispanic	Yes	B.S.	Yes
Teacher B	12+	Black	Yes	ABD	Yes
Teacher C	2	Mixed	No	B.S	No
Teacher D	6+	Black	No	B.S	No
Teacher E	6+	Black	Yes	M.Ed.	Yes
Teacher F	6+	Black	Yes	M.Ed.	Yes
Teacher G	11+	Hispanic	Yes	B.S.	Yes
Teacher H	11+	Hispanic	Yes	B.S.	Yes
Teacher I	15+	Black	No	M.Ed.	Yes
Teacher J	15+	Black	No	M.Ed.	No
Teacher K	6+	White	No	B.S.	Yes

Implementation of Pilot Study

All teachers were invited based on their prospective eligibility. The researcher initially informed potential teachers about the research via word of mouth. Those teachers who seemed interested and willing to participate were contacted via email, requesting participation. Teacher candidates who responded with a continued interest were invited to a focus group with specified date, time and location. Fifteen letters for request of participation were distributed, eleven approvals were returned with qualifications met. The focus groups create the opportunity for the researcher to have direct contact with the teachers involved and to get their feedback on what they believe is necessary for their ESOL students to succeed.

Focus Group

Use of the Focus Group

A reflective tool was given to the students for them to inform the researcher about how they feel the teachers can improve their lessons and approach to create a better opportunity for them to learn. With similar intent, the Focus group data information collected from the discussion was used to find out what the teachers believed they needed to be help students achieve. Depending upon the outcome of the focus group, there will be an online professional development that will be implemented to assist teachers. The focus group will allow the researcher to use the teacher input to create an online professional development resource folder. The teachers' input will be the structure that decides the updated component of this folder. There will already be a plan; however, the focus group will analyze this plan and collectively determine what is necessary for their success in the plan. The participants will be an integral part of the process and will determine the components that will be kept, added or discarded based on the

discussion of what is needed and what is not. The teachers in the focus groups will be the sounding board used because they and other teachers like them will utilize these folders for future lessons and as a contact to elicit information for their ESOL students.

Results

The researcher conducted two focus groups throughout the course of this pilot study. The purpose of focus group 1 was to identify areas in which the teachers felt they needed assistance with meeting the needs of ESOL students, as well as to present a plan to them and have them give feedback on whether or not it might meet their needs in the classroom. The purpose of focus group 2 was to update the teachers on the plan that was initially suggested. This focus group gives the teachers the opportunity to evaluate the curriculum for the professional development that was created based on the previous discussion (in focus group 1) and to assess their needs with the components included. The participants were given a reflective tool to help guide their thoughts and discussions on experiences they have with ESOL students and how this professional development curriculum might aid in the student academic success.

Focus Group 1

Focus group number one was held in an agreed upon location away from any participants' place of employment. Before the discussion began, there was a brief meet and greet where the participants were able to familiarize themselves with each other. Once everyone arrived, both the researcher along with a facilitative support who is also a researcher were able to review the consent agreement with each individual and explain the process of the focus group and the study in great detail. The presence of the other researcher was as a guide to assist and ensure that the procedures were being correctly completed as well as aid the discussion with the

participants. Both the researcher and the facilitator were taking notes as the discussions occurred and were available to the participants the entire session to answer questions as necessary. The focus group included a whole group discussion where the instructions were given. Then two groups were formed and each were given several questions to discuss and chart responses. After each small group completed their charted discussions, both groups came together once again to wrap up and finalize their discussions as a whole group. The researcher and support facilitator support then led the whole group discussion with separate questions chosen prior to the meeting to utilize as discussion guides for the participants.

Teacher Perception

Specific questions were asked to provoke responses that were useful for all stakeholders; some of those overall questions and answers, which included the following:

Question: What is your ethnicity?

Outcome: The focus group consisted of 27% Hispanic teachers, 55% Black teachers, 9% White teachers and 9% Mixed teachers.

Question: How long have you been teaching?

Outcome: There was an extensive range of experience of the teachers involved in the focus group. The years of experiences ranged from two years to over twenty years. The focus group included: 27% with experiences between 11-15 years, 36% of the teachers who had 6-10 years of experience, 9% had 1-5 years of experience and 27% of the teachers had over 15 years of experience.

Question: What grade levels do you teach?

Outcome: 100% of the teachers in the focus group have middle school experience (grades 6-8).

Question: What do you think ESOL students need to be academically successful in the classroom?

Outcome: The teachers felt the students need reinforcement and opportunities to boost their confidence. The students, according to the focus group, need enhanced vocabulary as well as the teachers need professional development trainings. These trainings would include technology and how to appropriately utilize these in the classroom (especially when working with ESOL students).

Question: Do you feel prepared now to teach ESOL students?

Outcome: No, we want to know if we are going about helping each ESOL student effectively. Also, trainings and strategies are needed for all teachers to be successful in the classroom.

Question: What additional resources do you think you need to be more successful with your ESOL students?

Outcome: Technology that can support translations as well as professional development trainings.

Question: Do you integrate technology? If so, how?

Outcome: Yes, we integrate technology to do the following: to introduce concepts, for additional practice for direct instruction, to utilize curriculum

software of online text, to give the students opportunities to read, communicate with the students in class, collaboration amongst students and to allow for school projects.

Question: Do you have a daily plan to focus on the academic success of ESOL students?

Outcome: Some felt that there are no specific plans, maybe a small amount but not much. Others felt they were equipped with lessons focusing on ESOL student success depending on level of acquisition.

Question: Have you encountered barriers in terms of acquiring the technology training you want and/or need?

Outcome: Yes, not all languages are available to translate for students. There is also a lack of training for curriculum resources.

Question: What has been the most beneficial technology workshop you have attended, and why?

Outcome: Canvas, Rosetta Stone

The researcher kept notes on the responses and elaborations made in each focus group. The conversations were then transcribed and coded to allow for confidentiality of the teachers involved (Creswell, 2013). The themes were finalized based on multiple participants stating concerns; if no one or only a few were identified as problem areas then those were discarded. To create an environment of efficiency, the whole group was divided into two small groups and each had an allotted time to have small group discussions amongst themselves with specific questions

used as their guide. Once the small group discussions ended, there was a whole group discussion which was guided by a facilitator to discuss the content highlighted in each small group . The following were ideas that were evoked based on the concerns, opinions and suggestions of the participants in each small group.

Focus Group Discussion

Group 1 Small Group Discussion

Question: What do you think ESOL students need to be successful?

- Themes
    - Students need opportunities where they feel successful, even with seemingly miniscule tasks.
    - Teachers are lacking the professional development opportunities/training with the strategies that allow for ESOL students who need modifications with different lessons, ideas and concepts.
    - Students are in need of technology that supports specific academic needs, more than just for pictures or translation.
    - Teachers struggle with the balance in accountability for ESOL students. It is sometimes difficult to identify what is "too much" when helping the students.

Question: Do you feel prepared to teach ESOL students?

- Themes
    - Teachers are lacking the professional skills necessary to teach ESOL students. One teacher noted, "it's a real struggle when I have a student who speaks French, and I am unable to help them". The participant, continued, "if it were not for a

French speaking student who helps me translate for that student, then we would both be lost". Another participant noted," in Tangerine Florida we tend to consider the ESOL student population as those that speak Spanish and Haitian Creole, however I have eleven different languages in my school, so how do I accommodate all those languages effectively. For example, "Swahili" how do I do that?"

- There is a feeling of lack of preparedness on the part of the teachers. There is pressure about not knowing how much of the student's native language to use when teaching to allow for effective immersion into the English language (even the Measurement Topic Plan [MTP] lacks a useful section for ESOL to assist in the curriculum).
- The professional development is not as practical as it has been before, where there are relevant experiences being had versus simply taking accelerated courses to receive the endorsement.

Question: What additional resources do you think you need to be more successful with ESOL students?

- Themes
    - Practical training is necessary to each teacher. One participant suggested, "even if we had a couple students in ESOL who we could use to help us practice our lessons." The ideas of "perfect practice makes perfect" was the trend discussed to allow everyday experiences to be highlighted in various subject areas.

- ESOL strategies should be differentiated instruction that is extremely enhanced daily in class. For example, videos with fidelity, cellular phones that allow the students to make connections in the lesson with what they consider relevant.

Group 2 Small Group Discussion

Question: Do you integrate technology and if so how?

- Themes
  - Half of the participants did and half did not. The ones who do, use it to introduce new concepts being taught. It is used for assessment and as the main curriculum in many classes.
  - It can be used as a form of collaboration and communication amongst the teacher and other students and to aid with the translation of other languages.

Question: Do you have a daily plan to focus on the academic success of ESOL students?

- Themes
  - Many participants do not have a daily "plan" that is created directly for ESOL students. Many of them however have accommodations that they use for each lesson.
  - The teachers' input is not always considered thoroughly when a program is being vetted by the district for the classroom.
  - The budget affects the resources that are available

Question: What has been the most beneficial workshop you have attended and why?

- Themes

- The roundtable discussions that the district or administrators conduct do not always include teacher input, sometimes no actions are taken.
- There is confusion with the IT specialist and the technology specialist in the school. There are often delays in getting support with the technology that is available to the school. Participant #7 said, "Our network is constantly revamping" Participant #10, added, "I am in a portable and its touch and go with getting Wi-Fi and connecting with the main building".

Whole Group Discussions

After each group had the opportunity to work and discuss their questions on their own, there was a larger whole group discussion conducted afterwards to allow all participants to engage with each other and the facilitator. The following ideas were highlighted.

- Themes
  - Students need more opportunities to build their confidence through positive encouragement, even with small tasks. Participant #7 noted that, "lowering the affective filter and getting to know the students allows for students to make connections with the instructor. Participant #6, curious about what to do in her class, asked the question "would it be too cheesy to incorporate some of their culture in the lessons?"
  - Some teachers are not aware of how to break the barriers with the ESOL students. Participant #6 noted, "I do shut down the students if they are wrong, because there are just some ways that are wrong when working on particular items of a problem. "Something she admitted that she needed to work on was how to address the

students if they were not going in the right direction. She wanted to learn how to be better at "praising more and attacking less".

- There is difficulty when teachers attempt to get students to retain, acquire and apply knowledge in English, when sometimes the ESOL students have not yet mastered that skill in their first language.
- The online curriculum is not translated in other languages for students who need it. The technological resource is limited. There are applications that are suggested, but there is no funding, and there is limited access to each program. There are additional costs associated with each and teachers are often tasked with funding the additional applications themselves. Some programs are being forced upon the teachers based on district selections. These programs do not always meet the needs of all the students. Whatever professional development is offered to the teachers is not continuous or implemented with fidelity.
- Even administrators lack the knowledge necessary to implement technology effectively in the core subject areas. Participant #5 stated her frustration, explaining "if administrators were more on board and supportive in finding ways to educate us, and allow us to learn ourselves and implement it, it would be helpful to us."

Question: Do your ESOL students let you know what they need?

- Overall, no, many do not know what they need and are probably not confident enough with the language barrier to ask without being chastised. Participant #11 highlighted the idea that teachers along with administration have to establish and support the culture in the school and classroom that it is ok that the accommodations are given to the ESOL

students who need it, and allow the students to feel comfortable enough to ask for those accommodations when they need them. Participant #1 consigned that point noting that sometimes the only time that administration focus on the accommodations for the ESOL students are during testing periods throughout the year.

Thoughts on Online Professional Development

The researcher sought to inquire what all the participants thought would be necessary for them to be successful in their classroom. She opened up the discussion on professional development and inquired about the relevance of it and how it would assist them. Participant #11 noted the online component would be good, but that practical application needs to be added to allow for practice and repetition. Some abstract activities can be better explained and modeled for the students. A mixed mode would work best to allow for direct, individual practice for various subject areas instead of being solely online.

Middle School Technology Transition (MST^2) Program/Curriculum Response

The researcher sought to inquire what participants thought would be necessary for students to be successful in all classes with the technology program/curriculum being proposed. Most participants verbally agreed on the possibility of success using this program, the others nodded their approval. Participant #6 stated that the idea would work especially because it would save time for the core teachers who prior had to use their whole group instruction time to teach students how to use the applications in specific core classes. Moreover, this student technology program/curriculum would allow for additional instructional time saved from whatever state mandated technology application is required for students in class such as CAPE.

Participant #4 noted that teachers are also lacking the ability to maneuver through the technological applications being utilized in the classroom. She felt they could use some assistance in gaining the confidence they needed to be proficient in those areas so that they could effectively assist students. Below is the table that was initially created for the online pedagogical intervention for teachers. It includes opportunities to reflect, look at ESOL specific domains, collaborate and share information. The teacher participants were each given a copy to analyze in the whole group meeting and given their input for what they believe would work for them.

Table 8. Teacher Online PD Proposed Lesson Plan

Activities	Time Frame	Pedagogical Intervention	Artifacts
Professional Online Development	2 weeks 09/19-30	• Introducing ways to gradually release technology with ESOL students • Read article #1 excerpt from, what great teachers do differently by Fred Jones.	• Journal • Self-reflection- how can you improve student learning? • Student artifacts
2b. PD	2 weeks 10/03-14	Domain 1: Cross Cultural Communication	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2c. PD	2 weeks	Domain 2: Language and Literacy	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2d. PD	2 weeks 10/17-28	Domain 3: Teaching and Learning methods of English Learners	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2e PD	2 weeks	Read article 2 – excerpt of Classroom	• Self-reflection

Activities	Time Frame	Pedagogical Intervention	Artifacts
	10/31-11/11	instruction that works by: Robert Marzano	
2f. PD	2 weeks 11/14-25	Domain 4: ESOL Curriculum and materials development	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2g. PD	2 weeks 11/28-12/09	Domain 5: Assessment Issues for ESOL students	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2h. PD	2 hours 12/12-23	Focus group – discussions on strategies/results/insight on cultural awareness and assessment results/discuss artifacts collected	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2i. PD	2 weeks 12/26-01/06	Class wrap up – best practices for ESOL student improved achievement	• Self-reflection • Exit quiz

Note. Adapted from the Beacon Educator' Programs: ESOL for Language Arts Teachers.

Focus Group 2

The second and final focus group was created to get feedback from the teacher participants and better develop the proposed curriculum based on the suggestions given during the first focus group. The intent was to use the information that was given last time, make adjustments to the proposed pedagogical tools and present the participants with the product once again to ensure that the plan would be feasible and would be helpful in allowing both student and teacher success.

Immediately the participants felt solace in one another and began to voice their frustrations with the happenings of their classroom at the end of the school year. The researcher/facilitator asked the question, where does your voice come in? One participant noted,

"We really don't feel like we have a voice, we no longer have that culture that was once created in the school" Another added, "a school environment is successful based on the leadership, we have lost the community feeling because we are so focused on data." As the conversations continued in the focus group, there was a theme of frustration that permeated the discussion. Many of the teachers were frustrated with the goings on currently at their institution. The researcher considered that this was close to the end of the school year, so there was an overall yearning for change.

The teacher participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the experiences that occurred with their ESOL students while they participated in the study. The participants received some questions to help guide their reflection after each interaction with the students and the lesson. When asked to share the questions that stood out to them, there was some discomfort with sharing .One participant noted, "Of all the questions in general, what first came to me was I had difficulty in answering some because I feel the ESOL students don't get any of the help they need, they are almost pushed to the side sometimes, so when I answered this I tried to implement things that I believe in but not necessarily because I am seeing it." Some of the other participants said they still did not know what to do to cater specifically to the ESOL students in their classroom because they have not had that support or training and were even more perplexed when thinking of how to aid ESOL student in subjects other than Reading and Language Arts. One participant noted, "I have a paraprofessional who helps me in my classroom. If it weren't for her I do not know what I would do." She explained that she has a large Portuguese speaking ESOL student population. She felt fortunate enough that her paraprofessional support also spoke Portuguese and is able to aid her in translating the content as she explains it in her class. Outside of that help, she felt ill equipped to aid the students. However, she did explain that once they

received the explanations and support that they needed the students excelled in multiple areas especially in mathematics. This experience prompted another participant to share saying, "sometimes the students know the material it is just that the content has been explained differently in their country, they sometimes know what to do they just need help to guide their thoughts." As she explained many of the other participants nodded in agreement, they were ready to be a part of the agency for change in the ESOL diaspora.

The following question was asked: What does the term collaborative learning mean to you? Responses provided varying opinions on the definition. One participant explained that to her, a collaborative learning environment is "conversations within conversations, respectful conversations, there is moving, student to student, student to teacher; it is verbal and nonverbal languages. Another participant chimed in stating, "It is student centered, it is more so students actually leading the conversations with the teacher there to facilitate and help with higher order thinking skills and ideas. Especially for ESOL learners who lack the ability to write, there are plenty opportunities to talk and learning great academic skills from one another." These conversations revealed that there are areas that need to be intentionally addressed expeditiously.

After the group had an opportunity to discuss the questions, some themes emerged from the overall discussion. The following ideas were highlighted:

- Themes
    - Collaborative learning means that the teacher is not the focus of the conversations/discussion. Students are in charge of thinking deeper and spearheading the learning and thinking process that occurs in the group (with the teacher as the facilitator and guide).

- Center rotations allow the student a mental break yet give them the opportunity to process, reflect and collaborate with peers.
- Allow the comfort level to rise and create a level of trust that allows the student to be open as opposed to being shy and shut down.
- Some teachers fear that they do not have all the skills to help their ESOL students beyond the basic ideas that are usually discussed.

Anecdotal Reflections

Student

All of the teacher participants were given a reflection tool to give to their students to get insight on what the students felt they needed to be successful. The **bolded questions** were highlighted as ones that the students explained and answered thoroughly and were discussed once again in the teacher focus group. The following questions were given to both ESOL and native English speaking students for reflection purposes:

1. What did you learn today?
2. How do you know you learned it?
3. **What strategies or activities most helped you learn? How?**
4. **What do you think will help you be more successful in class?**
5. **How can teachers better use technology to help you learn?**
6. What suggestions do you have to improve the teacher's lessons?

Teacher

All of the teacher participants were given a reflection tool to utilize for focus group two, of all the questions only a couple were discussed in the whole group (**bolded**).

1. What did you do with this lesson that specifically accommodated ESOL students? What was the expected outcome? What was the actual outcome?
2. Are there any areas when teaching ESOL students that you find difficult? What needs to be addressed?
3. How do the ESOL students react to the accommodations that are provided to them? How do they show they are receptive or not?
4. What have you noticed overall about how the students react and interact with the lessons they are given?
5. How do you think technology or the lack of technology in your lessons impact ESOL students?
6. **What does a collaborative learning environment look like in your classroom?**
7. **In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?**
8. **What collaborative learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?**
9. **What specific collaborative learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?**
10. **Does the student centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?**

The term *Collaborative learning environment* is one that is becoming more common in the middle school classroom. It is a term that many school administrators are highlighting and are expecting to see when they observe any class. Collaborative learning is explained as “an

instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one student helps other students to be successful" (Gokhale, 1995). When asked their input on their definition of a collaborative learning environment and what that looks like, the teacher participants explained:

- Teacher participant: "It is conversations within conversations, because we are not going to be at the same place at the same time, it is respectful conversations where we are feeding off one another. It may be in groups, where conversations are person to person, or student to teacher, student to student. It's verbal and non-verbal language where we try to understand one another, each other's' point of view.
- Teacher participant: "This is an environment where everyone has different ideas and when they all bring those ideas, it sparks other ideas in their heads and the students get to feed off of each other.
- Teacher participant: " A collaborative learning environment is student centered, it is not where the teacher is doing all the talking, more so of about 90% of the students leading the conversation. The teacher is there to facilitate or to clear up any misconceptions or to present those high order, more in-depth focused questions for students to actually get deeper in whatever lesson is actually being taught to bring about that awareness or that aha moment. Especially for ESOL learners, especially those classes where there are individuals who may lack that ability to write effectively, we have to be able to assess in multiple ways because when they talk they sometimes are able to better explain it to each other than maybe how the teacher would explain it. In an ESOL classroom, the students need to be exposed to an environment where there is freedom and opportunity to talk,

process, and share and then incorporate the writing and the writing will become better because now they have grasped the understanding of what they are supposed to do."

- Teacher participant: "My definition is where I feel that each student is enabled to present their own learning style and not feel judged. If I am a visual learner, or auditory learner that I am able to be myself and not feel like I did not do it exactly how my teacher did it so when you collaborate you are able to just put it out there."

All in all, they saw collaborative learning in the classroom was one where the students are able to work with one another, they are able to collaborate and feed off each other as they incorporate their own learning style. The participants saw this as an environment where the teacher was the facilitator instead of the sole instructor. The teacher is there to ask probing questions, and to help the students direct their thinking with higher order thinking skills. They are there as a resource to the working students. The students are the ones who are inquiring and gaining knowledge by practice and working together. Some strategies that were highlighted that help ESOL students in a collaborative learning environment included: allowing the students to work together and having student centered practice, as well as direct instruction from not only the teacher but also from student peers. It forces the students to have to collaborate and participate with one another and communicate and engage each other. This setting forces both the ESOL student and the native English speakers to work together and to bridge the learning gap.

Chapter Discussion

After the pilot study was completed, the researcher discovered that there are other factors that should be considered to allow the interventions to be successful. The results of the pilot

study indicated that there is a need for additional items included in the domains to remedy some deficiencies mentioned in the discussions. Both students and teachers voiced their concerns and shared their ideas to help advocate for change in their leaning and teaching environment. The three pronged intervention design proposed in the pilot study is aimed at meeting the needs of all those directly in the learning process, namely the teachers and the students. Based on the results from this pilot study there is need for immediate implementation of systems that are resourceful to the teachers, regardless if they are ESOL endorsed as well as resourceful for the ESOL students who are lacking the skills needed to be successful and to allow for achievement in a digital middle school. The framework was vital in informing the researcher on relevant ideas to aid the organization to support both the teachers and the students. Results of the pilot study indicated that there needs to be additional items included in the domains to remedy some deficiencies mentioned in the discussion. For example, the participants felt the online professional development would be more helpful if there was a face-to-face component added to increase efficiency and fidelity in lesson implementation.

CHAPTER 3: MODEL FRAMEWORK

Overview

The problem of practice emerges from the current Florida State Assessment (FSA) results in a digital middle school in Tangerine Florida. This dissertation in practice addresses the failure to bridge the gap between ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) and Native English Language speaking students on the state Reading/English Language Arts (ELA) assessment. The study examined how a collaborative learning environment affects ESOL student achievement. An analysis of how to bridge the gap between the subgroups and the application of strategies to aid both the students and teachers will allow both groups to meet the state expectations. The intent of this pilot study was to examine ways to bridge the gap between ESOL students and their native English speaking counter parts in a digital school setting. The focus on the gap between the two sub-groups is due to the analysis of the results from the Florida State Assessment (FSA)

The research site for this pilot study was a large middle school in Tangerine Florida. This school was one of the pilot schools for implementation of the digital platform for learning (all students have a device for learning, in this case a laptop) in middle schools in this school district. There are approximately 1000 students enrolled from grades six through grade eight. The demographics of the student body are as such: Hispanic 46%, White 35%, Black 10%, Asian 5%, Multi-Racial 3%, and American Indian at 1%. Included in the student demographics are students with specific learning disabilities and Emotional Behavioral Disabilities. The percentages of male and female students are about equal. Students who attend this institution include residences from a wide range of socioeconomic statuses. Teachers in the middle school setting were chosen because they were either Reading or Language Arts teachers so they had direct impact on how

the students are taught for the FSA Reading test. Those teachers all had a score of *effective* or *highly effective* score on their administrative evaluations.

The pilot study examined four questions:

1. In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase/impact the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?
2. What learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?
3. What specific learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?
4. How does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?

Successful Indicators

There would be many indicators to reveal whether or not the researcher was successful with the focus group.

- The teacher online professional development courses are being completed by all the Reading and the Language Arts teachers. In addition, other subject areas are interested and are taking part in the courses that are being offered based on their needs.
- Teachers are more attentive to the needs of ESOL students in all subject areas
- In the English Language Arts (ELA) and the Reading classrooms, there are significant improvements made based on the class grades, mini assessments and other formative assessments being conducted in the classroom.

- The Middle School Transition Technology classes are working. This is indicated by the level of proficiency in the content, materials, and the maneuvering through the e-text books and digital curriculum.
- The ESOL students receive passing scores on their FSA reading and writing assessments.

Outcomes

In my experiences as a teacher, I have not had the opportunity to delve into a Professional Development (PD) that fulfills the need of ESOL students. The school district in which this study took place has conducted many PDs every year on how they believe students should be accommodated to allow for growth. There have been PDs for low-level achievement in schools, for students who need accommodations, teacher evaluation, school data, assessments etc. however, there has been a lack of PDs provided on how to accommodate and bridge the gap of ESOL students in a digital setting. There have been small group meetings organized that focus on ESOL students but none with direct focus on how to utilize the digital classroom as a platform for more success of ESOL students especially to be reflected on the state assessments. With this is mind the researcher kept in consideration that specific input was needed to create change. The focus groups were to allow for an environment that was judgement free, and would allow the teachers to feel comfortable voicing their opinions and sharing what it is they really wanted to see happen to allow them to be successful with ESOL students.

Teacher participants who met the qualifications approved through the IRB process agreed to meet at an agreed upon location for the focus group. Each teacher was given a consent agreement, which the researcher read aloud as everyone settled in. The researcher had an agenda each time and tried to keep that agenda to respect the participants time. The focus group was

created to get input from the teachers and so every activity conducted by the researcher and facilitator aimed to do so. In the first focus group, 11 participants were involved and that created the opportunity for small collaborative efforts in inquiring about their needs in the classroom. The large group was converted into two small groups and the opportunity was given to use guiding questions to aid in a group discussion. Those small groups provided question responses that were charted and later discussed in the whole group setting when both groups reconvened for the whole group discussion. As a part of the whole group discussion, the researcher and facilitator guided the group with extended questions as well as prompting to delve deeper into the minds of the participants. Later in the discussion, the researcher explained the plan for the study and what the information would be used for. The three-pronged intervention plan was explained with hopes for feedback from the teachers, which would then determine what adjustments should be made to allow for success.

Once the plan was thoroughly explained from all aspects of the study, the participants shared their feedback. Many of them agreed with the idea of the MST² proposal for the students because they believed the student technology deficiencies distracted both themselves and the students from being able to focus on core subject work and practice.

Participant #6 noted: "I think this class would be a good idea because the language is not just about the word it is about the culture as well. When they are in the computer classes and seeing the different apps and different approaches for handling information it helps them to build on the language as well."

Participant #3 added: "This class would also alleviate the stress from the Language Arts department who has to take a day of CAPE, we have to take a day each week to do CAPE and we are a state mandated tested subject and we have already given up ten days." She felt that she

would benefit if another course would be able to handle that load and give the core subject teachers more time to work on content.

Participant, #4 chimed in the discussion asking, "Will there be a computer class for the teachers? I have many veteran teachers who come to me because they feel like the technology has been sprung on them and they do not know how to use this technology and so I end up having an after school class teaching them how to use technology. They actually want to know but it has been thrown on them and they do not know how to keep up, and they want to know how to help the kids but they don't know how to use that technology."

After the student technology course was discussed, the participants were asked about the online PD geared towards the teachers (with a resource folder). Many of the participants agreed that the online PD could be useful to them. They were able to see the relevance of such a resource to help them meet the needs of the ESOL students but felt it was lacking in some areas. One participant was able to explain why they that there should be some adjustments made to the curriculum.

Participant #11 explained that in his small group they discussed what might work as a remedy and noted: "That component of the intervention is good but what about the practical application of it? It is like the ESOL endorsement classes they have online, you get them and then you are done and have fulfilled the requirement, but when have we had time to practice and get repetition on these things? Some of the individuals who do not have a baseline understanding of what ESOL is can be abstract but it would make more sense to get in front of someone to say this is what is it and this is what is looks like."

This prompted the discussion of a professional development that is mixed mode. This way the teachers would be able to fulfill their online obligations but they would then have the

opportunity at real world examples that are specific to their own subject and students and they can see it modeled for them. It gives them the opportunity to also meet and match the names to faces online as well as make collaborative connections that might be useful to future lessons and lesson planning. With this in mind, the researcher created and updated the plan for the PD.

The pilot study was able to inform the framework by highlighting the "voices" of the teacher participants who have direct connection with the situations pertaining to ESOL students. The focus groups and the reflection data collected were used to obtain insight into how the problem at hand persists and how they believe improvement can be made. This allowed the researcher to revisit some ideas and to adjust possible pre-conceived notions or assumptions made about ESOL student performance. The problem being discussed has been approached with the idea that needs will be met from both the teachers and the students based on their deficiencies. The data collected illuminated the following outcomes:

- The need for continuous pedagogical intervention (professional development) that is knowledge rich and easily accessible to ALL teachers and that allows for a wide range of relevant topics covered relating to ESOL students.
- The comprehensive understanding of the term, collaborative learning environment.
- The role that every teacher plays in an ESOL student's academic life, and understanding the link between teacher awareness and student performance.
- The need for continuous technological interventions for new and seasoned teachers and the impact on ESOL student learning abilities and opportunities.
- The impact the student voice has on their own learning.

Action Research Methods

The pilot study method in action research was chosen to allow the researcher to observe and document changes made over time and to be given the opportunity to find the best possible solution to resolve the problem. This pilot study method is significant because it allowed for the teacher participants to meet and have discussions, highlight problems, find suggestions for solutions, test them out, come back, and reflect on the outcome. This method is useful because it is through trial and error that individuals are able to design and implement solutions. The action research method help to resolve the problem and is significant because the researcher is using real-world individuals who are currently involved in the problem. Getting their input is vital in finding the right direction for a practical outcome. This should resolve the problem of practice because it allows the researcher to get input from all the parties involved and share with the stakeholders in the organization being affected. Once addressed and success occurs, similar ideas can be implemented across organizations within the school district with same or similar deficiencies. No method of research like this pilot study has been conducted at this organization before so it created an opportunity to challenge any scrutiny that might arise about the entire process and to ease any concerns that any stakeholders might foresee.

Student/Teacher Progression

At the first focus group meeting, many of the teacher participants voiced frustration about their experiences with effectively teaching ESOL students to allow for increased achievement. Some thought this was due to their own lack of training, their support system as well as lack of ESOL training from their individual organization. By the second focus group, many of the teachers were intentional about the approaches that they took with their ESOL students and paid

more attention to the interactions and behaviors of the students after more intentional strategies were used to guide the students' learning. Some noted significant differences in their ESOL students' response to different strategies used, and although everyone did not observe extensive recognizable changes, others noted slight personal changes after their own self-awareness and adjustments they made for the betterment of their students.

The students' reflections provided evidence that they had frustrations that needed to be addressed, based on the reflective data tool. It can be noted that by the time the data were collected it was the end of the school year and so the children as well as the teachers might have been tired which reflected in their comments. Many of the students had been testing on and off since January, and by the month of May, there were tensions and frustrations about the amount of testing that had occurred all year long.

One question asked the students about suggestions they think might improve the teacher's lesson and they added:

- Student response: "If we watch videos and play games it will help us learn better."
- Student response: "Be more involved with the class and give us groups to work in."
- Student response: "I think she can break it down a little more easy or read along with us so we can better understand the lesson."

The teachers' reflection provided evidence that they recognized that there was a problem in their classroom as well as the reflection allowed them to voice concerns about the process of addressing the needs of ESOL students.

- Teacher participant: "The lack of technology in the lessons impact the ESOL students because it limits their ability to understand. It decreases interest in the lesson and causes

the inability to perform effectively. Sometimes the ESOL students have feelings of defeat and failure, other times they are embarrassed and shy.

- Teacher participant: “Lack of technology limits the ability to differentiate, provide examples, pictures, and illustrations consistently, nor meaningful practice and feedback frequently. I struggle with learners with extremely limited English vocabulary, especially when no other similar background students are available as a resource.”
- Teacher participant: “ESOL students tend to feel embarrassed to use their accommodations and refuse to use it. Some students are apprehensive, but later develop confidence and are eager to participate in the activity given. Technology can positively affect ESOL students because they can go on their own pace. I incorporate small group and peer to peer setting because students are less likely to hide behind a larger group.”
- Teacher participant: “Sometimes the willingness for students to participate is not yet there and for the most part the students who have been a part of the program longer are more engaging. My students tend to learn better when there is a translator.”

Reflective Tool

A student reflective tool was used to inform the researcher on the students’ perception of their own learning. This tool will be confidential and completed in multiple classrooms. This rationale is that we are making assumptions about what we believe the students need when they are the best source to find out their needs. The reflective tool was a series of questions about what they feel they need to become successful students. The tool was created to allow for anonymity for the students so that they would freely state their thoughts and ideas and not be judged or penalized in any way because they are not identified. The responses were shared with

the teacher participants at the focus group and revealed that many of the students, no matter the school or the teacher had similar concerns, wants and needs to allow them to be successful.

- Student Reflective Tool
    - What did you learn today?
    - How do you know you learned it?
    - What strategies or activities most helped you learn? How?
    - What do you think will help you be more successful in class?
    - How can teachers better use technology to help you learn?
    - What suggestions do you have to improve the teacher's lessons?

Students were given the opportunity to explain what they felt they needed to learn. Some of the confidential student reflections included:

- Student: "Some classwork should be in partners but not very often. Pay attention to whom you sit together with. Be funny, it helps. Don't give the kids an assignment, then homework. If they do not finish the assignment in class give that to them for homework. Remember we have 7 periods. Now if the assignment can be finished in class then that is an exception. Sometimes turn the lights off. It helps us concentrate more."
- Student: "In the classroom, I would like more paper assignments that we could do with a partner. If we continue doing assignments on the computer, then we have to worry about people getting chargers when their computers die. If we work with our partners, students would have some extra help if they get stuck."

For the question "What strategies or activities most helped you learn? How?", some of the anonymous student reflections included:

- Student: “I think the strategies that mostly helped me learn was the audio reading because it helped me feel the emotions of the characters in the book. It helps when she stops the book and ask questions I might have about the book.”
- Student: “The strategies that helped me compare a poem to an image and by comparing vocabulary words used in each.”
- Student: “Being in a group to understand that helps us explain what everybody learned, and I like talking about the text because it helps me go over what we just read.”

For the question “What do you think will help you be more successful in class?”, some of the anonymous student reflections included:

- Student: “I think if I was able to read a story or what we were going over during school, at home I could do better on homework assignments or study better for a test.”
- Student: “I think reading more of the book each day would help and I thinking keeping up with the work and taking notes will definitely help me be more successful in this class.”

For the question “How can teachers better use technology to help you learn?”, some of the anonymous student reflections included:

- Student: “They can use technology with reading, they could put the story/assignment on the board and we can visualize it. I like it when they have the computer reading the book in the background. It helps me stay caught up and understand what is going on.
- Student: “They can put the audio reading on more or they can make us read the story online instead of a book so we can get used to that while doing work.”

- Student: “By letting us use more programs and by reaching out to other students not in our class” and we can watch more videos about what we are learning and maybe play fun games to help our vocabulary words.

Mixed Mode Curriculum Content

As the focus group discussion continued, a vast conversation ensued which led to suggestions about the online professional development course for the teachers. A few of the teachers discussed how much more helpful it would be if they would be able to meet face-to face throughout the course to help with a detailed understanding of the materials that are entailed in the course. This feedback from the teacher participants suggestion led the researcher and facilitator to consider some adjustments to allow for an effective tool for the practitioners. With the input of the teachers being the first priority for the proposed intervention, the researcher adjusted the schedule and the details of the course to make accommodations for teacher progress. These adjustments included a face-to-face portion of the professional development, sharing resources and reflecting not only on the lessons that will be conducted with the help of the course but also a thorough look at the process being attempted in the study and assessing how the intervention impacted the implementation of the lessons being created for the classes. There was also the distinction made of the journaling and the self-reflection added to guide the participants through the process.

The content that will be covered in the online professional development is based on the ESOL standards that are required by the state. The curriculum highlighted in Table nine has four specific areas created specifically for the teachers. The first column is called *Activities;* this column highlights a list of the activities that will be conducted throughout the professional

development. This highlights what will be discussed or what will be the focus each week in the course. The next column in the professional development is the *Time Frame*, this area highlights the time that will be allotted for each meeting, and it suggests how long the entire professional development will be from the beginning to the end of the course. The time suggested for each face-to face meeting is approximately two hours. *The Content Intervention* column represents the more specific content topics that will be covered in each meeting week. If the course requires a face-to-face meeting, then the content will be covered in class. The articles will be discussed via whole and small group as well as the domain area topics will be explained and discussed in great length. If the course requires an online meeting, then those similar topics will be discussed using the online platform and there will be expectations of assignments to be completed during two weeks until the next meeting.

The *Journaling and Self-Reflection* portion of the intervention is to document the process of teaching. As the teachers participate in the study they will journal their experience. They will note their thoughts and ideas about the process involved and how they affected the students with the new or revised knowledge they have received. They will discuss how the conversations added or took away from their classroom strategies and will note things they felt could have been added for more impact. As a part of this process, they will also self-reflect, which allows them to discuss lessons planned and implemented. These reflections will explain things they felt were successful in each lesson and how they knew they were or were not successful. They will explain their students' reactions and they are informed of next steps by the students' performances. A reflective teacher is often better able to practice strategic methods and to gain knowledge (Wieringa, 2011). They plan, yet make adjustments after looking back at tasks they have completed to find alternate ways to refine them (Edwards, 2010). The difference between the

journaling portion and the self-reflection is that the self-reflection would occur after each lesson to gauge how much the students have learned and what needs to be adjusted for next time, whereas the journaling includes added information from the experience of the focus group and highlighting how those experiences are impacting the lessons with the students. Both ideas are close; however, the self-reflection gives the teacher the opportunity to look back after each lesson, whereas the journaling is a continuous learning process from the beginning of the study throughout the end of the course.

The *Artifacts* are necessary because they allow the teachers to see the students' perception of what they were asked to produce based on the content and the lesson. Those artifacts can then be used as sample products for other teachers in the face-to-face meetings of the pedagogical intervention. Other teachers can use the artifacts then as examples to show to fellow teachers in their PLT (professional learning team) to help them enhance learning and differentiate instruction for the students in their classroom. Teacher and student artifacts provide real world connections of what occurs in the classroom. They create the opportunity to assess instruction and to comment on and analyze strategy (Ormond, 2005).

The area for *addressing peers* was placed in the intervention because it forces everyone to participate, no one teacher gets to dominate the conversations. No teacher will be able to avoid being a part of the discussions in the classroom. Individuals are able to learn from their peers as well as they become aware of their own errors or misconception of ideas as well (Hansson, 2015). This idea works because it allows for inclusivity, where all teachers are able to express themselves, ask for further explanations, and create opportunities for deeper discussions, etc.

There will be five domains; each domain will introduce new ideas about how to effectively accommodate all students, but specifically ESOL students in the classroom. The

domains will include standards for ESOL performance indicators. The course is intended to be about the length of a school semester, it will be approximately four months long, there can be one offered in the first half of the school year and a second course offered at the second half of the school year. ParticipantS can enroll in as many sessions as they feel they need to be successful in the classroom.

Domain Expansion

In Domain 1: Cross Cultural Communication, Merriam-Webster defines Cross-Cultural as dealing with or offering comparison between two or more different cultures or cultural areas. The purpose of this domain is to allow the ESOL teachers the opportunity to gain knowledge and awareness on multiple cultures. It is to create the discussion about intercultural connections and how the presence or lack thereof affects the students of various cultures entering in the classroom. A topic of discussion will be *Surface and Deep Culture*. There will be a discussion about the distinction of the two terms including traditions and behaviors displayed in and outside of the classroom. This area will focus on thoughts, beliefs, and concerns of the schools and how that might affect their learning. It will look at how relationships are built with students and teachers as well as examine symbolism as it relates to student identity and relationships. Cultural diversity will be included in the module because multiple culturally diverse groups will be examined as well as their customs as it relates to education will be discussed. Cultural competence is another item that will be discussed in this module. Cultural competence means the ability to appreciate and understand others who are of different cultures than oneself. Culturally responsive teaching will be a topic included to give the teachers full exposure to information that will be vital to their teaching. Gay (2002) notes "culturally responsive teacher

preparation programs teach how the communication styles of different ethnic groups reflect cultural values and shape learning behaviors and how to modify classroom interactions to better accommodate them."

In Domain 2: Language and Literacy, the teachers will analyze what teaching ESOL students look like now in 21st century digital age. Included in this domain will be ideas to share on how to use digital devices in the classroom with ESOL students. They will learn how to support ESOL students' acquisition of the language to effectively enhance progress in communicating in English through reading and writing. In addition, 21st century literacy in the classroom looks different than literacy in the past, which means that there are different, more enhanced skills needed to be well versed in such an era. Often people misunderstand that the skills necessary to utilize a traditional text are not the same as the skills needed to interact with an online text. There is therefore the need for information, discussion, and practice on online vs. traditional texts.

Domain 3: Teaching and Learning Methods of English Learners, will include information on building historical content foundation. The 21st century and the impact it has on ESOL teaching and learning will be discussed, as well as teachers will get opportunities to familiarize themselves with real-world knowledge and strategies to enhance their teaching skills. Examples will be given of how to tie in the ESOL and Subject area standards with fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Those foundational skills will have an impact on how teachers approach providing accommodations for their students and how to differentiate appropriate levels of content instruction. Instructors are able to build a foundation on historical content as well as valid, current research in the 21st century learning practices. This familiarity educating ESOL students and the application of knowledge will advance the educating of English learners. Each

teacher will learn how to apply real-world knowledge and strategies that helps to develop and integrate ESOL students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

In Domain 4: ESOL Curriculum and materials development, the teachers will have the opportunity to create lessons based on the state standards. An analysis of the standards will guide the teachers on what lessons and activities might be appropriate for the students in class. In this domain, they will analyze how the standards are written and what each number represents as well as being able to identify the grade level associated with each standard. There will be the opportunity to take traditional texts and convert them into activities that are technology driven. This will also allow the teachers to collaborate and work on how to differentiate, enrich and remediate students in those respective groups. Here is where the discussion of groups and center rotations can be had to enhance the learning.

In Domain 5: Assessment Issues for ESOL students, formative and summative assessments are always a major concern in k-12. There is always the concern about if they are valid or reliable when they are created. There is also concern about the impact of the assessment on the students. This course will discuss and give practice on how to effectively assess writing and comprehension for ESOL students. Instructors will effectively utilize the district and state guidelines to inform proficiency and instruction. The following module can be enhanced if the participants had access to resources that they can use in their lessons.

Table 9. Revised Teacher Online Professional Development Mixed-Mode Plan

Activities	Time frame	Content/Pedagogical intervention	Artifacts/Activity/ Evidence
1. Teachers	2 hours	• Teacher introduction activities	• Personal reflection-

Activities	Time frame	Content/Pedagogical intervention	Artifacts/Activity/ Evidence
Meet and greet	09/12 Face to Face	• Review syllabus overview and expectations	what is your expectation? • Shared resources
2. Professional Online Development	2 weeks 09/19-30 Online	• Introducing ways to gradually release technology with ESOL students • Read article #1 excerpt from, What great teachers do differently by Fred Jones.	• Journal • Self-reflection-how can you improve student learning? • Do an activity with your students based on the article and bring student artifact to next meeting. • Address 2 peers • Shared resources
2b. PD	2 weeks 10/03-14 Face to Face	Domain 1: Cross Cultural Communication • Surface and deep culture • Cultural diversity • Cultural competence • Culturally responsive teaching • Differentiated instruction application	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts • Shared resources
2c. PD	2 weeks Online	Domain 2: Language and Literacy • 21st century literacy in the classroom • Online vs. traditional texts	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts • Address 2 peers
2d. PD	2 weeks	Domain 3: Teaching and Learning	• Journaling

Activities	Time frame	Content/Pedagogical intervention	Artifacts/Activity/ Evidence
	10/17-28 Face to Face	methods of English Learners • Fluency, vocabulary, comprehension • Accommodations • Appropriate levels of content instruction • Differentiated instruction application	• Self-reflection • Artifacts
2e PD	2 weeks 10/31-11/11 Online	Read article 2 – excerpt of Classroom instruction that works by: Robert Marzano	• Self-reflection • Address 2 peers
2f. PD	2 weeks 11/14-25 Face to Face	Domain 4: ESOL Curriculum and materials development • Standards based instruction • Use of technology • Differentiation of instruction • Differentiated instruction application	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts
2g. PD	2 weeks 11/28-12/09 Online	Domain 5: Assessment Issues for ESOL students • Formative and summative assessments • Validity and reliability • Assessing writing and comprehension • Feedback	• Journaling • Self-reflection • Artifacts • Address 2 peers
2h. PD	2 hours	Focus group – discussions on	• Journaling

Activities	Time frame	Content/Pedagogical intervention	Artifacts/Activity/ Evidence
	12/12-23 Face to Face	strategies/results/insight on cultural awareness and assessment results/discuss artifacts collected • Lesson plan presentation practicum (standards and accommodations included)	• Self-reflection • Artifacts • Exit slip
2i. PD	2 weeks 12/26-01/06 Face to Face	Class wrap up – best practices for ESOL student improved achievement • Lesson plan practicum (standards and accommodations included) • Shared folder with differentiated instruction materials	• Self-reflection • Exit quiz • Course survey

In Chapter 2, Table 6, English Language Arts and Reading Teacher/Student chart explains what both the teacher and the students will need to meet the English Language Arts standards. With guidance of the standards the domains will allow for a more effective curriculum to be created that caters to specific standards in content areas. A sample was created in Table 4 to show a sample of how the standards will be broken down to meet the needs of the students and show what the teachers need to be aware of how to meet those needs. The standard assessed was for seventh grade reading information text standard 2.4 (LAFS.7.RI.2.4). According to the Common Core/Florida State Standards, this reads that the students need to determine the meaning of the word and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; and analyze the impact of a specific word choice on

meaning and tone. Based on simply reading the standards, there is specific knowledge to be gained by both the teacher and the student. After the completion of the lesson, the students should have learned how to analyze words and phrases that will be utilized in the text to allow for understanding. They will be able to know and identify the differences in connotation and denotative meanings in words, as well as make assessments on how mode and tone affects a body of work. This then goes on to highlight that with that one standard there are things that the teachers need to do as well. The teacher now has to research and collaborate on how he or she can teach those ideas to the students. In addition, the teacher needs to have some insight on how to know where to find resources, teach cross-cultural communication, and utilize effective language and literacy strategies when they create these lessons and activities.

Focus Groups

There were two focus groups planned, one was conducted in second week of March, 2017 and the other conducted in the middle of May, 2017. It must be noted that this is after the stressful district testing season; most state assessments were completed or almost complete by this time. The first focus group allowed the teachers to work together and chart answers they had to the following questions: Specific questions were asked to provoke responses that were useful for all stakeholders; some of those overall questions and answers, which included the following:

- Question: What is your ethnicity?
- Question: How long have you been teaching?
- Question: What grade levels do you teach?
- Question: What do you think ESOL students need to be academically successful in the classroom?

- Question: Do you feel prepared now to teach ESOL students?
- Question: What additional resources do you think you need to be more successful with your ESOL students?
- Question: Do you integrate technology? If so, how?
- Question: Do you have a daily plan to focus on the academic success of ESOL students?
- Question: Have you encountered barriers in terms of acquiring the technology training you want and/or need?
- Question: What has been the most beneficial technology workshop you have attended, and why?

The second focus group was held to present the participants with an updated curriculum that included both face-to-face and online portions based on their feedback. This time the teachers were given a different set of questions:

- What did you do with this lesson that specifically accommodated ESOL students? What was the expected outcome? What was the actual outcome?
- Are there any areas when teaching ESOL students that you find difficult? What needs to be addressed?
- How do the ESOL students react to the accommodations that are provided to them? How do they show they are receptive or not?
- What have you noticed overall about how the students react and interact with the lessons they are given?
- How do you think technology or the lack of technology in your lessons impact ESOL students?

- What does a collaborative learning environment look like in your classroom?
- In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?
- What collaborative learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?
- What specific collaborative learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?
- Does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?

The researcher found many constructs that could have worked to help in the study, however there were a few that were more fitting than others. The constructs below were foundational in creating an intervention that would be effective. These constructs were vital in analyzing how to target the needs of both the students and the teacher and create academic student success.

Constructs of Conceptual Framework

With the idea of the proposed curriculum for both the online professional development course as well as the technological intervention, it stirred conversation and thoughts towards academic progression. The conversations which were charged by the teachers led the researcher to delve into each construct and make connections with what the teachers discussed about the student needs as well as what the teachers feel they need to be as prepared as possible to teach that students. Those discussions directed the researcher back to the foundations of each construct and the impact it would have on student and teacher success.

The teacher participants utilized the researcher and the focus groups as a source of support as it allowed them to make connections with other teacher participants and find support in others as they engaged in dialogue that highlighted similar needs and frustrations. The researcher initially created the pilot study with the following constructs in mind: Culturally Responsive Theory, Second Language Acquisition theory, Self-efficacy theory, Situational Learning Theory and Socio-Cultural Theory.

- Self-efficacy Theory: This theory was used to emphasize the importance of the pedagogical interventions for both the teachers and the students. If the students have high self-efficacy along with the appropriate knowledge they need they will have a better chance of being successful in their classes and therefore perform better on the assessments given. This goes for the teachers as well, if they have the knowledge that they need, they will feel efficacious and be more inclined to cater to the ESOL students in their classroom.
- Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory: This theory was used to support the idea that many teachers are not well equipped with the knowledge of how to be culturally responsive in their classrooms. This theory guides the pedagogical intervention in creating the space, the opportunity, and the modules for these teachers to see what a culturally responsive classroom entails. These practices will be modeled for them in the face-to-face sessions of the professional development and they will have multiple opportunities to adjust their own behaviors. This will give them background on how to reflect on what they can do to be impactful and give meaningful experiences to all students in their classroom.

- Second Language Acquisition Theory: This theory was considered because it explains the process that ESOL students must go through when they have to acquire a new language. There are many factors that have to be considered when the process progresses for the student. It is difficult enough to master all areas of a native language but then there is an added task to be successful and master a new language with multiple components. These are all things that the teachers need to be aware of in order to allow their students to be successful in their classes. These ideas will be discussed in the online professional development and practice assignments will allow the teachers to feel comfortable teaching multiple lessons where strategies for ESOL students are already planned and ready to be implemented.
- Socio-cultural Theory: Lev Vygotsky's research found that society had an impact and contributed to their development. His ideas were pertinent in creating this plan for success because they not only focus on child development but also on how adults and those people that are around you daily can impact how you learn. This was necessary for this pilot study because how the teacher creates the learning environment for the students determine how they will learn, and they will if given the opportunity to do so.
- Situational Learning Theory: John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky agreed on the idea that students are able to effectively learn when they have an active part of the learning process. These theorists strengthen the idea that students need to be placed in situations where they are challenged and able to think critically. In addition, the information they interact with are relatable and can be transferred to their everyday life. This theory was necessary in the pedagogical intervention because those ideas support the technology plan (MST^2) that was proposed. This class is intended to allow the students to practice

the skills they will need in their core classes, hence the real-world experiences that they will need to be successful. This would work also for the online professional development class is proposed for the teachers. This class not only has an online component that challenges the teachers to effectively educate their students but there is also a face-to-face component that allows the teachers to see first-hand how the strategies given can directly be applied to their own teaching and learning environment. Seeing good teaching practices modeled will give teachers the confidence to implement those ideas in their classrooms.

Teacher Practice

One noteworthy result of the pilot was the teachers' awareness of inner deficiencies and the urgency to correct those deficiencies. Many thought there was the need to create more opportunities for confidence by even highlighting small tasks that are completed by the students to allow them to feel safe. One of the teachers realized that she was not always approaching the students the right way, especially when she saw they were not correctly completing a task. She asked, "Is it cheesy to try and incorporate their culture in the lesson? So you're saying I'm not supposed to say that NO YOU'RE WRONG when the students do a problem incorrectly?" She later explained that in some subjects it is difficult to veer away from the standard format when working out some problems, hence the reason she feels the need to make the student know that is not the correct way to complete the problem. She added, "I do shut them down because when they are wrong, it's just wrong, but I have to work more on praising more and attacking less." That participant was able to observe herself, assess and find an alternate approach to connecting with her students in future conversations. Other participants explained their own approach to

give her insight on ways that are more positive. One explained, "depending on where you are from, the content may have been taught a different way in their native country, yet sometimes teachers might simply say, no you're wrong instead of trying to combine the two procedures and not deflating the students' self-esteem." Another participant highlighted that teachers can reinforce the child's motivation by highlighting each area they succeeded in to gain trust and boost the self-esteem. These conversations highlighted why the mixed mode professional development course will be beneficial because teachers are able to get direct-shared experience about how to approach different approaches face to face and then implement it to fit their needs.

Later in the discussion, the conversation arose about students not being given the opportunity to succeed because of the time limit they have on each lesson topic. One participant explained that she is often behind with her ESOL students because she sometimes worries there is need for them to spend more time on specific topics. This might lead to her having to re teach specific areas to allow her students to achieve level of mastery and that takes time. Another teacher added out of frustration "do they want me to teach the content and have the students successful or do they want me to just teach the content so the students can pass whatever test they have to take?" The participants all nodded in agreement especially when the topic arose about having to teach exactly as the other teacher in your grade level even when the method has proven less than effective. All the teachers teaching the same exact thing, the same exact way will not always result in ESOL student success.

Intended Audience

When creating this study, the researcher intended on developing an intervention plan that would give ESOL students an equal opportunity to perform at the same level as their native

English-speaking counterparts. Outcomes from the students proved that ESOL students are deficient in technology skills that they receive as they enter as a new student in the classroom. The results revealed that the ESOL students were lacking when receiving the support they need to thrive in the core classroom due to the strict sequence of the curriculum; therefore, they needed additional sustenance. The study also found that not only were the students lacking in high self-efficacy but so were the teachers in many areas. Many teachers are also lacking computer skills necessary to assist students with their academic improvement. Many schools do not have the support necessary to help teachers build on those academic skills in order to help the ESOL students assimilate comfortably in the classroom and be armed with the skills needed to bridge the academic gap.

Initially the research was aimed at Reading and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers, however, after the focus groups, the researcher found that the knowledge needed to be extended to other subject area teachers in middle school environment. This information then needs to be shared with not only the teachers but also the administration in the school (principal, assistant principals, literacy and academic coaches, department and team leaders etc.) and then the Area Superintendent for them to share with other schools in the district and other districts as a way of satisfying this great need for improvement.

Intended Use

The three-pronged intervention created was developed in the pilot study to inform all teachers, (those with an ESOL endorsement and those without one) and administrators about the persisting problem and how to address it. The researcher developed a diagram to identify the constructs that are connected with the interventions being proposed. The interventions

recommended should be used synchronously. Each intervention provides the individual opportunity for scaffolding to occur. The proposal addresses the need of the students and the teachers in the middle school to create the opportunity for change and success not only for ESOL students but also for all students.

Table 10 charts the focus group 1 questions (which are different from those of the second focus group) with the constructs used in the study as well as the exploratory questions to ensure that the ideas are connected and that they help to promote learning. This chart represents how the theories played a role in the overall focus questions as well as the specific questions discussed in each focus group.

Table 10. Exploring Construct Connections for Focus Group 1

Exploratory Questions	Focus Group Questions	Constructs (Theories)
In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?	FG1. Do you have a daily plan to focus on the academic success of ESOL students?	Second Language Acquisition
	FG1. Have you encountered barriers in terms of acquiring the technology training you want/and need?	Self-Efficacy Theory
What collaborative learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?	FG1. Do your ESOL students let you know what they need to be academically successful in class?	Self-Efficacy Theory Situational Learning Theory
	FG1. Do you integrate technology? If so, how?	Second Language Acquisition Theory
	FG1. What do you think	

Exploratory Questions	Focus Group Questions	Constructs (Theories)
	ESOL students need to be academically successful in the classroom?	
What specific collaborative learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?	FG1. Do you feel prepared to teach ESOL students?	Culturally Responsive Theory
	FG1. How prepared are you to teach in a multicultural classroom? Do you integrate multicultural content in your lessons? Why or why not?	Self-Efficacy Theory
	FG1. What additional resources do you think you need to be more successful with your ESOL students?	Second Language Acquisition
	FG1. How often is technology staff development offered at your school and/or in the district and who is responsible for conducting this training?	
How does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?	FG1. Do you know what resources are available to you to assist ESOL students? How do you use them?	Socio-cultural Learning Theory
	FG1. What has been the most beneficial technology workshop you have attended and why?	Situational Learning Theory

Table 11 charts the focus group two questions (which are different from those of the first focus group) with the constructs used in the study as well as the exploratory question to ensure that the ideas are connected and that the ideas help to promote learning. This chart represents how the theories played a role in the overall focus questions and the specific questions discussed in each focus group.

Table 11. Exploring Constructs Connection for Focus Group 2

Exploratory Questions	Focus Group Questions	Constructs (Theories)
In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?	In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?	Second Language Acquisition
	What does a collaborative learning environment look like in your classroom?	Socio-cultural theory
What collaborative learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?	What specific collaborative learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?	Situational Learning Theory
What specific collaborative learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that	Does the student centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap	Self-Efficacy Theory

has access to digital learning?	between ESOL students and native English speakers?	
How does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?	What collaborative learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?	Culturally Responsive Theory

Using this framework creates the opportunity for ESOL students to be challenged to perform at their best. It creates the opportunity for them to be given the appropriate resources needed to be successful in the digital classroom setting in an environment with various levels of learning. This framework also promotes teacher preparedness. It creates the opportunity for the teachers who engage with ESOL students to be prepared and feel confident with the task they have at hand to support these students' needs. With the appropriate tools to scaffold instruction for the ESOL student, the teacher can relinquish control and allow the students to gain confidence and knowledge to succeed (Walqui, 2006). Along with scaffolding, there is the added factor of differentiated instruction. This allows for the creating of a systematic approach to cater to a variety of learners. The intent is the increased knowledge of both the teachers and the students to allow the opportunity to narrow the gap between the ESOL students and their native English speaking counterparts (Van Garderen & Whittaker 2006).

CHAPTER 4: MODEL/PROGRAM DESIGN/FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

Overview

This dissertation's problem of practice emerged from the current Florida State Assessment (FSA) results of ESOL students in a digital middle school in Tangerine Florida. The study addresses the failure to bridge the gap between ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) and native English Language speaking students on the state Reading/English Language Arts assessment. The dissertation also examined how a collaborative learning environment affects ESOL student achievement. The intent of the pilot study conducted was to examine ways to bridge the gap between ESOL students and their native English speaking counterparts in a digital school setting. Qualitative research methodology was used to design and facilitate focus groups in the pilot study because it was found to be rigorous, reliable and valid (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2002). The researcher intended for the study to be effective, therefore approached it with as much skill, creativity, sensitivity and flexibility as possible. This study was conducted to explore the following questions:

- In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase/impact the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?
- What learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?
- What specific learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?
- How does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?

Outcomes

Romber, Carpenter and Dremock (2005) noted that unless there are interventions in place to assist ESOL students, the trend of lacking in achievement will persist. The pilot study was significant because it revealed not only the teacher perception of their knowledge and skills but it revealed the student perceptions of their current learning situation. The pilot also provided evidence that the teachers perceived themselves prior to the study as somewhat knowledgeable but were able to see gaps in their knowledge as the study focus groups progressed. Throughout this process, the pilot revealed that some teachers thought they were initially equipped for all learners, others learned that they needed resources that could be directly impactful on their students. Some of the tools they needed would be ongoing and they even needed opportunities for strategies such as gradual release of information, modeling and opportunities to collaborate with teacher peers for best results. Consequently, a professional development framework was proposed to remedy those needs. Tellez and Waxman (2006) explains that professional development if implemented correctly can provide teachers with the skills necessary to successfully aid ESOL students. Theoretical constructs were used as foundational lens to help guide the researcher on impactful procedures that might incur effective results. The data revealed the need for specific interventions that would influence both the teachers and the students involved in the study.

A specific intervention proposed was the teacher professional development. Another intervention proposed was the student technology course MST^2, which was intended to slowly assimilate the incoming students into the digital classroom platform. Initially there was equal focus on both interventions (the online PD and MST^2), however the focus shifted to focus more on the PD as the study continued. After the many discussions that occurred in the focus groups,

the researcher discovered that the teachers appreciated the idea of the student technology program and found it useful. The teachers did find that with these discussions on interventions and the needs of the students that they were in dire need of guidance to affect change in ESOL student achievement. The teachers then chose to focus on their own self-reflections and how their needs could be met to effectively accommodate the ESOL students through the PD, thus there was more focus moving forward on the online teacher PD.

Each intervention, especially if completed in its entirety and done simultaneously, has the potential to heighten knowledge for both the teacher and the students, creating a link to ESOL students' higher achievement and the opportunity to close that achievement gap between ESOL students and native English speaking students. A significant intervention proposed was the teacher professional development.

Framework

After analyzing, the results obtained from the pilot study, and considering the input of both the teachers and the students, the researcher created a framework to address the problem of practice: the gap between ESOL students and their native speaking peers in a collaborative learning, digital setting.

Goals of the Models

Framework A: ESOL Middle School Technology Transition (MST^2)

The goals for this course included the ability to sustain the core curriculum and instruction in the standard Language Arts classroom as determined suitable for development of the ESOL student. Another goal for this course included supporting ESOL students to demonstrate growth in Reading and Language Arts using technology. Technology would

support Reading and Language Arts because it is with the computer applications that students would be able to polish already acquired skills, or acquire knowledge and skills they lack. In the MST^2 course, the students would have the opportunity to work on core class curriculum by practicing the use of digital applications required for those classes. This class time would be utilized to exercise those basic skills necessary to maneuver through a core class. The students would be able to find the curriculum, as well as practice and complete class specific tasks to ensure that once they enter in the classroom that they are equipped with the basic technology skills for the lesson. An additional goal of this course was to create an environment that would provide affective, cognitive and linguistic support of all ESOL students.

For the purposes of the dissertation in practice, although the teachers in the focus groups discussed the MST^2 program, the more they delved into the discussion, the more they discovered that it was their own professional development on which they needed to focus. This realization of the teachers of their own shortcomings and the need to find ways to improve shifted the discussion away from MST^2 to the professional development framework. The online professional development was then enhanced by the teacher input, and by highlighting what they thought they needed to succeed.

Framework B: Teacher Online Professional Development (PD)

The goals for the teacher online professional development include providing online professional development (with pedagogical interventions) on comprehension skills and strategies that content area teachers can incorporate and use for ESOL students within their particular content area. This was created to allow the teachers to have access to ideas, activities

and lesson plans that they can not only incorporate in their classes, but that are also able to cater to ESOL students in the same capacity as the native English speakers.

Another goal included providing the teachers the tools necessary to learn how to collect, effectively analyze, and utilize classroom data to drive and improve ESOL instruction. Some of the teachers expressed their lack of knowledge in how to accommodate ESOL students in each lesson. Hence, the professional development focuses on opportunities to utilize student data for classroom instruction that is also differentiated for different level learners. Finally, content area teachers will also learn how to utilize the school's technological applications to help them differentiate their content for ESOL students. Differentiated instruction creates the opportunity for all students to learn the same content no matter their skill level. Levy (2008) describes *differentiated instruction* as the teacher creating strategies that will meet each student where they are in the content and help them move forward. The task is for the teacher to create activities that will allow students who have mastered the subject to become enriched with the next activity, while allowing those who are still acquiring the knowledge after the whole group instruction to be remediated to master the materials being taught.

Furthermore, the online professional development was intended to provide staff development in appropriate instructional and assessment strategies for all teachers who interact with ESOL students. An area in the module focuses on assessment for ESOL students. Based on the focus group discussions, feedback from the teachers noted that some teachers distribute the assessments that they are given for all their students; however, there is no common knowledge among Reading and Language Arts teachers of assessments for ESOL students, or how to effectively accommodate them. In many schools, the ESOL coordinator focuses on the assessments, thus leaving the classroom teacher with little knowledge of the process, how it

works, or how to effectively assess the ESOL students in their classes. Due to cases like this, many researchers have doubts about how reliable and valid the assessment results are (Linn, Baker & Betebenner, 2002).

A part of the online professional development is the unlimited access that the teachers will have to the Professional Resource Folder. The folder will contain contact information for support/mentor teachers, it will have sample lesson plans on different topics and subject areas, there will be videos that highlight model lessons being demonstrated. It will include all of the materials used to discuss and practice skills for student improvement. It will contain resources for access to instructor information for specific questions, concerns or assistance. There will be videos and model lessons as well as strategies that have been proven to work. best practices. These folders will contain ESOL strategies for different topics, as well as stories, articles and activities for different grade levels that can be utilized with them. The ESOL and Reading standards will be available and lessons that connect the standards to student learning will be highlighted. This resource folder will be updated weekly to ensure that it is active and useful, as well as relevant to those teachers who will utilize the tools. Individuals will be tasked with ensuring that teacher needs are fulfilled, that the tools correlate with the standards for each subject, and are ongoing throughout the school year.

Furthermore, the resource folder will ensure proper tools are afforded to teaching practitioners that will be necessary to implement lessons that demonstrate their cultural awareness. These teachers will be given practice in embracing the different levels of ESOL learners in their classroom and know where to find strategies, lessons, lesson plans as needed. This is where model teachers can house their sample lessons, artifacts, videos etc. This would also be where the teachers are able to connect with one another and ask questions about specific

lesson and activities to collaborate and share ideas, and give feedback based on teacher request. The intent for the resource folder is that if the teachers, no matter if they are new or seasoned, have an ESOL endorsement or not, they will find the folder updated and useful for their instruction.

Intended Audience

While this framework was intended for Reading and Language Arts teachers specifically especially those who have ESOL classes, it must be noted that other subject areas might find these ideas beneficial. It should also be noted that not only will teachers who possess the ESOL endorsement find this useful but also those who interact with all students, no matter the sub-group, and might find areas in this study effective in striving for increased student academic achievement. This need was highlighted in focus group one. A Mathematics teacher found that she was having difficulty when asked questions about how to accommodate her ESOL students. She felt as though when working through mathematics, assessment results would determine if students understood the process. She found herself sometimes telling the students outright that they were wrong. Throughout the focus group discussion, she realized that there were modifications that needed to be made to her attitude and approach about addressing mistakes and finding alternate ways to explain the process to her ESOL students.

The lack of ESOL training in subject areas other than Reading and Language Arts was evident again in focus group number two. Two Mathematics teachers explained that they felt lost and out of their element when they had to teach ESOL students because they felt ill prepared. One teacher explained that she has a class of Portuguese ESOL students and it is with the help of another teacher that she was able to communicate with them and teach them different

formulas in her class. She explains that the students seem to know how to complete the task and they often are able to help each other once they have mastered different problems. Her concern was that she was unable to communicate with them and felt as though she couldn't do her best work if she is not able to reach her students using the same strategies that work for her English-speaking students. It was evident that she was lacking the confidence she needed to successfully reach her entire classroom audience. Carrasqullio and Rodriquez (2002) found that the level of self-efficacy of the teacher directly affects the students. How much confidence the teachers have influences the extent they will go to improve their ESOL students' learning opportunities. This pilot study also noted that the simultaneous implementation of the pedagogical interventions along with continuous teacher and administrative support and collaborative learning environments might yield greater results.

Intended Use

The framework that was created was intended to inform all stakeholders, which includes teachers, administrators and students. The intent was to show the connection made between each individual in the organization and the role they all play to allow for student success. The visual shown previously on Figure 2, *the Middle School Universe* shows how the frameworks, if implemented appropriately, can be used for success. The researcher was able to find the links between the interventions and connect theories as well as demonstrate how deliberate practice can allow for student achievement. Figure 2 in chapter two shows the connection between multiple areas that can contribute to ESOL student success. The researcher developed this diagram to identify the constructs that are connected to the proposed intervention. The interventions recommended should be used synchronously for the best results. The pilot study

created opportunities for the teachers to collaborate, which influenced suggestions about what would yield improved results for the students (Goddard & Goddard, 2007). Based on the teacher collaborative discussions and reflections in the focus groups, and on the student reflections, the researcher was able to find connections between the MST^2 student program and the teacher professional development that would facilitate successful instructional strategies for ESOL students. The tools proposed can be utilized in any middle school in any school district with a digital platform created for learning.

Flexibility of the Interventions

Flexibility of the intervention means that the researcher saw where there might be necessary modifications based on teacher discussions and collaboration and student reflections. After focus group number one, where the online curriculum was introduced, the teachers voiced their need to have a face-to-face option for the professional development. The researcher took these concerns into consideration and made modifications to the curriculum to make it mixed mode. This means that there will be opportunities for the teachers to meet each other as well as work and collaborate with the instructors face to face. Flexibility such as this is what the researcher felt would be helpful to the teachers so that they can in return help their ESOL students achieve academic success.

As previously stated, the lack of knowledge and skills on the part of both the teachers and the ESOL students may have played a role in their low academic achievement compared to their native English-speaking counterparts. Due to the inconsistencies in training opportunities in different schools and even states, many teachers enter into the academic system ill prepared without the knowledge they need for ESOL students' success (Samson & Collins, 2012). The

resolution to this problem of practice is to provide the teachers with the resources to acquire the knowledge and skills required to adapt their teaching to the needs of ESOL students.

All five of the modules that were created in the mixed mode pedagogical intervention along with the activities, reflections, collaborations, modeling and sharing of artifacts are designed to meet the needs of the teachers. Teachers will be introduced to the concept of continuous learning earlier on in the course and will be given opportunities to make connections with their specific lessons. All domains will follow a sequential order, as will the activities and the modeling of all content area information. The mixed-mode curriculum was created to ensure that the teachers are supported every step of the way, with every assignment and task. The face-to-face meetings will allow the instructor to make modifications as necessary based on teacher feedback and performance. Various relevant research articles as well as guest speakers will be introduced to allow for a smooth transition from acquiring the knowledge they are lacking to mastering and demonstrating skills and strategies. After each class, there will be journaling and self-reflections that are submitted to the course instructor in order to demonstrate progress made based on information that is shared in the course. Modifications will be made as soon as there is a need, which will allow for teacher improvement. There is no set time for suggestions, as all are welcomed and will be implemented if the entire group finds it beneficial to their learning and success.

Anticipated Changes in Performance

Both teachers and students need the opportunity to be taught to process information and get guidance in order for the knowledge to become permanent and for the learners to become successful individuals (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Shulman, 1987). Like the students, the

teachers need to be able to connect ideas and make authentic connections to real world ideas and concepts. The anticipated changes in student performance are that they will show growth in Reading and Language Arts using technology skills they have acquired through the MST2 intervention course. In addition, ESOL students' affective cognitive and linguistics skills will increase appropriately and that they will show growth in performance to close the gap between themselves and their native English speaking counter parts.

The anticipated changes in teacher performance are that they will: become more aware of their students' culture and begin to use culturally responsive teaching methods, become familiar with effective strategies that are appropriate and relevant to ESOL student learning, and learn how to collect, effectively analyze, and utilize classroom data to drive and improve ESOL instruction. Finally, content area teachers will also learn how to utilize the school's technological applications to help them differentiate their content for ESOL students.

Overall, identical to the intervention objectives, the anticipated changes for administrators will include that all content area teachers are equipped with the knowledge to assist all students in their classroom and provide interventions to ESOL students based on need and competency level or level of ability. Administrators will ensure proper tools are afforded the teaching practitioners that are necessary to implement lessons that demonstrate their cultural awareness. These teachers will be given practice in embracing the different levels of ESOL learners in their classroom and know where to find instructional strategies and lesson plans as needed.

Conclusion

While this pilot study informed the design of the online professional development model, it was not implemented. Even though the model was not implemented, the ideas of ongoing professional development and an introductory technology course show potential to allow for teacher success, which then transfers to student success. Although these ideas were presented at early stages, the pilot study provided a foundation that can possibly aid educators and students in moving forward in the era of technological learning in the 21st century. These tools will provide a gateway for students, teachers and administrators to gain knowledge, find support and create opportunities for overall success.

The researcher utilized ESOL standards as well as core Reading standards and highlighted the continuum of teacher needs and student needs. Table 6 in Chapter 2 explains how the needs were targeted for both the teachers and the students. The standards were used as a target benchmark, one where all parties were familiar with the end goal and what should be done to achieve this standard goal. Using this format ensured that the teachers were given opportunities to meet the standards based requirements of the curriculum. This also ensured that there was a strong connection between the required state standards and what the students needed as well as how the teachers were going to meet those needs. Using the standards based model the researcher found that highlighting the connection for the teachers would solidify their confidence in the program because the interventions were developed from the standards they are required to teach every day.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation's problem of practice emerges from the current Florida State Assessment (FSA) results in a digital middle school in Tangerine Florida. The study addressed the failure to bridge the gap between ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) and native English Language speaking students on the state Reading/ELA assessment. The dissertation examined how a collaborative learning environment could affect ESOL student achievement. The intent of the pilot study was to examine ways to bridge the gap between ESOL students and their native English speaking counterparts in a digital school setting. Qualitative research methodology was used for focus groups because it was found to be rigorous, reliable and valid (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2002). The researcher intended for the study to be effective, therefore approached it with as much skill, creativity, sensitivity and flexibility as possible. This study was conducted to explore the following questions:

- In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase/impact the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?
- What learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?
- What specific learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?
- How does the student-centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?

Implications

As a school that has a high number of ESOL students, Corner Carver Lake middle school needs teachers who are equipped and feel confident in teaching ESOL students. The school needs teachers and students to be aware of the implications associated with instruction that could impact their learning. The teachers need to have access to information that will give them the boost in knowledge and self-efficacy that they need throughout the entire school year. This is why the pedagogical interventions are necessary, to allow for teacher success. Having online professional development means that there is constant support available for each teacher to help guide their ESOL population to higher achievement.

The resource folder adds to the substance of the professional development that is being offered to the teachers. No study like this has been conducted at Corner Carver Lake middle school therefore the teachers have not been given the opportunity to explore how a proposed student technology course and an online professional development might impact their effect on ESOL students' academic achievement. The professional development framework provides the opportunity for the teachers to get help with content specific strategies and activities as well as receive opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in the same and other content areas. There will be instructors who can help practice gradual release by creating and sharing model lessons. There will also be access to model teachers and mentors that will guide the teachers towards higher ESOL student achievement.

ESOL students failing to meet the same academic achievement as their native English speaking counter parts is not a new topic. However, we do have to consider the implications of having a digital curriculum where different comprehension, predicting, and inferencing skills are required when compared to the use of a traditional text in the classroom (Coiro & Dobler, 2007).

Collaborative learning environments have to be considered as schools are now moving towards including a student driven learning component to the yearly curriculum. These students also need to have resources to help them merge smoothly into the digital environment; hence, the need for the technology course MST^2. This course helps the students to build on their knowledge and skills, as they are given the opportunity to enhance their self-efficacy.

This pilot study was significant because it allowed for the voices of the people being directly affected to be heard. The teachers were given the opportunity to reflect and reveal their perceptions of their teaching situation and give details as to what they need to help progress. The students were also given the opportunity to reflect and express their perceptions of what they believed would be helpful to them. In addition, instead of simply listening and making no attempts for change, the researcher took the concerns of the teachers and the students and made modifications to the interventions suggested. This created the opportunity for the teachers to see that their voices were being heard, that their input was important to the study and they were integral to transformative change.

The focus groups were used to enlighten and inform the researcher on what the teachers truly believed they needed to be successful and for their students to become successful as well. A qualitative research methodology for the focus groups was appropriate because these types of studies empower teachers to share their stories, and reduce tension and power of control amongst the researchers and the participants (Creswell, 2013). The pilot also created the opportunity for those teacher participants to engage and share information with one another. It has been noted that when teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate and find a supportive environment that they will remain in the field longer than if they are not given that opportunity (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsly, Haertel & Rothstein, 2012). The online intervention will allow the

face-to-face meetings to be at least two hours each time to allow for this collaboration to occur. The modules proposed in the online professional development were therefore created in such a way that the ideas build upon one another and would be implemented throughout a five-month period.

The purpose for the framework that was developed in this pilot study was to inquire about the teacher needs for ESOL improvement as well as to seek ways to accommodate them so that they are equipped to assist the ESOL students in successfully acquiring higher academic achievement. A visual aid was created in Figure 2, chapter 2 that reveals how using different constructs as support and simultaneously implementing the interventions proposed in the study can aid in ESOL student achievement. This framework can be and is intended to be used by any other digital middle school in the school district or nationwide. It offers opportunities to address gaps in teacher knowledge and practice as well as it opportunities to address student gaps in knowledge especially through targeting their technology skills in a 21st century classroom. The data were received and utilized by the researcher to help develop the framework that would effectively address the problem in practice: ESOL students are failing to meet the same levels of academic achievement (based on the Florida Standard Assessment Test) as their English-speaking counter parts in collaborative learning environment in a middle school.

Recommendations and Limitations

The results of the pilot study indicated that teachers were confident when teaching their native English speakers, they were vibrant, they were positive, they found multiple ideas, and were creative when finding ways to differentiate instruction. However, as the study progressed the researcher was able to identify that the teachers felt they were lacking those same skills for

their ESOL students. Those teachers felt somewhat responsible for the role they played in the problem of the ESOL students not meeting the same level of achievement as their native English speaking counterparts. While the study showed favorable results, there were areas that could be improved upon for further study.

The limitations included only having access to a small amount of digital schools to complete the study, due to time constraints. A larger number of digital school participants would allow for more conclusive results. Biau, Kerneis and Porcher (2008) discussed the effect of sample size, noting that "Significant results issued from larger studies usually are given more credit than those from smaller studies because of the risk of reporting exaggerating treatment effects with studies with smaller samples or of lower quality." Another limitation would be the inclusion of more Reading, ESOL and Language Arts teachers. Some teachers of other content areas chose to join the discussion and their input was vital to the study, but seeing that it is the FSA reading score the is being discussed in great detail it would be more powerful having more of those subject areas teachers involved. Another limitation noted was that in the first focus group, there were eleven teachers who gave their input; however, in the second focus group, only 50% of the participants were able to return to discuss the adjustments made to the curriculum and to update their input on the revised plan. Having more feedback and reflection would better guide the researcher on any further steps that can be taken for success.

The study was officially conducted between January and May, 2017. The first focus group was not until March and the teachers were willing to support and give feedback. The second focus group however was in May and was close to the end of the test season as well as close to the end of the school year. The idea of *teacher burnout* may or may not have had impact on the turnout of the participants or their frustrations in the discussions. It has been found that a

teachers' level of stress can affect their behavior and attitude and therefore influence their students (Muller, Gorrow & Fiala, 2011). These factors therefore need to be highlighted and addressed.

Finally having more student input from earlier on in the school year might have created a clearer picture of how the students felt and what they thought they needed overall. There could have even been a comparison made between ESOL student reflections and native English speaking student reflections to analyze their thought processes and to see the difference and similarities in ideas.

I recommend that both proposed pedagogical interventions are simultaneously implemented for an entire school year before being introduced to other digital schools and later to the school district. This ensures that any adjustments that need to be made can be addressed prior to a large group participation and will allow for a smooth district wide transition.

Program and Coursework Reflection

As I began this journey to writing this dissertation I never imagined the end results would enable me to feel equipped and exhilarated to want to continue future studies on the topic discussed. As a teacher in the k-12 school system, I have experienced many changes. I believe that this study will be a part of the foundation that helps to build the digital learning platform. This opportunity to research and seek out topics that are important and relevant to my daily life gave me the motivation I needed to continue the work of helping students reach success. There are many important factors that can be highlighted of my time in this program that has molded me to be a more aware teacher in the classroom. If I did not see how much impact I had on my

students prior, this study brought to light how a teacher can affect their students' life and academic achievement.

In addition to the practical experience that occurred in this program, many courses were instrumental in my success. The course EDF 7468, *Evaluation of Complex Problems of Practice,* allowed me to focus on the complex problems in my organization and develop and practice effective program evaluation methods. It allowed me to experience the rigorous process entailed in evaluating a system that I use for my students daily. The course, *Identifying Complex Problems of Practice* (EDF 7494), allowed my peers and me to go through the process of identifying problems that directly affected us complete research to correct it. It included rigorous tasks such as completing the IRB process and experiencing the ebb and flow of a research study. Finally, the course, EDA 7101 *Organizational Theory in Education*, focused on sociological and behavioral theories that are applicable to various educational organizations. This course allowed me to do my own assessment of my organization, using the text from Bolman and Deal (2011), Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership and analyzing the organization through multiple lens namely, human resource, political, structural and symbolic frameworks.

Conclusion

This Dissertation in Practice addressed the problem of the failure to bridge the gap between ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) and native English Language speaking students on the state Reading/ELA assessment. The problem is relevant because of the large influx of ESOL students entering our classrooms in Florida every year, as well as the incursion of ESOL students that continue to arrive in the country daily. There are many more immigrants

entering in the United States from the early 90s to the 2000s (Cararota & McArle, 2003). Due to the large demographic this problem cannot be neglected because it will cause larger problems of more ESOL students failing later down the line. If the ESOL students do not have the tools that they need and skilled teachers to help guide them, then these students will struggle. ESOL students are no longer secluded in a class by themselves, they are integrated in the mainstream classroom and therefore need to be catered to for success (Genesee, 1999). The author of this dissertation has presented the ideas and the framework so that it is eligible to be used elsewhere. Readers have to keep in mind that these proposed ideas will be more effective if there is an administration who is in full support of the interventions discussed. Students will become successful if they are armed with the appropriate tools and given opportunities to practice, as well as teachers will show improvement in addressing ESOL students' needs if they are also given the appropriate resources and support to help students succeed. In order for all stakeholders to benefit there have to be opportunities provided that allow the individuals involved to feel safe with their inadequacies and are open to learning and making progress.

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT

University of Central Florida

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Bridging the Gap between ESOL and Native English Speakers in a digital Collaborative classroom

Principal Investigator: Shalander Samuels

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Carolyn Hopp

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- The purpose of this Combined Qualitative study is to analyze how to bridge the gap between ESOL students and Native English speaking students in a middle school in Central Florida.

- Participants will be solicited to participate in two focus group dicussions. One will be held in March and the other May 2017. Only teachers appointed for the 2016/2017 school year will be asked to particpate. The focus group discussions will be recorded via an audio device and will be administered in and office outside of the school. No names or forms of identification will be necessary the focus group will be conducted to allow for anonymity of all participants involved.
- The time needed to complete this focus group will be approximately one hour and it will be moderated by the supervising professor.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Shalander Samuels, Graduate Student, and Ed.D in Education program, College of Education and Human Performances at ssamuels2010@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. Carolyn Hopp, Faculty Supervisor, School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership (407) 823-0392 or by email at Carolyn.Hopp@ucf.edu

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

Name Of Participant: _____

Signature Of Participant: _____

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Do you have students who are considered ESOL students in your classroom? Can you estimate the percentage?

Group 1

1. What do you think ESOL students need to be academically successful in the classroom?
2. Do your ESOL students let you know what they need? What do your ESOL students tell you they need to be academically successful in class?
3. Do you feel prepared to teach ESOL students?
4. Do you know what resources are available to you to assist ESOL students? How do you use them?
5. What additional resources do you think you need to be more successful with your ESOL students?
6. How prepared are you to teach in a multicultural classroom? Do you integrate multicultural content into your lessons? Why or why not?

Group 2

7. Do you integrate technology? If so, how?
8. Do you have a daily plan to focus on the academic success of ESOL students?
9. How often is technology staff development offered at your school and/or in the district…and who is responsible for conducting this training?
10. Have you encountered barriers in terms of acquiring the technology training you want and/or need?
11. What has been the most beneficial technology workshop you have attended, and why?

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Bridging the Gap between ESOL and Native English Speakers in a digital Collaborative Classroom

Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: *Shalander Samuels M.Ed.*

Faculty Advisor: *Carolyn Hopp Ph.D*

Investigational Site(s): *Carver Lake Middle School*

Introduction: Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study which will include about *10-15* people locally. You have been asked to take part in this research study because you are a Middle School instructional teacher who is teaching Reading or Language Arts, appointed for the 2016-2017 school year. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

The person conducting this research is Shalander Samuels of the University of Central Florida. Because the researcher is a *graduate student she* is being guided by Dr. Carolyn Hopp, a UCF faculty advisor in the College of Education and Human Performance.

What you should know about a research study:

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.

- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

- **Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyze how to bridge the gap between ESOL students and Native English speaking students in a middle school in Central Florida. Educators' input will be utilized as a vehicle to guide and create change in the classroom, especially for ESOL students.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

You will be asked to participate in two focus groups. Each focus group will be approximately one hour long. One focus group will be held in March, 2017 and the other will be held in May 2017. The focus group will simply require the particpants to engage in confidential dicussions among each other using questions prompted by the researcher. The only responsibility of the participants will be to respond to and discuss the questions.

- Only teachers appointed for the 2016/2017 school year will be asked to particpate. The focus group discussions will be recorded via an audio device and will be administered in an office outside of the school, in the UCF Center for Emerging Media. No names or forms of identification will be used. The focus group will be conducted to allow for anonymity of all participants involved.
- The time needed to complete this focus group will be approximately one hour and it will be moderated by the researcher and a faculty member.

You will be audio taped during the focus group. If you do not want to be audio taped, you will not be able to be in the study. If you are audio taped, the recording will be transcribed and kept on an encrypted and locked computer. The audio will be stored in safe place with a encrypted and code until it is transcribed, at that point the audio tape will be destroyed after transcription.

A perceived risk of participating may include feelings of discomfort in sharing personal views on the topic. However, the following measures will be in place to ensure minimal risk:

- The participants will meet at a neutral location outside of the school setting.
- The research is designed to enhance their experience in working with ESOL students.
- There will be no identifiers in the focus group process.
- Each participant will be assigned a number that will be used throughout the study to ensure the identity of participants remains confidential.

Benefits:

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to teachers who participate include sharing in the collective information gathered, and contributing to the increased acheivement of ESOL students in reading and Language Arts. They will also be able to access any additional resources that might be identified as a result of the study.

Compensation or payment:
There is no compensation or other payment to you for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality: Demographic information collected will be limited to general information (number of years of experience, grade levels and content areas, and ethnicity). Only the researcher and the faculty supervisor will have access to the demographic information. Once the research is complete the article will document this information but the particpants will be noted by the number that they were assigned in the study to allow for confidentiality.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, contact *Shalander Samuels* Graduate Student, Reading Program, College of Education and Human Performance, (407) 766-2322 or Dr. Carolyn Hopp, Faculty Supervisor, School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership in the College of Education and Human Performance at the University of Central Florida (407) 823-0392 or by email at Carolyn.Hopp@ucf.edu

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Withdrawing from the study:
There are no consequences for withdrawing from the study.

APPENDIX D: ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IRB

Orange County Public Schools
445 West Amelia Street • Orlando, FL 32801-1129 • Phone 407.317.3200 • www.ocps.net

Notice of Approval

Approval Date: 03/16/2017 Approval Number: 0078

Project Title: Bridging the Gap between ESOL and Native English Speakers in a digital Collaborative Classroom.

Requester: Shalander Samuels
Project Director/Advisor: Dr. Carolyn Hopp
Sponsor Agency/Institutional Affiliation: University of Central Florida

Thank you for your request to conduct research in Orange County Public Schools. We have reviewed and approved your application. This Notice of Approval expires one year after issue, 03/15/2018.

If you are interacting with OCPS staff or students, you should have submitted a Principal Notification Form with your application. You may now email the principals who have indicated interest in participating, including this notice as an attachment. After initial contact with principals, you may then email any necessary staff. This notice does not obligate administrators, teachers, students, or families of students to participate in your study; participation is entirely voluntary.

OCPS badges are required to enter any OCPS campus or building (see the Security Clearance Flow Chart).

You are responsible for submitting a Change Request Form to this office prior to implementing any changes to the currently approved protocol. If any problems or unexpected adverse reactions occur as a result of this study, you must notify this office immediately by emailing a completed Adverse Event Report Form. On or before 6/30/2017, you must complete a Request for Renewal or Executive Summary Submission. Email all forms to research@ocps.net. All forms may be found at www.tinyurl.com/OCPSresearch.

Should you have questions or need assistance, please contact Mary Ann White at (407) 317-3201 or mary.white@ocps.net.

Best wishes for continued success,

Illatawie Showalter

Illatawie Showalter
Illatawie.Showalter@ocps.net
Director of Accountability, Research and Evaluation
Orange County Public Schools

"The Orange County School Board is an equal opportunity agency."

APPENDIX E: UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA IRB

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Shalander Samuels**

Date: **January 06, 2017**

Dear Researcher:

On 01/06/2017 the IRB approved the following human participant research until 01/05/2018 inclusive:

Type of Review:	UCF Initial Review Submission Form Expedited Review
Project Title:	Bridging the Gap between ESOL and Native English Speakers in a digital Collaborative classroom
Investigator:	Shalander Samuels
IRB Number:	SBE-16-12705
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at https://iris.research.ucf.edu .

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 01/05/2018, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

IRB Chair

APPENDIX F: PRINCIPAL NOTIFICATION EMAIL TEMPLATE

Principal Notification Email Template

Researchers: Please replace the yellow highlighted phrases with information about your study. Email your final version to research@ocps.net.

OCPS Middle School Principals,

Your school has been invited to join a domestic study named "Bridging the Gap between ESOL and Native English Speakers in a digital Collaborative Classroom" This research study has been reviewed by the OCPS Research office and will be approved if there is interest in participating.

Purpose: The researchers want to uncover how to bridge the gap between middle school ESOL students and their native English speaking counterparts. This was aid in higher academic achievement in a digital classroom in Language Arts.

Who: The researcher, Shalander Samuels, of the University of Central Florida has asked if the following people will participate in the study.

Research Participants	Number of Participants Needed	Research Activity	Total Time Commitment
Instructional Staff	At least 15 in total	Online survey	5 minutes
Instructional Staff	Atleast 15 in total	Focus group	2-1hour sessions

Compensation: There will be no compensation offered.

What do you think: We would like to find out how many principals are willing to participate in Bridging the Gap between ESOL and Native English Speakers in a digital Collaborative Classroom

Vote: Please click on the voting bar across the top of this email to vote. The options are:

- **Accept**, and are willing to be a part of the study
- **Decline**, and do not wish to be contacted
- or **Need more information**, and want the researcher to contact you with more information about the study before you decide to participate.

You may ask the researchers for a copy of the proposal, IRB approval, OCPS Notice of Approval, or OCPS Security Clearance Form at any time. Please feel free to call or email me with any questions. My contact information is below.

Thank you,

Tavy Chen, Ed.D.
Director
Accountability, Research and Assessment
Orange County Public Schools
445 W. Amelia St. 7th floor, Orlando, FL 32801
(407) 317-3201
Tavy.Chen@ocps.net

APPENDIX G: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hello and pleasant good day to you, my name is Shalander Samuels. I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida in the College of Education and Human Performance, working under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn Hopp. The reason I am contacting you is because I am conducting a study entitled, *Bridging the Gap between ESOL and Native English Speakers in a digital Collaborative classroom*. This study is being conducted in the Orange County School District, and I am inviting you to participate because you are a Reading or Language Arts teacher who encounter ESOL students academically on a daily basis. The study is aimed to get input from teachers such as yourself on how to help close the gap in academic performance with ESOL students and native English speakers.

Participation in the study involves completing two focus groups, one will be held in February, and the other will be held in March 2017. Each focus group will be facilitated by my supervisor as she will ask questions that will lead to a discussion about ESOL teachers in the classroom (especially digital schools), ESOL students, as well as their performance and how to bridge their gap of performance in middle schools. If you participate in the study, each focus group will be approximately 1 hour long. These focus groups will be conducted off campus in a prearranged location allowing for confidentiality and private discussions. There will be no compensation for this study if you participate.

If you are interested and have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 407-766-2322 or ssamuels2010@knights.ucf.edu.

APPENDIX H: STUDENT REFLECTIVE TOOL

Reflective Classroom Tool

1) What did you learn today?

2) How do you know you learned it?

3) What strategies or activities most helped you learn? How?

4) What do you think will help you be more successful in class?

5) How can teachers better use technology to help you learn?

6) What suggestions do you have to improve the teacher's lessons?

APPENDIX I: TEACHER ANECDOTAL REFLECTIVE TOOL

Participant #_____

1. What did you do with this lesson that specifically accommodated ESOL students? What was the expected outcome? What was the actual outcome?

2. Are there any areas when teaching ESOL students that you find difficult? What needs to be addressed?

3. How does the ESOL students react to the accommodations that are provided to them? How do they show they are receptive or not?

4. What have you noticed overall about how the students react and interact with the lessons they are given?

5. How do you think technology or the lack of technology in your lessons impact ESOL students?

6. What does a collaborative learning environment look like in your classroom?

7. In what ways does a collaborative learning environment increase the English Language understanding among ESOL students in the digital Language Arts classroom?

8. What collaborative learning strategies are more effective in helping ESOL students reach the same level of proficiency as native speakers?

9. What specific collaborative learning strategies are more effective in a classroom that has access to digital learning?

10. Does the student centered learning environment aid in bridging the performance gap between ESOL students and native English speakers?

APPENDIX J: TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Please complete the following information:

Circle the appropriate response:

Identify your gender

- Male
- Female

Identify your ethnicity

- African-American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Other

Identify your teaching experience

- 11-15 years
- 6-10 years
- 1-5 years
- 15 years or more

What subject areas do you currently teach?

- -English Language Arts
- -Reading
- -Mathematics
- -Civics
- -Science

What grade levels do you currently teach? Circle/Check all that apply

- -Grade 6
- -Grade 7
- -Grade 8
- -Other

Which of the following endorsements do you currently withhold?

- -Reading
- -ESOL
- -ESE
- -5-9
- -6-12

Do you teach students who speak a language other than English?

- Yes
- No

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