

RESEARCH BRIEF



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Center for Research & Development in
Dual Language & Literacy Acquisition



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Education Leadership
Research Center

Virtual Professional Development for Campus Teacher Leaders

Beverly J. Irby, Ed.D., Rafael Lara-Alecio Ph.D., Fuhui Tong, Ph.D., Roya Pashmforoosh, Ph.D, Sharon de Marin, Ph.D., Siming Xie, Ashray Bali, Kenil Shah, Linda Rodriguez, Ph.D, Kara Sutton Jones, Ph.D, Hailey Harris, M.s., & Matthew J. Etchells, Ph.D

Introduction

What is a MOOPIL?

MOOPIL stands for Massive Open Online Professional Individualized Learning. The Building Teacher Leaders component in A-PLUS project, offers virtual professional development (VPD) using Canvas as the online learning platform. We worked with our partner, Texas Center for Educator Effectiveness (TxCEE) in developing the MOOPILs that were delivered over the three years. The MOOPILs were targeted to help teacher leaders increase instructional capacity to better serve schools with ELs and student experiencing economic challenges.

Virtual Professional Development (VPD) via MOOPILs

The first year (October 1, 2017 - September 30, 2018) served as the pilot program of this component. There were 110 enrollments and 98 MOOPIL completions. There was an increase in participation with MOOPILs in the second year (October 1st, 2018 - September 30, 2019) with a total of 90 MOOPILs offered to teachers across Texas. Nine hundred eighteen participants enrolled and completed MOOPIL modules.

We continue to recruit for our third year. We have initiated a first phase of dissemination of the MOOPILs with the first recruitment efforts focused on states with large numbers of English learners (ELs) and economically disadvantaged students, and teacher leaders serving in rural areas where professional development opportunities tend to be fewer than in urban districts. In addition to Texas, we currently have a small band of teacher leaders in California, Utah, Colorado, Alaska,

New Mexico, Delaware, Florida, Tennessee, New Jersey, North Carolina, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Iowa. We created a database with 40,000+ teacher emails across various states, and we continue to increase database; we plan to Our aim is to reach teacher leaders in rural areas and areas of high numbers of ELs, offering teachers high-quality professional development (MOOPILs) with micro-credentials and virtual PLCs (VPLCs) with virtual mentoring and coaching (VMC) to help strengthen teacher knowledge, promote effective teaching practices, increase teacher leadership opportunities, and develop strong cohorts of teachers across Texas primarily with some national dissemination test beds as noted.

From year 1 to the first half of year 3, we have trained 2338 individuals who have completed 3393 learning units. The number of participants in component 2 as of March 31st, 2020 is 689. As we continue with our recruitment efforts for the second half of year 3, we will be able to offer our MOOPILs to additional participants.

Researchers saw an increase in the number of enrollments and completions. By the end of year 3, we project a total of 2,750 teacher leaders enrolled and over 2,500 completion of a learning unit or MOOPIL.

Virtual Professional Learning Communities with Virtual Coaching and Mentoring

APLUS Component 2 provided teachers from around the United States opportunities to participate in a randomized control trial that involved using a predetermined sequence of MOOPILs as the content for virtual professional learning communities (VPLCs). The treatment groups received virtual coaching and mentoring. The control groups received the same MOOPIL courses for their VPLCs but did not receive VMC. The MOOPILs used with teachers included the following:

1. Phonics in the Bilingual Classroom
2. Assessing Student's Phonics Knowledge
3. Stages of Spelling Development
4. Reading Fluency
5. Strategies to Support Writing Development in ELLs
6. Strategies to Support Reading Development in ELLs
7. Fundamental Concepts of Second Language Acquisition

Each VPLC used a prescriptive reflection cycle developed by Brown and Irby (1997, 2001). The cycle uses the acronym LEADER - leading question, engagement, action research, discussion, examples, and reflection with a focus on transformation of instruction). VPLCs used a prescribed series of MOOPILs that served as the professional development. The VPLC steps included: (a) select the facilitator; (b) determine PLC time and date meeting via GoToMeeting (another partner); (c) introduce leading questions and engage participants; (d) work in groups through applied research, discussion, and example; and (e) discuss reflection and transformation as a team-next goal.

Researchers aimed to provide a collaborative-based forum whereby teachers could build strong, research-based knowledge to increase instructional practice, develop timely leadership skills, and network as participants are exposed to diverse challenges and transformational learning opportunities throughout the United States. These participants come from numerous states, diverse backgrounds, different ethnicities, and varied school contexts. Researchers are finding that teachers began using the LEADER model, specifically discussion, examples and reflection to transform their instruction and meet students' needs in these unprecedented times dealing with COVID-19.

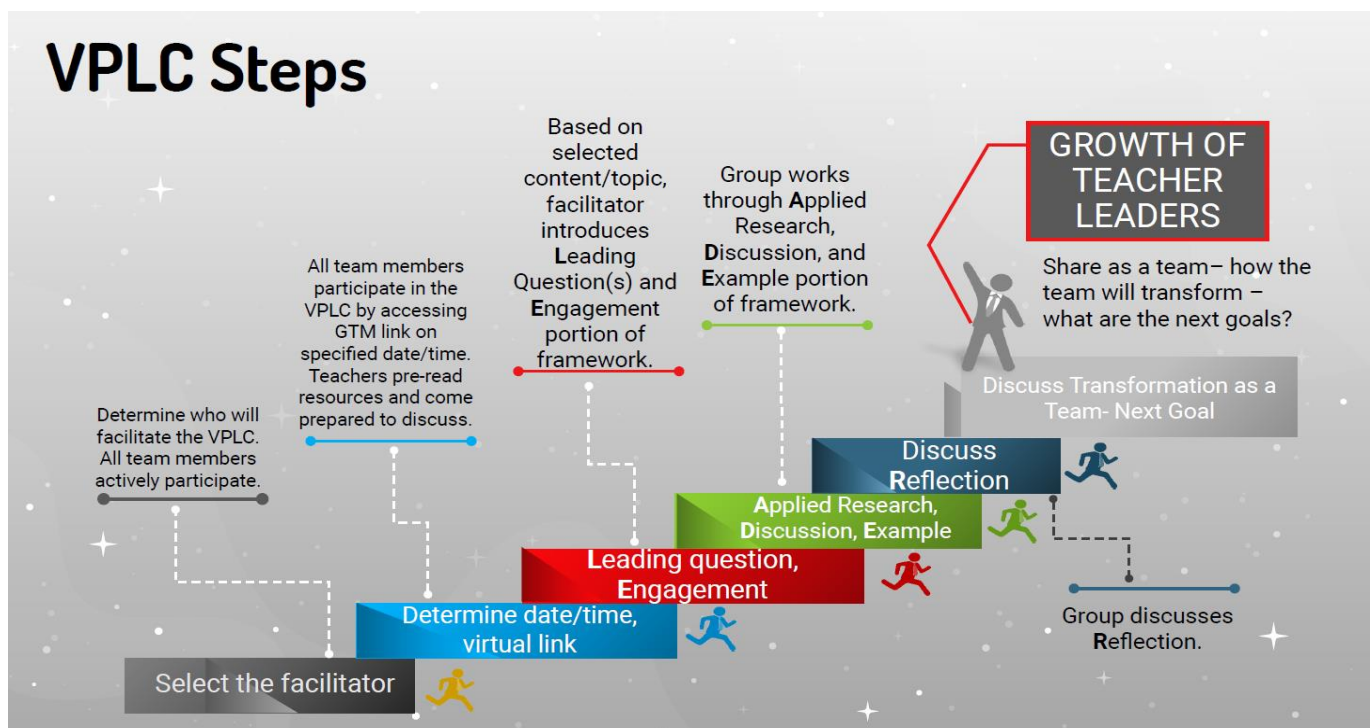


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the VPLC L.E.A.D.E.R. (Irby & Pugliese, E, 2019)

What is a virtual professional leadership learning community (VPLC) with a L.E.A.D.E.R. model?

Our Virtual Professional Leadership Learning Community (VPLC) L.E.A.D.E.R. (Leading Question, Engagement, Applied Research, Discussion, Example(s), and Reflection) process guided MOOPIL PD sessions (Irby & Pugliese, 2019). Learning community members were encouraged to contribute to the discussion for each component of the L.E.A.D.E.R. model (Irby & Pugliese, 2019). Having this online community allowed practicing school leaders to share leadership, research, and resources, which provided them with an avenue for collaboration with other school leaders as they went through the Massive Open Online Professional Informal Learning (MOOPILs; Irby, Sutton-Jones, Lara-Alecio, & Tong, 2017). We included virtual mentoring and coaching (VMC), virtual peer leadership mentoring (VPLM) via the VPLCs.

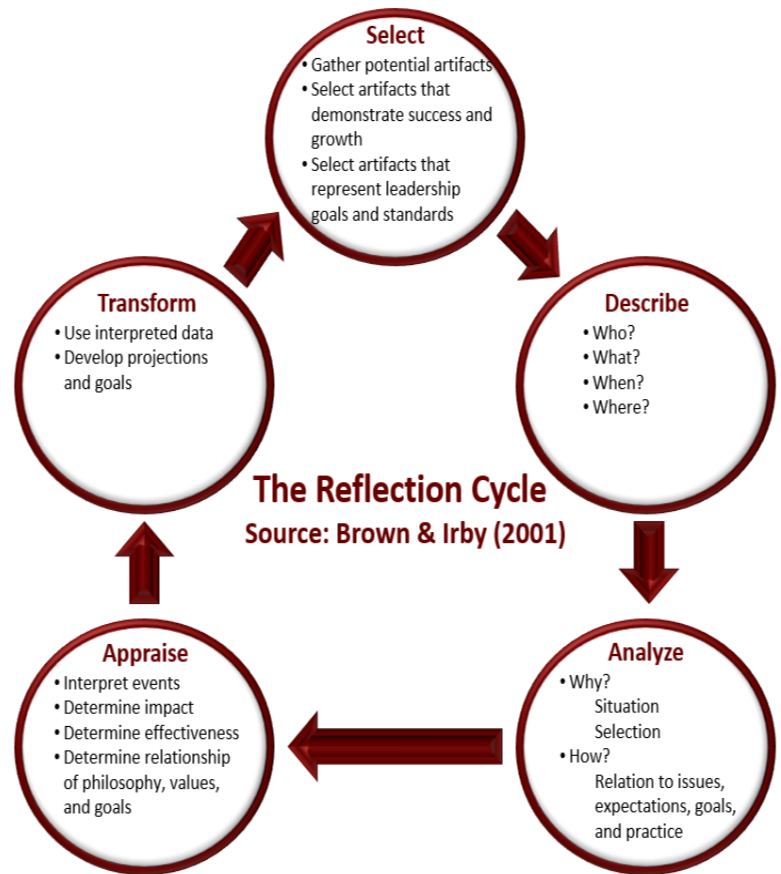


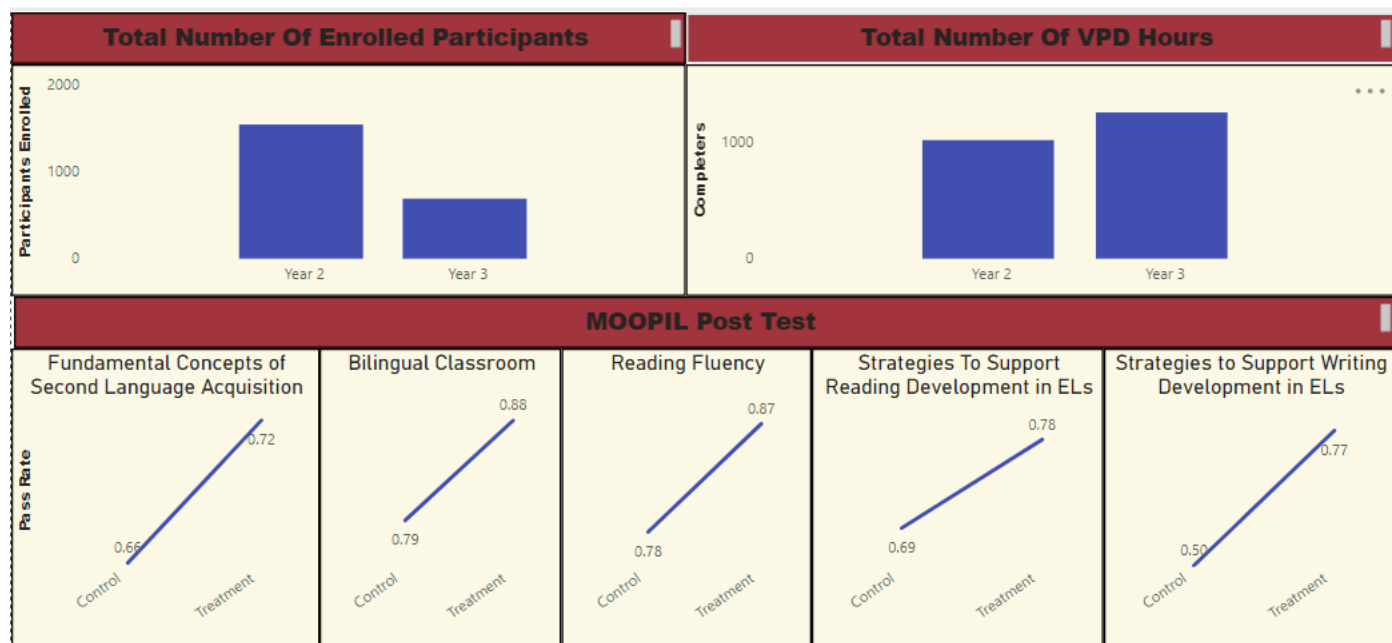
Figure 3. The Reflection Cycle framework. (Brown & Irby, 2001; Reprinted with permission.)

For year three (third cohort) there were 116 participants (59 in T and 58 in C group) who were randomly assigned to be part of the RCT. Treatment participating teacher leaders received seven VMC sessions using Virtual Professional Learning Communities (VPLCs). All sessions are recorded via GoToMeeting. The T and C groups rotated participants in leading the VPLCs. Both T and C groups used a prescribed list of MOOPILs as their Virtual Professional Development (VPD) using VPLCs. Currently, cohort four has begun and will end in early August 2020. Cohort four has 40 participants divided between treatment and control.

MOOPILs used in the VPLCs include: (a) literacy developing, (b) oral language proficiency, (c) phonics in the bilingual classroom, (d) assessment of student's phonics knowledge, (d) role of phonics in a balanced literacy program, (e) stages of spelling development, (f) reading fluency, (g) strategies to support writing development in English Learners (ELs). These were selected to aid teacher leaders in helping themselves and fellow teachers to improve their instructional capacity for working with ELs and economically challenged students (ECs).

Currently, our VPLC groups are diverse and are made up of teachers from across Texas with some teachers from the test-bed for dissemination across the United States including New Mexico, Mississippi, Iowa, Alaska, California, Texas, North Carolina, New Jersey, Colorado, Tennessee, Delaware, Nevada, Utah, Arkansas, and Florida.

Growth in MOOPIL Involvement and Knowledge



Having this online community allowed participants to share important leadership research and resources and provided them with an avenue for collaborating and communicating with other school leaders as they proceed. The instructional coach rotated the participants in leading the online PLC meetings.

These online PLCs regarded as grounds for innovation as participants worked together with other teacher leaders to find problems and determine creative and workable solutions with a focus on building instructional capacity in serving challenging schools.

Perceptions of Teacher Leaders on VPLC with VMC and VPD

Percentage of participants who indicated that they were well or very well prepared after for having general knowledge regarding effective English Learner teaching and learning



Percentage of Participants who mentioned they are very well prepared for choosing the high-quality research-based interventions for ELs



Percentage of Participants who mentioned they are very well prepared for adapting my teaching to students' English proficiency level



Percentage of Participants who mentioned they are very well prepared for working with ELs with behavioral problems



Percentage of Participants who mentioned they are very well prepared for supporting ELs literacy development needs in English



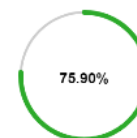
Percentage of Participants who mentioned they are very well prepared for teaching ELs with learning and physical disabilities



Percentage of Participants who mentioned they are very well prepared for involving parents in the English language acquisition of their children



Percentage of Participants who are extremely comfortable with VPD



Percentage of Participants who are extremely comfortable with VMC



Conclusion

Our virtual professional learning communities (VPLCs) with virtual mentoring and coaching (VMC) for teacher leaders led to networking opportunities, focused and transformational discussions connecting research to practice, and exploring achievable ways to improve effective instruction among diverse learners. The coaches facilitated teachers in gaining leadership skills and a strong knowledge base to increase instructional capacity among their students. Teacher leaders practiced reflecting on their sphere of influence among learners, expectations from their diverse learners, strengths and weaknesses using the LEADER model.

The VPLCs brought teachers together who would otherwise not have had these meaningful connections. As COVID-19 began disrupting the “normalcy” of day-to-day instruction and school routines, coaches steered teachers in utilize the VPLC platform and the LEADER model to come to grips with the realities they were facing and reasonable solutions. The virtual communities that stretched across state borders served in empowering teachers to overcome huge obstacles in reaching their students in unprecedented times. The discussions were rich and deep. The VPLCs took on an added dimension of social-emotional wellbeing, and participants were more actively engaged in the VPLCs than when they first began.

References

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