A CASE STUDY EXAMINING

HOW CULTURE AND SHARED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IMPROVE LITERACY

by

Jennifer Gutierrez

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

Darren D. Howland, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Breck L. Perry, Ph.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). The central research question is, how do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in urban elementary schools? The theory guiding this study is Bandura's self-efficacy theory, as it impacts the direction of behavior and effort toward accomplishing goals. Utilizing Bandura's self-efficacy theory adds to its philosophy by examining actions and behaviors that leaders and teachers employ to shape the culture of schools, generate a greater sense of collective efficacy, and increase student literacy achievement. The participants selected for this study are public school educators working at an urban Title I school experiencing success with closing literacy gaps. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for interviews, focus groups, and observations. The collected data was analyzed using the case study framework. Categorical aggregation established themes, patterns, and meaning. Data triangulation allowed the examination of patterns, thoughts, and behaviors from interviews, focus groups, and observations. The thematic findings for this case study were valuing all team members, building shared knowledge and decision-making, desire for success, and commitment to closing literacy gaps.

Keywords: collective efficacy, cycles of inquiry, shared leadership, literacy gaps, resilience, school culture

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator. I would never have been able to engage in this endeavor without the strength he provided throughout this journey.

To my mother, Berna, who always believed in me and modeled for me from an early age that anything can be accomplished through hard work and dedication.

To my amazing husband, Joaquin, who has been my moral support, encourager, and mentor every step of the way. Thank you for taking on numerous roles so I could focus on completing this work.

To my children, Jenevieve and Joaquin III, thank you for your patience when I could not spend time with you due to the hours and work this dissertation required. I am incredibly proud of all you have accomplished thus far. May you continue to pursue knowledge and all the things you love.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Darren Howland, for his inspiration and unwavering support. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to have him serve as my chair.

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Dr. Sean A. Maika, thank you for insisting I enroll in a doctoral program. You began mentoring me from the moment we met, challenging, influencing, believing, and never giving up on me. I would not have started this journey without your consistent drive to help me realize what I am capable of accomplishing.

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List of Abbreviations

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Measure of Academic Progress (MAP)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Reading Panel (NRP)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

A student's future is dependent on literacy proficiency. According to a long-term study by Fiester and the Anne Casey Foundation (2010), if not proficient in literacy by third-grade, students are four times more likely to drop out of high school. The Center for Public Education (2015) shared that third-grade is classified as vital to reading literacy since it is the last year students are learning to read. After third-grade, students read to comprehend the content in all core areas. Foundational literacy skills may no longer be the emphasis of the core literacy block. If students are not proficient readers when entering third-grade, half of the curriculum will be incomprehensible (Weyer et al., 2019). Literacy is associated with many positive life outcomes: individuals with better literacy proficiency are less likely to be unemployed, earn higher incomes, are more likely to have good health, be able to volunteer, trust others, and feel that people like them can have a voice in society (Grotluschen et al., 2016). Students who fail in school have difficulty securing a job, thereby running the risk of living in poverty, spending time in jail, and having a shorter life span (Buffum et al., 2010). The fundamental purpose of schools is to ensure all students master content and skills for the grade level being completed. Therefore, leaders and staff work collaboratively to transform student achievement through equitable practices.

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). Literacy acquisition is vital for adults to experience success and

advancement on a social and professional level (Reardon et al., 2012). The results of this study would assist educators in evaluating and self-reflecting on current practices employed to close literacy gaps for elementary students before it is too late. This chapter will illustrate the historical, social, and theoretical text of the problem and practices leaders use to achieve equity by improving literacy outcomes. The research questions are aligned with the problem, purpose, and theoretical framework. This chapter ends with definitions from the empirical literature and a summary.

Background

The continued literacy gaps in the United States are alarming. The United States Department of Education shared that through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), schools have been provided federal resources since 1965 to ensure all students have access to an equal education (United States Department of Education, 2001). However, despite focusing on literacy, the results have remained stagnant over decades. Reassessing the systematic approach to close literacy gaps during the foundational years of kindergarten through third-grade is key to literacy success in the United States of America. Some research studies connect literacy gaps to a lack of implementation of systematic phonics and phonemic awareness programs (Bowers & Bowers, 2018; Bowers, 2020; Castles et al., 2018; National Reading Panel, 2000), lack of training and knowledge in foundational literacy practices (McArthur et al., 2012) and a need for schools to have a culture of high expectations for all students by believing academic success can occur regardless of circumstances related to a child's socioeconomic background, disability or student group (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Gorski, 2013; Schwartz, 2001; Snell, 2003). The principal goals of the modern United States education policy have been to increase the performance of all students to proficiency in core subject areas and achieve educational equity by eliminating

historically persistent achievement gaps for subgroups (Goddard et al., 2017). Researchers and scholars argue that present-day education policy has adverse and detrimental outcomes on equity, including, driving increases in drop-out rates, especially among Latino and Black students, deskilling and deprofessionalizing teachers, exacerbating the effects of economic disparities among schools and districts through unfunded mandates, failing to consider students with special learning needs, and narrowing curriculum and forcing teachers to teach to the tests (Goodard et al.,2017; Haney, 2000; Klein, 2001; McNeil, 2000; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001; Valencia et al., 2001; Valenzuela, 2005).

School leaders impact student achievement primarily by influencing teachers' motivation and working conditions (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Previous research demonstrates that collective efficacy positively predicts students' academic achievement (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000). Knowing the complexities of the United States of America's educational system and how these policies influence student achievement, a rich research-based understanding of practices leaders employ to operate and achieve equity in the current policy context is needed. The existing literature has yet to address whether shared leadership practices decrease inequities and, as a result, close literacy gaps. The results of this case study intend to generate findings and examples of shared leadership practices that foster collective teacher efficacy and increase literacy achievement.

Historical Context

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was developed to ensure that all students and schools obtain equal access to quality education. The rising focus on accountability during the 1990s was further emphasized with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 (Linn et al., 2002). Additionally, the Race to the Top initiative heightened the

focus on teacher accountability. Finally, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 maintains standardized testing as a focal point for closing achievement gaps. Despite the innumerable attempts to close achievement and literacy gaps, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that only 33% of fourth-grade students and 31% of eighth-grade students are proficient in reading based on the 2022 national assessment. These literacy results have remained constant since 1992, and as a result, states have adopted policies prioritizing closing achievement and literacy gaps through house and senate bills (Education Commission of the States, 2020; Wixom, 2015). The primary goal of these adopted policies is to measure how schools are closing achievement gaps, especially for students of different racial and socioeconomic groups.

The teacher is the most important factor influencing student learning (Marzano et al., 2018). Teachers are critical to closing literacy gaps. Haycock (1998) found that a student taught by a highly effective teacher experienced an 83-percentile point gain in learning growth, while a student taught by an ineffective teacher experienced a 29-percentile point gain in learning growth. Teacher leadership associated with student learning indirectly influences student achievement through school process variables such as school capacity, coaching, and climate (Sebastian et al., 2016; Sebastian et al., 2017). Principals' effects on student achievement are primarily indirect, coming through efforts to recruit, develop, support, and retain a talented teaching staff and create conditions to deliver effective instruction (Grissom et al., 2021). However, teacher effectiveness is central to student achievement. A student endures high levels of learning in a school with an effective principal through a focus on teacher growth, development, and shared leadership (Berry et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Grissom et al., 2021).

Social Context

According to the Bernstein et al. (2019), African American and Hispanic/Latino children enter kindergarten an average of 7-12 months behind in reading skills, with more significant gaps for low-income students. One of the most compelling conclusions from current literacy studies found that students that did not have a strong literacy foundation in the early years seldom recover (Gilmour et al., 2019; Muir, 2022; Ratcliff et al., 2016). Moreover, the effects of literacy gaps grow immensely over time. Most schools lack research-based, coordinated efforts to identify students with reading difficulties until third-grade (Reardon et al., 2019); the gaps have grown exponentially by that time.

By third-grade, the expectation is for students to comprehend complex text for all content areas. If students are reading below grade level, students are always playing catch up and, in most cases, exposed to below-grade-level text during literacy and intervention blocks. Students exposed to below grade level text end the year below grade level (Mesmer et al., 2016). Reading instruction that is structured, systematic, and explicit for students who are at risk has been demonstrated to close literacy gaps and provided evidence to be not only beneficial but critical for students' future success (Weyer et al., 2019). Educators cannot assume that students with literacy gaps will gain the needed skills without being explicitly taught the skill or knowledge. Students also need to have plenty of opportunities to practice. Teachers need the knowledge and tools to deeply understand how to provide explicit, systematic instruction in all five essential components of early reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (Ordetx, 2021). A structured literacy approach is necessary for building a foundation for reading success. Professional learning experiences that use modeling and

coaching assist teachers in developing the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to effectively support literacy gaps (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The literacy trajectory of schools and districts can shift and ensure literacy becomes the greatest equalizer when teachers have the tools, structures, coaching, and professional learning to accomplish this vital goal. Leaders work closely with teachers to develop shared leadership, which has improved teaching and learning practices (Shen et al., 2020). Wahlstrom et al. (2010) found that shared leadership substantially influences student achievement more than individual leadership. Through shared leadership, teams can accomplish school goals. Leaders can use the results of this study to elicit discussions about the root causes of literacy gaps in school buildings. District leaders can examine differences amongst or within campuses and student groups correlated to instructional practices, high expectations, school culture, shared leadership, and how the literacy curriculum becomes guaranteed and viable.

Theoretical Context

One of the most significant continuing challenges schools and those who study them endure is how to accelerate student learning while also closing existing achievement gaps. School improvement is complex work, and principals alone cannot achieve and sustain the expected levels of school improvement (Shen et al., 2020). Traditional leadership theories concentrate on the head in the leadership role and the actions and characteristics they utilize to persuade employees to follow commands and meet the leader's vision (Krier, 2022). Over time, the focus shifted to transformational or human relations theories of leadership, in which the leader's role was to manipulate relationships, feelings, and perceptions to influence personnel (Bennis, 1959). During the 1990s and 2000s, scholars began to recognize that traditional, hierarchical organizational forms of leadership did not allow for adjusting and innovating swiftly

enough to react to quickly changing environments (Goble & Brown, 1996; Hooker & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Consequently, researchers began to explore team models, and shared leadership theories started to develop (Pearce & Sims, 2000; Pearce et al., 2003, Pearce et al., 2008; Spillane, 2005, 2012). The shared leadership theory has been broadly distributed and utilized throughout a variety of team styles: change management teams (Pearce & Sims, 2002), top management teams (Singh et al., 2019), consulting teams (Carson et al., 2007) and entrepreneurial teams (Zhou, 2016).

In a school that practices shared leadership, often called a professional learning community (PLC), all adults continually learn together to achieve high levels of learning for every student (Wilhelm, 2013). Yiegh et al. (2019) similarly noted that the distributed perspective allows principals to facilitate and support teachers to take leadership roles which build ownership, efficacy, and student success. Distributed leadership is often used interchangeably with shared and collaborative leadership (Spillane, 2005, 2012). Fink (2016) argued that principals who grant leadership roles by showing trust could encourage teachers' professional efficacy. Liu et al. (2022) found that principal instructional leadership is significantly related to teacher instructional leadership and are both positively related to teacher self-efficacy and student performance. Previous research on teacher self-efficacy has considered school climate, principal role, collective efficacy, and district or school context as variables (Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Other research has included teacher perception; as a result, teachers with greater self-efficacy beliefs tend to have higher-achieving students (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Haverback, 2020; Midgley et al., 1989; Ross, 1992; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Current studies proposed new models for organizations that stressed collaboration by learning together and creating space for dialogue and disagreement, which

develops collective efficacy (Capone, 2019; Wu, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers found that a teacher with healthy self-efficacy beliefs was important for students in virtual learning environments, and healthy self-efficacy beliefs proved advantageous to learning (Bailey, 2021; Haverback, 2020).

Another feature of shared leadership that has been studied is collaboration. According to Philpott et al. (2017), collaboration fosters collegial support and enhances teachers' collective efforts to develop and improve teaching and learning. A spread of leadership roles is helpful in teacher collaboration and collegial support because such distribution positively affects teachers' feelings about respect, and the need to influence educational changes is positively related to teacher collaboration (Brown et al., 2019). In addition, sharing leadership roles contributes to realizing change because professional and collaborative learning will strengthen when teams work together (Hadfield et al., 2018). In their study, Neugebauer et al. (2019) demonstrated that teacher teams collaborating on instruction were positively associated with a change in teachers' practices, efficacy, and beliefs, as well as increased student learning. The research builds on studies performed in schools by exploring the social sources of teachers' self-efficacy through the lens of social cognitive theory (Neugebauer et al., 2019). Collective teacher efficacy has been considered a significant predictor in explaining differences in teacher success (Goddard et al., 2000; Guidetti et al., 2018). Bandura (1997) classified collective teacher efficacy as the most important factor influencing student achievement. Teachers' collective efficacy beliefs affect what they aim to accomplish, how resources are used to attain goals, the strategies developed, the amount of effort placed, and the ability to persevere when results are not evident, or discouragement is encountered (Bandura, 1997). Educators demonstrating high levels of collective efficacy set ambitious goals and are relentless in efforts to succeed (Tschannen-Moran

et al., 1998). Some research studies found that low levels of collective efficacy are linked with high burnout and depression in teachers (Capone & Petrillo, 2016; Yang & Farn, 2005).

This case study intends to add to the existing literature by examining how a campus responded to closing literacy gaps. The central research question aligns with the self-efficacy theory by examining how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy. Shen et al. (2020) found that teacher leadership is essential for school improvement. Teacher involvement in leadership can enhance teacher self-efficacy and motivation (Day et., 2016). Teacher voice and expertise are critical to closing literacy gaps. Shared leadership is a powerful path to school improvement as it generates efficacy and ownership of schoolwide student outcomes (Wilhelm, 2016).

Problem Statement

The problem is that students are leaving third-grade without proficient literacy skills (Casey, 2010, 2013; Gilmore et al., 2019; Muir, 2022; Paisini, 2018; Reardon et al., 2016; Samuels, 2015; Scammacca et al., 2020). Third-grade students who are not reading at grade level are among the most vulnerable to dropping out of school in later years (Fiester et al., 2010; Hernandez et al., 2011; NAEP, 2019: Weyer et al., 2019). Reading proficiency is critical to achieving and breaking the cycle of poverty over time. Preis (2020) emphasized that leaders focus primarily on student behaviors, rarely engaging educators in ongoing self-reflection about individual implicit beliefs and practices, which, though unintentional, often serve to protect the hierarchies of privilege that fuel unhealthy school climates and disparate student outcomes. The culture and beliefs on campus by all staff related to student ability, high expectations, and student success impact daily decisions and, ultimately, student achievement. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Opportunity and achievement gaps are common in our nation's schools. Leaders often create action plans that consist of structural changes. These include schedules, groupings, and logistical procedures. Unfortunately, improvement plans are typically unsuccessful and fail to demonstrate high academic achievement or more significant participation in effective opportunities for lower-income student groups. Leaders are positioned to shape the culture and expectations that dominate school buildings. Teachers are central to the process of transforming schools. Teacher leadership can be utilized as a lever to improve student outcomes through shared leadership practices (Lovett, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). This study aims to assist in closing literacy gaps for elementary students. Interviews, focus groups, and observations will demonstrate how schools' close literacy gaps through shared leadership practices and manage to challenge the status quo collectively. The evidence collected from this study will inform school and district leaders on the forms of shared leadership systems that increase collective efficacy and provide equitable practices that close literacy gaps.

Significance of the Study

This study made meaningful contributions to field of education and leadership. The United States has emphasized closing literacy gaps for decades. Even though closing gaps has been an emphasis, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that only 33% of fourth-grade and 31% of eighth-grade students are proficient in reading based on the

2022 national assessment. These literacy statistics have remained stagnant since 1992 (Education in a Pandemic, 2021). Students who demonstrate early reading difficulties are at greater risk for various problems, from low achievement in other academic areas to dropping out and incarceration (Duke, 2019; Weyer, 2019; Williams, 2021). Research suggests that a culture of shared leadership fosters collective efficacy and increases student achievement (DuFour et al., 2016; Eaker et al., 2020; Goodard et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2018). A school climate that is open, collegial, professional, and focused on student achievement provides the atmosphere for productive teacher empowerment in teaching and learning decisions, but the link to student achievement is through collective efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018). This case study is valuable to urban school leaders as it provides an in-depth examination of practices that have proven to close literacy gaps. This study's findings identify beneficial strategies other districts and schools can incorporate to improve school culture, commitment to goals, and academic performance.

Theoretical

Bandura's social cognitive theory (1997) demonstrates that the strength of individual efficacy beliefs strongly influences self-regulation. Bandura (1997) proposed that an effective leader that can "unite the community for a common cause" (p. 501) and inspire the whole school community may increase the collective efficacy of a school. Recent research shows that school leadership is a crucial predictor of teachers' collective efficacy beliefs (Goddard et al., 2015). When leaders emphasize closing gaps, teachers work collaboratively to increase achievement, and as a result, teams develop a better sense of collective efficacy. Goddard et al. (2017) contended that school leaders may be central to shaping the in-school experiences that influence teachers' work and sense of collective efficacy. This case study provides evidence from an

elementary school campus of shared leadership practices that contribute to collective efficacy and yield positive results in kindergarten through third-grade literacy.

Empirical

The reason for this study was to add to the existing literature on the positive influence of shared leadership (Grissom et al., 2021; Park et al., 2018; Sebastian et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2020) and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000, 2004; Goddard et al., 2015; Goddard et al., 2017). The current literature does not address closing literacy gaps through a culture of shared leadership. Closing literacy gaps continue to be a challenge across the United States of America, especially for minority students. The results of this case study clarify practices that favor students leaving third-grade with the required literacy skills to succeed in future grades.

Practical

This case study can affect the school district where the research will occur and other communities struggling to close literacy gaps in early grades. The district serves 67 schools with diverse student populations and outcomes in early literacy. Through continued research on the influence of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000, 2004; Goddard et al., 2015; Goddard et al., 2017) and shared leadership (Grissom et al., 2021; Park et al., 2018; Sebastian et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2020) focused on learning outcomes, achievement gaps can be closed. As themes are developed from the in-depth analysis, the School District will have the opportunity to review the findings and reflect on current practices and student data at all campuses. The intent is to reflect and replicate the shared leadership practices that have been demonstrated to close literacy gaps in schools successfully.

Research Questions

Students are leaving third-grade without mastering the literacy skills needed for future success. The research aims to gather and examine data from an elementary school that has successfully closed literacy gaps in kindergarten through third-grade. Understanding the leadership practices, beliefs, and expectations reflected on that campus will demonstrate the influence of shared leadership and collective efficacy. In addition, understanding how perception and behavior contribute to positive and supportive learning environments correlates to the social cognitive theory. Finally, schools and districts can benefit from replicating and adapting these existing factors to close literacy gaps within organizations.

Central Research Question

How do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in urban elementary Title I schools?

Sub-Question One

How are leaders prepared to address literacy gaps?

Sub-Question Two

How do leaders inspire and influence teachers to create systematic cultural change that eliminates literacy gaps?

Sub-Question Three

How do teacher expectations affect student literacy performance?

Definitions

1. *Collective Efficacy*- A group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given levels of attainment (Bandura, 1997).

2. *Cycles of Inquiry*- Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results (Eaker & Marzano, 2020).
3. *Literacy* - Literacy generally refers to reading and writing effectively in various contexts (Pilgrim et al., 2013).
4. *Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)* - The ability to fluently read text aloud. ORF depends on more basic single-word decoding skills but also requires words to be fluently read in the context of sentences (Dominique et al., 2021).
5. *Organizational Resilience* - the ability to anticipate potential threats, to respond effectively to unexpected events, and to learn from these events, resulting in a dynamic capability designed to facilitate organizational change (Dechek et al., 2020).
6. *Professional Learning Communities (PLC)* - A group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills through a commitment to the learning and academic performance of all students (DuFour et al., 2016).
7. *Shared Leadership* – Incorporates transformational and instructional leadership, as well as other tenants of good leadership while ensuring that all stakeholders are included as active participants and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017).
8. *Title I* - is a federal education program that supports low-income students nationwide. Funds are distributed to high-poverty schools, as determined by the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch (United States Department of Education).

Summary

Reading proficiency is critical to student achievement and breaking the cycle of poverty over time. The problem is that students are leaving third-grade without proficient literacy skills. Third-grade students who are not reading at grade level are among the most vulnerable to dropping out of school in later years (Fiester et al., 2010; Hernandez et al., 2011; NAEP, 2019; Weyer et al., 2019). Research studies have found factors that perpetuate literacy gaps; lack of implementation of systematic phonics and phonemic awareness programs (Bowers & Bowers, 2018; Bowers, 2020; Castles et al., 2018; National Reading Panel, 2000), lack of training and knowledge for education in foundational literacy practices (McArthur et al., 2012) and a culture of low expectations (Duncan & Murnane, 2014; Gorski, 2013; Schwartz, 2001; Snell, 2003; Workman, 2012; Workman, 2017). Leaders are positioned to shape the culture and expectations that dominate school buildings. Teacher leadership can be used as a lever for improving student outcomes through shared leadership practices (Lovett, 2018; Park, 2018; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). This study aims to assist in closing literacy gaps for elementary students. In addition, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by sharing examples that; help eliminate current disparities in educational access and illustrate the relationships between shared leadership collective efficacy and student achievement. Every student deserves

to attend a school committed to transforming and equalizing learning opportunities that will result in students leaving third-grade with proficient literacy skills.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A critical review of the literature was performed to synthesize how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in elementary schools. The literature review chapter offers an examination of the existing literature associated with the focus of this study. The first section explores the theory of self-efficacy. It is followed by an analysis of current literature related to literacy gaps, the impact of COVID-19, school leadership training, teacher perceptions and expectations, shared leadership, the relationship between shared leadership and collective efficacy, and the role shared leadership and collective teacher efficacy play on organizational resilience and student literacy achievement. The findings are organized to integrate shared leadership and collective efficacy to highlight how these can potentially close literacy gaps. Existing gaps in the literature uncover a necessity for this study.

Theoretical Framework

The self-efficacy component of Bandura's social cognitive theory profoundly influences an individual or team; self-efficacy impacts both the direction of behavior and effort toward goals (Bandura, 1997). When individuals are driven to persist in challenges, the individuals gain momentum. These positive experiences increase self-efficacy. This literature review employs Bandura's self-efficacy theory to search for actions and behaviors that leaders can utilize to shape the culture of the schools' principals lead, generate a greater sense of collective efficacy, and increase student literacy achievement and organizational resilience.

Theory of Self-Efficacy

The self-efficacy theory was an extension of Bandura's (1971) Social Learning Theory. The theoretical foundation of the social learning theory originated from B.F. Skinner in the

1940's (Bandura, 1971; Skinner, 1948). The Social Cognitive Theory developed from the Social Learning Theory, identifying that individuals learn from experiences and by observing the experiences of others, tested through the Bobo Doll and clown experiments (Bandura, 1991; Bandura et al., 1961). The theoretical origins for the Social Cognitive Theory derive from 1931 when Edwin B. Holt and Harold Chapman Brown's hypothesized that animals' behaviors are centered on satisfying the psychological needs of feeling, emotion, and longing (Bandura, 1963: Holt & Chapman Brown, 1931). The self-efficacy theoretical foundation arose from the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977). The social cognitive theory focuses on a person's actions and reactions within social behaviors and mental processes; the behaviors are influenced by what an individual observes in others (Bandura, 1991).

Bandura viewed motivation in relation to outcome expectations in the 1970s (Bandura, 1971). He continued to explore motivation by utilizing restorative procedures for individuals with phobias (Bandura, 1977). Although the participants were motivated to employ the methods despite fears of outcome expectations, the individuals failed to apply the techniques within real-life circumstances. Bandura then attributed the personal differences to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Bandura argued that self-efficacy builds from external experiences combined with self-perception and is instrumental in influencing the result of experiences (Bandura, 1982). Bandura posited that self-efficacy has a more significant effect on motivation than outcome expectations (Zimmerman, 2000). Bandura proposed the Social Cognitive Theory in 1986, emphasizing the position of self-efficacy in cognitions, actions, behaviors, reactions, and motivators (Bandura, 1986). During 1991–1997, Bandura determined that individuals recognize beliefs in self as a result of interactions with the surroundings constructing beliefs of individual abilities (Bandura, 1991, 1993, 1997). Bandura performed numerous examinations determining the power of self-

efficacy in managing and influencing individual behaviors (Bandura, 1991; 1997). According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, individuals with high self-efficacy believe in performing well and have a greater opportunity to view complex tasks as something to be conquered instead of avoided (Bandura, 1997).

The self-efficacy theory focuses on individuals' perception of the ability to succeed based on precise circumstances; the level of self-efficacy changes based on psychological measures (Bandura, 1993). Human behavior is developed and controlled through cognitive processes. Therefore, successful performance replaces personal experiences and acts as the principal vehicle for change. Additionally, cognitive methods moderate change, but intellectual actions willingly persuade and transform based on the expertise of mastery as the outcome of effective performance (Bandura, 1997). Leadership is second to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning, and such influence is achieved through the effects on school organization and culture (Day et al., 2016). How teachers collectively view influence and student progress is most relevant to student success (Hattie et al., 2018). The teachers' collective efficacy represents the self-confidence to conquer challenges and limitations through the shared belief that all students can learn at high levels.

A focus on efficacy can be advantageous to closing literacy gaps (Berry et al., 2010, DeWitt, 2022). According to Bandura (1977), persistence in activities that are subjectively threatening but, in fact, relatively safe produce, through experiences of mastery, further enhancement of self-efficacy and corresponding reductions in defensive behavior. These beliefs of efficacy originate from four principal foundations. The first is mastery experiences, which are the most influential and generated when an individual completes a task successfully (Bandura, 1997). The second is vicarious experiences, which occur when an individual observes another

accomplishing a task successfully (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). The third is verbal persuasion, which impacts self-efficacy when a highly respected individual provides assurance of the capability to achieve a challenging task (Bandura, 1978; Goddard et al., 2004). The final component is physiological and affective states, these influence an individual's feelings regarding a specific duty (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Of these four principal foundations, enactive mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). This factor provides the most direct, authentic evidence that individuals can gather the personal resources necessary to succeed (Artino, 2012). Healthy self-efficacy beliefs are advantageous to learning (Bandura, 1997). Positive feelings will increase self-efficacy, while negative emotions like anxiety or nervousness will decrease self-efficacy. School leaders shape a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate that cultivates leadership in others, which improves instruction (Willis et al., 2019). Leaders can use strategies that generate collective efficacy, positively influencing student achievement.

Self-efficacy is beyond an individual or team having confidence or lack of. Increasing individual or team efficacy involves demonstrating, modeling, organizing, planning, and stretching one another's knowledge and thinking (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, self-efficacy consists of the ability to relinquish any rank centered around a position and focus the attention on elevating the status of other individuals. High self-efficacy in one domain does not necessarily mean high efficacy in another (Artino, 2012). Shared leadership increases efficacy when teachers share expertise, learn from one another, can take risks in a safe environment, and experience success. Shared leadership allows teachers to share knowledge as a means of effective capacity building (Bean et al., 2012). Shared leadership develops self-efficacy and reinforces the

importance of schools functioning as learning communities (Buffum et al., 2010; DeWitt, 2017, 2019, 2022; DuFour et al., 2016; Eaker et al., 2020; Goddard et al., 2015, 2017; Hattie, 2018).

Self-efficacy is often determined by utilizing self-report surveys requiring participants to assess in-depth beliefs about the ability to accomplish the necessary actions in educational research. Some self-efficacy instruments were designed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and Gibson and Dembo (1984). Woolfolk believed there was a correlation between self-efficacy and student achievement when teachers set the bar high, did not give up on students, and continued to try different strategies if the one used was ineffective (Shaughnessy, 2004). When teachers are given opportunities to build knowledge and collaborate with peers through given feedback and treated as experts, schools improve student achievement and build collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2015). One way to raise students' achievement is to improve the collective efficacy of that school's faculty and staff. Collective efficacy is defined as the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty, as a whole, would positively affect student learning (Goddard, 2001). As collective efficacy increases, so does individual teacher efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). When considering the effects of factors beyond the school's control, such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender, teachers' views of collective efficacy are strong predictors of academic performance (Goddard et al., 2000). Self-efficacy beliefs can change with the context of the situation (Gale et al., 2020). It is crucial to keep in mind that an activity that brought about positive self-efficacy in one situation or context could bring about a negative self-efficacy belief in another (Bandura, 1982; Pajares, 2002; Smylie, 1990). When a person develops new skills or adds to existing skills, efficacy beliefs undergo an adjustment. Bandura (1997) advised that the ideal level of generalization, at which self-efficacy

is measured, varies depending on what the researcher pursues to predict and the degree of foresight in the situational demands.

Previous research on self-efficacy has generally focused on examining teacher leadership and principal leadership in isolation (Neumerski, 2013). Although researchers have investigated the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher efficacy, both collective and individual, as well as teacher efficacy and student performance, the relationships have yet to extend to include all these variables in one model (Yan et al., 2022). The existing research on shared instructional leadership as a composite has missed the opportunity to unveil the extent to which principal and teacher shared leadership help create a culture that focuses on enhanced instructional outcomes. The effect of self and collective efficacy on shared leadership and how the approach shifts school culture and improves literacy remains unclear.

The self-efficacy theory applies to this case study as shared leadership practices entail maximizing all the human resources on campus by empowering and providing educators with the opportunity to lead and contribute through leveraging expertise. This study is unique in that it will add to the field's current understanding of self and collective efficacy as a means to share leadership and produce cultures focused on closing literacy gaps for all students. Understanding the importance of early enactive experiences and a sense of urgency around literacy for those who lead and supervise can support the design of environments that create effective, shared leadership. This study examined how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school.

This research further explored the influence and experiences of teachers' self and collective efficacy, which can inform how administrators foster self and collective efficacy to best support the literacy outcomes of all students. Additionally, the self-efficacy theory examined

how leaders use shared leadership strategies and how these strategies shape the culture of the leaders' school. The research questions allowed for a deeper understanding of how teachers use shared leadership to shape instructional practices, increase self and collective efficacy, and expectations to close literacy gaps. This case study employs Bandura's self-efficacy theory to add to its philosophy by examining actions and behaviors that leaders and teachers utilize to shape the culture of schools to generate a greater sense of collective efficacy and increase student literacy achievement. Self-efficacy impacts the direction of behavior and effort toward goals (Bandura, 1997). The sub-research questions assisted in creating an understanding of a culture of shared leadership practices that close literacy gaps and build collective teacher efficacy in elementary schools. The data analysis findings explain the effect of self and collective efficacy on shared leadership and how the approach shifts school culture and improves literacy by analyzing how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy.

Related Literature

Creating a positive influence on student learning outcomes and ensuring students master grade-level skills are fundamental reasons schools exist. This literature review includes a historical analysis of literacy in the United States and its current reality after the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature review concentrates on shared leadership practices that can improve literacy outcomes. The literature emphasizes shifting practices to close literacy gaps that educators use through collaborative work in Professional Learning Communities and engaging in continuous cycles of inquiry. In addition, shared leadership practices that generate organizational resilience are highlighted. Finally, the review examines the shared leadership practices that increase collective teacher efficacy and can assist with closing literacy gaps. This study intends

to contribute knowledge to the field of education by demonstrating how shared leadership practices lead to collective teacher efficacy and increase student achievement specific to closing kindergarten through third-grade literacy gaps.

Historical Literacy Performance

The educational system is foundational to the development of our society. Public education is founded based on equal educational opportunities for all. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 has provided federal resources to schools for over four decades to ensure all students have equal access to quality education. Due to a fear of the United States losing its distinction as an industrially superior leader globally, *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983. The report proclaimed that the "educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 9). As a result, almost every state in the United States of America identified and implemented content standards for math and literacy by 1998 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Yet, according to Paterson (2021), school leaders and teachers were criticized, students were promoted or retained, and legislation continued to be passed so that high school students would graduate or be denied a diploma based on whether standards of proficiency were met as measured by a standardized test. The emerging focus on accountability in education policy throughout the 1990s was additionally heightened with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 (Linn et al., 2002). A system that relies heavily on standardized testing undermines the importance of protecting diversity, inclusion, and creativity by transforming a well-rounded education into a competitive pursuit of scores (Baldner, 2021). As a result, NCLB veered the focus to teacher accountability by utilizing the Race to the Top initiative. The ESSA of 2015 gives greater autonomy to states yet continues

to endorse standardized testing as a means of closing achievement gaps. Yet, standardized testing negatively impacts low-income, marginalized, and emergent bilingual students as achievement gaps for these groups have stayed the same and, in some cases, grown with the increased use of these assessments (Baldner, 2021).

Despite numerous attempts to close achievement and literacy gaps, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that only 33% of fourth-grade and 31% of eighth-grade students are proficient in reading based on the 2022 national assessment. These literacy statistics have remained stagnant since 1992 (Education in a Pandemic, 2021). States have adopted state policies that focus on closing reading gaps through house and senate bills. This legislation holds school districts accountable for progress monitoring early literacy assessment data, meeting third-grade proficiency goals, and screening for dyslexia and dysgraphia as early as kindergarten. Yet, there is alarming concern that a system that relies heavily on standardized testing to measure student achievement is conditioning students to become automated, ultimately compromising critical thinking during formative years and not understanding the theories of child development (Darling- Hammond, 2007).

A focus on early foundational literacy practices has significantly correlated with graduation rates, college, career, and military readiness (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2013a, 2013, b, 2014; Fiester et al., 2010; Muir, 2022; Samuels, 2015; Whaley, 2019). The Every Student Succeeds Act state-mandated accountability systems, much like the No Child Left Behind, federally mandated procedures, lead schools and school districts to narrow the curriculum, reduce student engagement and instructional time in non-tested subject areas, and over-teach test preparation materials with the hope that some students would do slightly better on the tested multiple-choice sections (Saultz, 2019). Additionally, substantial dependence on

standardized testing measures causes teachers to mainly focus on short-term outcomes of exiting the needs improvement accountability status. The reliance on standardized testing measures creates detrimental actions that make the long-term goal of decreasing knowledge and literacy gaps more unattainable (Baldner, 2021). Educators should keep in mind that students who are not meeting grade-level reading expectations by the end of third-grade are most likely to drop out of school (Paisini, 2018).

Literacy in Early Foundational Years

Early literacy skills have a lasting impact on students' academic trajectories (Birgisdottir et al., 2020; Duncan et al., 2007). Literacy incorporates numerous foundational skills and understandings about written and spoken language as structures that communicate meaning. Early literacy is defined as the most comprehensive yet concise description of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that precede learning to read and write in the primary grades, kindergarten – third-grade (Roskos et al., 2003). The development of early literacy skills is critical. When students begin formal instruction, entry into complete literacy instruction is supported by knowledge of letters and letter-sound correspondence, experience with a range of types of print, vocabulary, syntactic, and discourse abilities essential to understanding text (Cameron et al., 2019; Hemphill et al., 2008).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) discovered that students who were not proficient readers at the end of third-grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school when compared to proficient readers. This study also found that 88% of students who did not earn a high school diploma were not reading at grade level at the end of third-grade. Academic success defined by high school graduation can be accurately predicted by knowing the student’s reading skills at the end of third-grade (Hernandez & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). Furthermore,

incarceration and lack of a high school diploma correlate directly. According to Weyer et al. (2019), dropouts are eight times more likely to be incarcerated. Third-grade is classified as essential to literacy since it is the last year students develop foundational literacy skills by learning to read. Following third-grade, students read to gain knowledge from the information. Therefore, if students are not reading at grade level, students will struggle to comprehend the content presented in all subject areas independently (Duke, 2019). According to the Children's Reading Foundation, more than half of the printed curriculum is incomprehensible to students who read below grade level (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013a). Early literacy instruction is an intricate and multifaceted process that integrates appropriate materials, skills, and social assistance, fostering effective reading and writing development.

Early reading matters, and it is vital to recognize that reading goes beyond decoding words (Duke, 2019). Effective reading instruction includes the following components: (a) phonemic awareness, (b) alphabetic knowledge and decoding skills, (c) fluency in word recognition and text processing, (d) vocabulary, and (e) comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). However, the National Institute for Literacy (2008) identified six critical predictors for reading and school success, including alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or numbers, rapid automatic naming of objects or colors, writing, and phonological memory. The academic skills students develop early in schooling establish the foundation for later competence and proficiency (Duke, 2019). Other studies show that early literacy and math skills significantly predict children's subsequent academic achievement (Pace et al., 2019; Vernon et al., 2019). Other skills that are moderately predictive of later literacy achievement include concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and

visual processing (Bowers, 2020). These five skills are usually more predictive of literacy achievement at the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade (Nguyen, 2019).

Various early literacy skills can impact later academic achievement across content areas. For example, the National Institute for Literacy (2008) argues that vocabulary skills in early grades are strong predictors of future literacy achievement. Others contend that letter word identification and word attack skills are the most important predictors of reading comprehension at the end of first grade, especially for low-income students (Hall et al., 2021). On the other hand, vocabulary was the best predictor of reading comprehension at the end of the second and third-grades (Spillner, 2021). Gersten et al. (2020) posited that vocabulary scores were a significant predictor of proficient readers and that the predictive influence of early print-related and phonemic awareness skills diminished over time. In addition, early reading and pre-reading skills were related to math abilities in elementary school, even after family background and sociodemographic factors were controlled (Clerkin et al., 2018). In another study, kindergarten reading predicted math achievement in the first, third, and fifth grades (Vernon et al., 2019).

Typically, reading instruction is delivered through direct face-to-face instruction (Jensen, 2021; National Reading Panel, 2000). Given the diversity of students within a classroom, traditional whole-class instruction, as well as a one-size-fits-all approach, does not account for student's differences and, consequently, fails to reduce the gap between struggling and proficient readers (Beach et al., 2021; Dietrichson et al., 2021). Teachers teach concepts and skills but explicitly teach reading and writing strategies, ensuring students have opportunities to apply these skills and strategies to meaningful texts (Wilkes et al., 2020). Struggling students benefit from explicit instruction in critical areas such as decoding, fluency, and vocabulary (Kennedy, 2018). Effective instruction should be differentiated and guided by continuous assessment results

(Birgisdottiret al., 2020). Literacy instruction and intervention should take place daily to assist students struggling with developing literacy skills (Stephens, 2022). To reduce the high number of students struggling to read at grade level, alternative or supplemental lesson structures have emerged, aiming to improve students' reading proficiency (Sutter et al., 2019; Whaley et al., 2019; Yakimowski et al., 2016). Some examples are skills-based structured small groups focused on the components of foundational literacy (Dietrichson et al., 2021; Ortiz et al., 2021; Whaley, 2019;), acceleration practices (Lambert et al., 2020), and adaptive literacy-based computer practice (Beach et al., 2021; Sutter et al., 2019).

Non-Academic Skills Impacting Literacy

Student academic and nonacademic behaviors predict the educational future as early as elementary school (Parker et al., 2018). Early academic literacy skills are the most significant predictor of future success (Cameron et al., 2019). Even though literacy skills directly influence learning, some evidence indicates that reading proficiency in early elementary grades can also impact learning in indirect ways (McClelland et al., 2019). Early years learning related skills, such as self-regulation and social competence, have also been demonstrated to affect students' future academic trajectories (Wolf et al., 2019). Early social skills are linked to future literacy achievement (Cooper et al., 2014; Miles et al., 2006). Social-emotional skills have been shown to impact reading and math scores as far as middle school (Sutter et al., 2019). The relationship between social skills and literacy found that poor literacy skills in the first and third-grades predicted relatively high aggressive behavior in the third and fifth grades (Korucu et al., 2020).

The National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort examined the impact of kindergarten reading and social skills on academic success in elementary school (Cooper et al., 2014). Results suggest that kindergarten reading, and social skills were associated with fifth grade academic success in math and reading after the researchers controlled other

predictors of achievement, such as gender, minority status, household income, and current social skills (Cooper et al., 2014). Students with a combination of low to average reading skills and higher social skills performed better on later academic assessments than children with similar reading skills but lower levels of social skills during kindergarten (Hein et al., 2013). On the other hand, children who were very strong early readers performed similarly on fifth grade academic assessments regardless of the level of social skills (Wolf et al., 2019).

Evidence suggests that cognitive control, or children's ability to shift behavior in response to changing environmental demands, contributes to academic success (Denham et al., 2010). Cognitive control improves rapidly between the preschool and elementary school years. One study revealed that cognitive control predicted children's academic performance on math and school-based assessments (Hall et al., 2021). Other studies highlight that self-regulation skills are related to mathematical skills in school-age children; the ability to shift behavior predicts reading and math performance in each of the three primary grades (Clerkin et al., 2018; Coldren, 2013). This line of research attests to the role that mental flexibility and control play in education. These findings suggest that a combined focus on developing literacy and social skills is most likely to benefit all children, regardless of background, and provide lasting impacts through elementary school and beyond.

Importance of Reading By Third-Grade

Early reading performance is a strong predictor of later school success. Students who demonstrate early reading difficulties are at greater risk for a wide variety of problems, from low achievement in other academic areas to dropping out and incarceration (Duke, 2019; Weyer, 2019; Williams, 2021). Reading is the gateway to knowledge, the greatest equalizer, and the most critical academic transferable skill. Sending a child to fourth grade unprepared to read is educational malpractice (Muir, 2022). Some argue that there is nothing magical about reading by

third-grade. Second grade is also predictive of later success through language and emerging literacy measures in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (Dietrichson et al., 2021; Duke, 2019; Jensen, 2021). Others contend that third-grade is the linchpin because of the prevalent notion that children first learn to read and then, beyond third-grade, read to learn (Muir, 2022; Weyer et al., 2019). Third-grade is typically treated as more important than any other grade due to it being the first-year students take a standardized reading test (Baldner, 2021; Sutter et al., 2019). Doing well on standardized tests requires far more than reading words (Jensen, 2021). Standardized tests are based on rigorous state standards that include long passages of literary and informational text followed by questions about the text and the intended meaning of words.

Due to the existing range of literacy intricacies, strengths, and limitations, it would be rational to assume that schools align interventions and systems of support based on students' diverse needs. However, in too many United States schools, elementary students who perform poorly on reading screeners and assessments are placed in the same intervention (Dietrichson et al., 2021; Whaley et al., 2019). Compare this practice to administering a vision screener and providing everyone who fails it with the same eyeglass prescription (Wright et al., 2016). Educators who teach literacy are compared to emergency room (ER) doctors needing comprehensive knowledge, skills, expertise, and the ability to manage and coordinate numerous situations simultaneously (Duke, 2019). Stakes are high in classrooms, just like in the ER, given that students who are at risk for reading difficulties are linked with critical long-term effects; dropping out of school, which in turn is associated with higher rates of incarceration, unemployment, and chronic health problems (Greenberg et al., 2007; Hernandez, 2011; McFarland et al., 2018; Rabiner et al., 2016). The efforts to improve the achievement of struggling readers require an emphasis on daily practices that develop solid foundational literacy

skills. Additionally, a focus on targeted literacy practices is essential to closing literacy gaps before students move to fourth grade and the gaps grow wider and skills become more complex.

Literacy Gaps in Underrepresented Populations

The United States has significant gaps between its highest and lowest performing readers, particularly for minority students. (Duke, 2019). African American and Hispanic/Latino children enter kindergarten an average of 7-12 months behind in reading skills, with more significant gaps for low-income students. (Bernstein et al., 2019). Students from homes where a language other than English is spoken and from a lower socioeconomic status exhibit different language skills and educational trajectories compared to middle-class peers from monolingual English-speaking homes (Kennedy, 2018). One of the most alarming conclusions from current literacy studies found that students that did not have a strong literacy foundation in the early years seldom recover (Gilmour et al., 2019; Muir, 2022; Ratcliff et al., 2016). Compared to other modern countries, the average reading gap between students with and without disabilities was equivalent to 3.3 years of reading growth (Gilmour et al., 2019). The significance of this gap is especially troubling given the latest NAEP (2019) statistics that 65% of fourth grade students and 66% of eighth grade students without a specific learning disability are performing below grade level in reading. The reported data is based on pre-pandemic percentages without school interruptions.

The effects of literacy gaps grow immensely over time if not adequately targeted. Students deemed to have behavior and motivation concerns or needing special education services are typically excluded from instructional time to address these issues. Exclusion from core content is used as a discipline practice contributing to racial gaps in academic achievement (Gregory et al., 2010). Literacy gaps grow exponentially if not addressed with research-based strategies before third-grade (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014; Reardon et al., 2019).

Disadvantaged students rarely have rich literacy opportunities due to limited literacy resources at home; this often impacts vocabulary development leading to delayed literacy growth (Morrow, 2012).

On the contrary, students from affluent or high socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to have an advantage due to various literacy-related resources and experiences that prepare students for reading-related success before entering kindergarten (Kieffer, 2012). Compared with White students, researchers have documented lower reading and math proficiency among Hispanic children at the beginning of kindergarten (Reardon et al., 2012). Students who enter elementary grades with low achievement remain well behind typical and high-achieving students, particularly in the upper elementary grades (Scammacca et al., 2020). Interventions can potentially accelerate growth; however, strategies need to be robust, targeted, and consistent to close the achievement of average students (Tunmer et al., 2019). In the last four decades, not only has the income gap widened, the achievement gap among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds has increased (Burris et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2014).

When faced with repeated academic struggles, students become frustrated, decreasing self-confidence, contributing to a higher rate of school disruption. Miles et al. (2006) linked low literacy achievement in the elementary grades to later aggression beyond third-grade. Fergus (2016) identified inconsistencies in tracking and educators' referral methods in overrepresenting minority student groups who receive special education services. Some teachers perceive special education services as a pull-out program that would fix students performing below grade level (Bean et al., 2012). There is a critical need to understand how to address existing literacy gaps for students to experience more tremendous success beyond third-grade, especially for underrepresented populations.

Across every state in the United States, students from low-income households are less likely to read at grade level when compared to students from higher-income families, and in nearly all states, the gap has climbed during the last decade (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013a; Reardon, 2011; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Scammacca et al., 2020). Closing literacy gaps would assist in breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty while improving our country's social equality, economic competitiveness, and national security (Muir, 2022). The United States has enormous gaps between its highest and lowest-performing readers (Whaley, 2019). Equitable learning opportunities are not provided for all demographic groups (Duke, 2019). Access to high-quality pre-kindergarten education is not equally distributed (Claessens et al., 2014; Duke, 2019). Participation in high-quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs, including child care, pre-kindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start, can increase children's language and literacy skills before school entry (Weyer et al., 2019). Early literacy knowledge begins to develop before students enter kindergarten, yet pre-kindergarten and kindergarten are not mandatory or fully funded in many states (Williams, 2021). States include essential standards to be taught and mastered by the end of kindergarten; however, students are not required to attend public school until the age of 7, which is identified as first grade (Williams, 2021). There is evidence that exposure to academic content in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten for students who lack strong foundations can benefit student learning (Claessens et al., 2014; Clements & Sarama, 2011; Engel et al., 2016). Academically oriented early elementary experiences can help children who did not attend pre-kindergarten catch up with peers (Magnuson et al., 2007). Unequal access to high-quality pre-kindergarten opportunities for underrepresented populations continues to be a challenge.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic generated major interruptions for students and school communities. School systems responded to the crisis in various ways, some suspending in-class instruction in favor of online learning. In contrast, other districts moved to a hybrid model that combined socially distanced in-class instruction with distance learning. Some districts continued to provide in-class instruction with smaller classes and shorter school days to allow for social distancing (Diliberti & Kaufman, 2020). Education transitioned to a home environment from about March 2020 to the end of the 2019-2020 school year. There were significant variations in the timing of responses to the pandemic based on the region's spikes (Bailey et al., 2021). States like New York, where contagious levels spiked earlier, experienced closures more rapidly than other parts of the nation. There were legitimate causes for differing judgments across the United States, including differing risks related to local demographics or population density and ambiguity about the public health effects of in-person learning environments (Goldhaber et al., 2022). During this halt to regular instruction, the amount of time students spent learning decreased compared to the types of instructional lessons and activities that take place in the spring to ensure students finish the school year strong.

Through the height of the pandemic, there were many extreme cases in which students did not access any materials provided by teachers (Goldstein et al., 2020). Lack of resources, technology, and high-speed internet were a few factors impeding access to instruction. School closures affected all students, but school closures disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable students due to unequal access, further exacerbating the considerable disparities between learning opportunities for the most vulnerable students (Lambert et al., 2020). For many years, students in the United States of America have not met grade level expectations, disproportionately affecting socioeconomically disadvantaged students. According to Javurek et

al. (2020), the pandemic highlighted and intensified these disparities as it impacted historically underserved communities harder, and the digital divide was more prevalent within those areas. K-12 summative assessment administration was impossible due to school closures; therefore, data from the 2019-2020 school year is unavailable (Wyse et al., 2020).

The United States will be reckoning with the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic for years to come (Education in a Pandemic, 2021). However, one situation that requires immediate attention is that remote learning worsened the racial and socio-economic achievement gap. Crowe (2020) emphasized that the achievement gap is an educational phenomenon where students of color and students from disadvantaged backgrounds consistently perform inferior to white students academically due to disparate opportunities both in and outside the classroom. America's long history of racial oppression continues to be impacted. Black and Hispanic families are more likely to reside in urban areas with greater COVID-19 infection rates, forcing school districts to move to remote instruction (Education in a Pandemic, 2021). Consequently, students of color disproportionately attended schools that did not offer in-person learning during the height of the pandemic. These students are typically from low-income families; parents cannot stay home from work, have childcare, or afford reliable internet or access to technology (Council of Great Schools, 2020). The data demonstrate that remote learning will have the harshest effects on the districts with the lowest historical test scores and fewest resources (Crow, 2022).

In 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) performed a specific administration of the NAEP reading evaluation for students who were nine years of age. This assessment aimed to analyze student achievement during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The average scores for students who were nine years of age in 2022 declined by 5 points in reading

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). NAEP (2022) stated this is the most significant average record decrease in reading since 1990. These scores show regression to existing low literacy proficiency levels in the United States. Goldhaber et al. (2022) argued that districts that transitioned to fully remote settings show lower levels of achievement growth for all students but more so for students attending high-poverty schools. Minority students and those with special educational needs were at greater risk of widening educational gaps due to the lack of face-to-face interactions, resources, and support based on individual needs (Panagouli, 2021). School closures are expected to reverse the slight growth in narrowing literacy gaps within the last decade. Learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year are catastrophic for those already below grade level (Lambert et al., 2020). The projections suggest that school closures will widen the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and peers by 36% (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020). Students returned to school with as little as 70 percent of the learning gains typically made in reading (NWEA, 2020). Even under normal circumstances, it is uncommon for students to achieve a year's worth of growth in one year. Hurricane Katrina caused significant disruptions to the education system in 2005, demonstrating that getting students back on track is a long-term challenge (Javurek et al., 2020).

Younger students faced more difficulties during online learning, and some students' reading skills stopped developing when schools closed (Dominigue et al., 2021). Unfinished learning has the potential to show up differently across grades and subjects, with intense recovery needs concentrated in the early grades and among already struggling students (Council of Great City Schools, 2020). It is then critical to focus on potential gaps in a foundational skill; oral reading fluency (ORF). ORF is the ability to read text aloud fluently and is highly predictive of reading comprehension (Baker et al., 2008; Reschly et al., 2009) and the best overall measure

of reading competency in early grades (Fuchs et al., 2001). The ORF results from a study of 111 school districts across 22 states show evident learning loss for younger students, particularly in grades second and third (Dominigue et al., 2021). Others argue that assessments and intervention are not enough; social-emotional learning needs to be at the forefront to ensure students succeed academically (Goldhauber et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Students who stayed home throughout the height of the pandemic were physically less active, depressed, bored, and experienced less engagement with their peers, friends, and teachers (Brazendale et al., 2017). The connection between lifestyle changes and psychosocial stress produced by home confinement may have a harmful effect on children's behavior (Wang et al., 2020). Studies show that students' mental health through the pandemic exhibited intensified irritability, distraction, anxiety, disturbed sleep, and appetitive disturbances (Singh et al., 2020). This generation of learners will cope with the loss of academic and social-emotional skills for the foreseeable future (Liberty, 2022). Since the human brain primarily evolves through processing social and emotional information, teaching students how to utilize these parts of the brain allows learning to become more accessible, enjoyable, and effective (Bailey et al., 2021). Social-emotional programs are at the core of bouncing back from the pandemic. Javurek et al. (2020) argued that younger students will need more support and time to master skills foundational to future learning. The abrupt change to instructional environments for younger learners during the pandemic can have long-term consequences for students' future. School districts need to understand the degree of learning loss associated with each student to provide appropriate acceleration practices that will not further exacerbate literacy gaps.

School Leadership Training

The role of the principal has shifted (Bellibas et al., 2021). Principals were once building

managers, but today are leaders held responsible for improving student achievement. Management is concerned primarily with getting the work of the organization completed in an efficient manner (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021). Managers typically focus on the organization's day-to-day functions, giving primary attention to getting the job done (Tobin, 2014). On the other hand, leadership focuses on the future and what needs to be accomplished for the school to succeed by focusing on vision, empowerment, and a clear plan for reaching the goals (Lalonde, 2010). An effective building manager is no longer sufficient. The principalship consists of an ever-increasing variety of roles making the daily tasks inherently complex and the demands increasingly fragmented, rapid-fire, and voluminous (Lunenburg, 2010). Yet, many of the university-based programs designed to prepare the next generation of educational leaders are engaged in a counterproductive race to the bottom, in which the institution is competing for students by lowering admission standards, watering down coursework, and offering faster and less demanding degrees (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). In the era of accountability, principals are expected to be effective in all areas, which is out of reach for an increasing number of principals (Augustine-Shaw et al., 2016). Schools face pressure to have all children meet high standards. States and districts increasingly recognize that successful school reform depends on having principals well-prepared to change schools and improve instruction, not just managing buildings and budgets (Corcoran, 2017). The school principal, more than any other staff member, is in the position to ensure that effective teaching and learning are happening in every classroom. Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors as an influence on learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

It is the work principals do that enables teachers to be effective not just the traits teachers bring but the ability to use the knowledge in a high-functioning organization that produces

student success (Cosner et al., 2015). The leader recruits and retains high-quality staff serving as the number one reason teachers decide whether or not to stay in a school; the decision is based on the quality of administrative support (Cruz-Gonzalez et al., 2021). Unfortunately, principals are not always prepared for these demands due to a lack of training and preparation. The research identified some common flaws in principal preparation programs; curricula that fail to consider the needs of districts and diverse student bodies, weak connections between theory and practice, faculty with little or no experience as school leaders, and internships that are poorly designed and insufficiently connected to the rest of the curriculum and lack opportunities to experience authentic leadership situations (Jerdborg, 2022). Many programs admit nearly everyone who decides to apply, often with little input from the districts that may eventually hire them (Goldrick, 2016). The admission process fails to probe for evidence of a candidate's ability to work well with teachers or in challenging school settings (Gates et al., 2019). The process fails to reveal the candidate's resilience, integrity, and belief in all children's ability to learn, qualities central to a school leader's eventual success (Mitgang & The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Many programs fail to screen out applicants whose primary motive is not to lead a school but to receive the monetary increase or promotion that follows an advanced degree (Mitgang & The Wallace Foundation 2012). To tackle this issue, states have adopted standards for school leader licenses, and each state has adopted requirements for school leader certification (Mitgang & The Wallace Foundation, 2012). The school diversity within the United States and unique circumstances within states, regions, and community levels cause educational leadership preparation programs to be challenged to effectively prepare leaders to lead in a multitude of contexts (Sanchez et al., 2019).

Through a historical study of educational leadership, it was discovered that the position of the leader is constantly being reshaped and adapted to the current social, cultural, and economic circumstances (Charalampous 2022). Educational leadership is a dependent mechanism that varies based on the specific circumstances of the individual campus (Alhouti, 2020). School leaders would then need increased experiential learning opportunities, assignments applicable to daily leader tasks, and increased cultural awareness and diversity training in preparation programs (Dickens et al., 2021). Principal training programs aim to prepare school leaders to be ready to explore and execute research-based practices in school settings. However, educational administration programs only sometimes provide activities and opportunities for principal candidates to learn how to address the daily leadership and management tasks that confront today's principals (Tobin, 2014). If equipped with this lens, future principals would have the tools and ability to promote ongoing cycles of continuous improvement and challenges for PK-12 students and staff. The scholar-practitioner lens would then begin taking place in the administrator preparation master's-level coursework rather than only when pursuing doctoral-level degrees (Bowers, 2017). These future leaders would identify and practice potential solutions for problems or concerns at future sites through real-life scenarios and problems of practice typically encountered by principals. School principals must constantly juggle the many hats worn each day. The School Principal as Leader (2013) argued that effective principals perform five key practices well: (a) shaping a vision of academic success for all students; (b) creating a climate hospitable to education; (c) cultivating leadership in others; (d) improving instruction; (e) managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement. School principals must have the training and tools necessary to confront the daily challenges school leaders encounter continuously.

Effective principals engage in instructional-focused interactions with teachers through feedback and coaching, support for professional development and professional learning communities, engagement in collaborative decision-making and planning time, teacher evaluations, and engagement in schoolwide planning and change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Principals manage personnel and resources strategically through hiring, staff assignments and placements, and attention to teacher retention (Grissom et al., 2021). Yet the current research on principal preparation and professional development focuses on broad, poorly defined measures, such as principals' readiness to lead or leadership abilities (Goldring et al., 2020). Preparing principals to lead effectively is imperative for student and teacher success. Principals are a critical school-level factor influencing student outcomes, including student achievement, graduation rates, and attendance rates (Bartanen, 2020; Coelli & Green, 2012; Grissom et al., 2015; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004). Given the scope of principal effects across an entire school, it is difficult to envision an investment with a higher ceiling on its potential return than a successful effort to improve principal leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Faculty and other leaders within principal preparation programs should model effective scenarios, including approaching a continuous improvement cycle based on diverse populations and achievement gaps.

Once principals are on the job, only some receive ongoing professional learning that reflects changing student demographics, new technology, evolving instructional strategies, or large-scale reform initiatives aligned to learning needs (Rubin et al., 2021). When principals participate in principal-focused professional development, it is primarily centered on the what of district reform, such as what is expected for district teacher evaluation policies, and not on the how of leading change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Other research shows that

comprehensive clinical experiences linked to coursework assist principal candidates in addressing context-specific problems and the needs of special population groups, including students with disabilities, English-language learners, and students from economically disadvantaged families (Fusarelli et al., 2019). Developing partnerships with principal preparation programs that include genuine engagement and incorporate district needs into the recruitment, training, and clinical experiences is the most effective (Goldring et al., 2020). Unfortunately, such efforts remain limited. All too often, programs still need to catch up with the evolving role of the principal.

Literacy Training

Principals are instructional leaders who play a critical position in affecting student learning (Fullan, 2014). Principals are second only to teachers in terms of impact on student achievement (Park et al., 2018). Principals with strong literacy content knowledge are correlated with schools that show an increase in literacy student achievement scores (Grissom et al., 2021). Yet, principal preparation programs do not include literacy training (Bean et al., 2018). The most effective principals are avid learners who develop collaborative school cultures in which the principal participates in learning with teachers and focuses on implementing high-quality instructional approaches that increase student achievement (DuFour, 2016; Eaker & Marzano, 2020; Fullan, 2014). A principal cannot provide instructional guidance, support, or feedback for subject matter unfamiliar to the leader. McGeehan et al. (2020) reviewed 100 educational leadership programs and found that only seven university programs required a course that emphasized literacy as a topic within the course descriptions. To serve as an effective leader of instruction, principals need content knowledge that will allow them to provide actionable feedback (Seashore Louis et al., 2010).

Elementary education and early childhood preservice programs expect candidates to complete at least one, if not several, literacy courses, but not all principals have a background in early childhood or elementary education (Grissom et al., 2019). Many principals come from secondary backgrounds, for example, math, history, science, music, or physical education. (Bean et al., 2018). Secondary education programs concentrate on the subject of study and do not emphasize literacy (McGeehan et al., 2020). Based on the lack of literacy courses required in nationally accredited educational administration programs, it is likely that many principals need to prepare to serve in the role of literacy instructional leader (Thessin, 2019). Therefore, without formal coursework focused on literacy instruction, principals may enter the field without the knowledge needed to make curriculum and instruction decisions. Principals support student achievement but may be unfamiliar with effective literacy practices and lack the ability to create or identify effective professional development that will help teachers improve literacy instruction (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The instructional leadership role is critical to a principal's job to ensure all students receive effective classroom literacy instruction (Kindall et al., 2018). Therefore, principal university preparation programs must consist of courses that allow all principal candidates to establish the content knowledge necessary to support classroom instruction.

Teacher Perceptions and Expectations

Teachers' perceptions of students influence how encouragement and expectations are provided for students. When a teacher holds a student in high regard and promotes and supports that student frequently, the student might, in turn, be more motivated and eager to learn in class (Brandmiller et al., 2020). Personal biases and beliefs about students' ability to learn at high levels may be inadvertently communicated using words, physical responses, behaviors,

intonation, and actions (Bambaeeroo et al., 2017). Being aware of biases, beliefs, and perceptions involves constant self-reflection and a schoolwide emphasis on a culture of high expectations for all students (Brandmiller et al., 2020).

Teacher biases, perceptions, and expectations profoundly influence closing literacy gaps (Bambaeeroo et al., 2017; Kapasi et al., 2022; Merga, 2020; Ratcliff et al., 2016). Although teachers' views and beliefs are vital for struggling learners, students are greatly motivated by the messages received from significant individuals about personal ability (Saphier, 2016). For schools to close literacy gaps, educators play an essential role in finding a solution. Decades of research about the effects of teacher perceptions conclude that teacher perceptions and expectations influence students' academic achievement (Conn et al., 1968; Jussim et al., 2005; Gentrup, et al., 2018; Murdock-Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018; Ready and Wright, 2011). Researchers have studied how perceptions differ according to student characteristics such as socioeconomic status, demographics, or gender (Dusek and Joseph, 1983; Jussim, et al., 1996). Some educators believe students need to be held more accountable for individual success and that the achievement gap is not in the teacher's circle of control (Ratcliff et al., 2016). As personal class-based values and beliefs inform teachers' expectations about appropriate classroom behavior, these beliefs can shape perceptions of student behaviors in the classroom (Kapasi et al., 2022).

For African American and Latino students who face entrenched marginalization and discrimination in schools, assignment to a teacher of another race or ethnicity may result in being perceived as more disruptive in class, a greater chance of being referred to the front office, and a greater chance of receiving exclusionary discipline for the same offenses (Okonofua et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2017). Some teachers perceive female students, students with higher

socioeconomic status, and students who do not come from immigrant backgrounds as having a higher learning motivation and therefore higher cognitive skills (Brandmiller et al., 2020). When a schoolwide focus is a shared commitment to student achievement, teachers no longer blame outside influences but instead generate joint responsibility to make the best instructional decisions for all students (Bean et al., 2012). Students who struggle with reading are typically children of color and often live in poverty (Khalifa, 2018). These students have internalized consistent messages regarding individual potential and have suffered from academic gaps throughout school experiences (Saphier, 2016). Closing the literacy gap would mean motivating and changing students' thoughts about assumed low ability (Redding, 2019).

Focusing on specific approaches that assist students in fostering a growth mindset is highly effective in reducing students' low expectations or low confidence (Kapasi et al., 2022). Students benefit from structured risk-taking lessons, which allow for and encourage mistakes as a part of the learning process (Margolis et al., 2016). For shared risk-taking to improve student outcomes, teachers must let go of outdated instructional practices that require students to be confined to a desk (Brandmiller et al., 2020). Instead, teachers shift expectations that lead to understanding and adopting culturally relevant pedagogy that, as a result, improves student-to-teacher relationships (Celeste et al., 2019). A teacher's influence extends outside the classroom when focused on organizational influence by advocating for changes to school policies or practices that improve student learning opportunities (Redding 2019).

Closing literacy gaps would require shifting educators' beliefs, expectations, and biases about students' abilities, holding themselves to high levels of accountability, and working collaboratively to address gaps. In the absence of a single broadly applicable and successful intervention that can be applied with universal success, more needs to be known about teacher

perceptions of struggling student barriers and the implications for curriculum delivery (Merga, 2020). The core concepts of teacher collaboration are a focus on student learning through a collaborative climate, a professional learning community, professional development, and fostering a culture of change within teaching practices (Coban et al., 2020). Districts attempting to address achievement gaps without focusing on the culture that fosters and reinforces these gaps will unsurprisingly lead to unsustainable results (Fergus, 2016). Teachers perceive little control over factors that impact existing achievement gaps (i.e., parenting techniques, student misbehavior, lack of student motivation, and low family income) (Ratcliff et al., 2016). These factors can lead to misidentifying students for specific services through disproportionality. Disproportionality becomes the over and/or underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities compared to overall enrollment (Ahram et al., 2011); these are commonly correlated with student discipline, motivation, identification of special education, and advanced courses.

Teachers are vital to this essential work. According to Sebastian et al. (2016), there are statistically indirect pathways from principal leadership to teacher leadership to learning climate and student achievement in primary schools. Teacher leadership associated with student learning indirectly influences student achievement through school process variables such as school capacity and school climate (Sebastian et al., 2016; Sebastian et al., 2017). Principals' effects on student achievement are primarily indirect, coming mainly through efforts to recruit, develop, support, and retain a talented teaching staff and create conditions for them to deliver effective instruction (Grissom et al., 2021). However, teacher effectiveness is central to student achievement. A student learns from a school with an effective principal partly because the principal makes it more likely to be exposed to effective teachers that believe all students can succeed (Berry et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Grissom et al., 2021).

Shared Leadership

There is increasing advocacy related to the advantages of implementing shared leadership to improve team performance outcomes (DeWitt 2017, 2019, 2022; Dufour et al., 2016; Eaker & Marzano, 2020; Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Researchers continue to search for actions that one can use to increase student achievement. Leaders in the current era confront countless challenges in the principal required roles related to operations, safety and security, instruction, evaluations, and state and federal accountability (Bellibas et al., 2021). School leaders strive to uncover the greatest research-based method and improvement strategy for schools. Curriculum revisions, updated standards, assessments, and teacher growth plans have created expectations for teachers, students, and staff that have jeopardized a culture of efficacy (Prelli, 2016). Leaders maximize shared leadership when focusing on the staff's experience. The essence of educators' shared commitment defines successful leadership teams, and this shared commitment becomes a powerful unit of collective performance (Amels, 2021; Boru, 2020; Goodall, 2013). Effective school leaders build a collaborative leadership culture with school personnel to encourage and maintain a shared sense of purpose (Brown et al., 2019).

Shared leadership is advantageous as it is challenging for a leader to have all the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to lead every aspect of the job (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016). Numerous research studies have shown the positive impact of utilizing shared leadership and debated that it produces increased team-level performance gains compared to old-fashioned hierarchical control structures (Amels et al., 2021; Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Bellibas et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2019; Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Liu et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2016). Sharing leadership engages all team members to distribute influence to one another. Shared leadership arises when team members take on leadership behaviors, investigate root causes, and discover

solutions that influence the team and maximize effectiveness (Northouse, 2019). Team members step forward when circumstances call for contributing the leadership necessary.

Shared leadership allows team members to respond to complex issues. When tasks are complex, there is a lower likelihood of one individual being an expert on all task components (Coban et al., 2020). As task complexity increases, the benefits of shared leadership become more apparent. Shared leadership is positively related to team performance creating a significant positive relationship between the two and supporting the claim of its benefits (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016; Donohoo et al., 2018; Gichuhi, 2021). When theory and capacity embrace the intricacies of shared leadership, the extent of shared leadership practices, team performance, and relationships become powerful. School principals who utilize shared leadership practices apply an organizational structure of teachers participating in subteams (Amels et al., 2021; Grissom et al., 2021). The teachers choose the area of focus, which varies from operational to instructional. Members of the team distribute tasks, so it does not become the responsibility of one individual.

When leadership is distributed, the relationship within the team becomes the shared foundation. Allowing individuals to choose an area of strength increases efficacy because success leads to deliberate actions, fosters collective efficacy through modeling and expertise, and jointly deepens knowledge (Gichuhi, 2021). Shared leadership promotes accountability and success. Teams that share leadership roles contribute to the teams' high expectations; each assumes several responsibilities that are clearly understood in the name of student achievement (Eaker et al., 2020; Goodall, 2013). Shared leadership represents a condition of mutual influence embedded in the interactions among team members that can significantly improve the team and organizational performance (Karriker et al., 2017).

Organizational Resilience

Resilience is a person's capacity to adapt successfully to stressful situations and maintain mental well-being in the face of adversity (Limon et al., 2021). Resilience also suggests that individuals cope with challenges and turn them into an advantage to improve a current position or situation (Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2015). In the current educational era, individuals and school systems are also expected to build resilience to survive uncertainty, endure crises, and foster success (Duchek, 2020). Resilience benefits organizations to use cognitive, emotional, relational, and structural resources to resolve uncertainty and consists of flexible, transformational processes (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007). Crises provide organizations with the opportunity to develop new connections and reach new stakeholders (Chewning et al., 2013; Pal et al., 2014; Teixeira et al., 2013) since resilience is about precise analysis of crises (Korkusuz et al., 2015) and transforming adversity into a benefit (Duchek, 2020; Gunsel et al., 2018). Resilience is of fundamental importance for schools because resilient schools will produce successful outcomes related to student achievement in the long term compared to those demonstrating a small number of resilience attributes. Efforts to increase resilience within an organization can be a powerful approach to improving staff commitment and closing literacy gaps.

The complex business environment has put significant physical, psychological, and emotional pressure on employees (Putra, 2022). Psychologists have emphasized the necessity to investigate and develop the capacity for employees to adapt and remain functional in constantly shifting circumstances (King, 2016). The need for constant adaptation and flexibility has brought focus to employee resilience (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Research reveals that resilient individuals can deal with stress and cope with adverse conditions more effectively (Meneghel et al., 2016b). Other studies suggest that organizations with resilient employees are more likely to

thrive in uncertain business environments and perform better financially (Shin et al., 2012). In addition, resilience has been linked to increased job performance and employee satisfaction (Meneghel et al., 2016a; Youssef et al., 2007). Britt et al. (2016) argued that the capacity to be resilient is intrinsic to each individual, although the capacity to demonstrate resilience at an opportune moment is dependent upon situational circumstances. The support available to an individual within the organization, such as peer support, leader or mentor support, plays a vital role in showcasing resilience (Luthans et al., 2006). Organizational support creates a positive emotional experience for individuals, strengthening resilience (Cohn et al., 2009; Fredrickson et al., 2003). According to Meneghel et al. (2016b), positive emotions protect individuals against anxiety and enhance positivity amid unfavorable conditions. A key determinant of employee emotions in the workplace is the individual's relationship with the leader (Harland et al., 2005). Studies suggest that the leader can shield and counteract negative attitudes toward the organization and improve positive sentiments, thus enhancing staff performance (Eisenberger et al., 2010). These findings imply that there is specific leader behavior that influences resilience. The leader’s actions become instrumental in cultivating resilience among team members and depend on the leadership style.

Through their leadership style, school principals become influential figures during times of uncertainty, highlighting the need for schools to embrace a climate of initiative (Limon et al., 2021). A school with stakeholders taking the initiative is likely to have higher organizational resilience because they are proactive and focused on overcoming barriers to achieve organizational goals (Yukl, 2018). However, it is impossible for principals to create and maintain school resilience alone in today's dynamic and turbulent environment. Therefore, principals should share responsibilities with other stakeholders as much as possible. Shared leadership can

significantly generate a climate of initiative and improve school performance because teachers who assume some of the responsibilities and take the initiative are more likely to develop positive feelings and thoughts toward their schools (Limon et al., 2021). Shared leadership generates substantial trust, commitment to the organization, and persistence regardless of the barriers and challenges encountered (Berraies et al., 2021; Gichuhi, 2021; Margolis et al., 2016; Sedrine, 2019). Shared leadership is an interactive, collective, and evolving process involving many individuals and is reciprocally influenced by the context in which it occurs (Mulford et al., 2011; Park et al., 2018). Staff members who engage in decision-making through shared leadership and resilience create positive organizational outcomes (Sedrine et al., 2020). Organizational resilience is influenced by shared leadership; it allows teams to bounce back after disturbances or disruptive events and increase the capacity to adapt and handle such events in the future (Liu et al., 2021). Team members can rely on one another through a shared commitment that allows for overcoming barriers. Shared commitment enables teams to collaborate with colleagues, resulting in increased loyalty to ensure organizational success (Tengblad et al., 2018). The leadership style adopted can influence an organization's resiliency (Jung, 2019; Teo, et al., 2017). When leaders ensure the involvement and contribution of relevant stakeholders to the decision-making process, they nurture the resilience of organizations by building trust, empowering, motivating, and creating commitment (Barasa et al., 2018). It can be anticipated that shared leadership can contribute to the resilience capacity of organizations since it can make organizations more productive and responsive (Harris, 2011).

Shared leadership may increase understanding of how to improve school issues. The literature offers evidence for the positive associations between shared leadership and teachers' organizational commitment (Akdemir et al., 2017), trust in colleagues and principals (Beycioğlu

et al., 2012; Mascall et al., 2008), school culture and teachers' self-efficacy (DeMarco, 2018), collective teacher efficacy and organizational behavior (Mascall et al., 2008). Consequently, Al-Harthi et al. (2017) found that shared school leadership is a significant predictor of school effectiveness, including efficiency, adaptability, and flexibility. Limon et al. (2021) contended that schools, where teachers take the initiative, can be more resilient. The demands and constant changes posed on educational leaders require staff to work collaboratively to adapt and persevere through challenges. Marzano et al. (2018) posited that leaders think and constantly learn in high-reliability organizations by empowering individuals to prevent failures. In another study, Kershner et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of distributing authority as a precursor to an adaptive change in schools. Coban et al. (2020) argued that shared leadership supports organizational resilience, which increases efficiency, and the necessary changes to adapt swiftly based on changing circumstances. Leadership is not equivalent to a position or a person; leadership is the process of influencing and mobilizing people toward desired change (Gichuhi, 2021). Schools need to be flexible, adaptive, and responsive to enhance organizational resilience capacity in case of crises and challenges. As put forward by previous research, shared school leadership may result in qualities that can boost resilience. These findings show that shared leadership may result in desirable outcomes for closing literacy gaps.

An essential element of a resilient organization is a loyal workforce that gives maximum effort (Harthi et al., 2017), demonstrating the potential power of initiative climate as an antecedent of resiliency. Although, the initiative climate is described by self-initiated and proactive actions that overcome obstacles and allow for the achievement of goals (Hahn et al., 2012). When team members embrace behaviors in favor of the organization, it may impact the overall resilience capacity within the organization since organizations rely on the actions taken

by individuals during adversity (Limon et al., 2021). During challenging times, performing the duties and responsibilities in the job descriptions may not suffice. A cross-sectional study conducted in the aviation sector revealed that organizational citizenship behaviors significantly enhance corporate resilience (Gabriel, 2015). Kim (2020) found that organizational resilience was positively associated with employees' intentions for meeting goals, adaptivity, and proactivity. In the school setting, Day (2014) stated that the most distinctive aspect of resilient schools compared to non-resilient ones is the involvement of all stakeholders. Therefore, it can be concluded that when school teams take the initiative, resilience creates positive student outcomes.

The consistent change and uncertainty in schools make organizational resilience critical. School leaders play a facilitating role in developing school communication and information networks (MacBeath et al., 2005). School culture should be conducive to shared leadership (Printy et al., 2020) because teaching and distributed leadership play a vital role in how the school climate fosters collaboration, respect, and trust. Effective teaching and distributed leadership help school principals build respect and trust among teachers (Liu et al., 2016) because distributed leadership ensures that all school stakeholders can benefit from support systems. An environment where mutual trust and effective communication exist allows teachers to take more initiative, which can also contribute to organizational resilience. Leaders who employ shared leadership build strong structures that withstand various complex tasks and challenges. Hillman et al. (2021) argued that an organization can only be as resilient as its individuals. For others, organizational resilience is the ability to anticipate risks based on current information or data (Burnard et al., 2011; de Carvalho et al., 2012; Gilly et al., 2014). When aligning achievement gaps to organizational resilience, leaders develop systems that allow teams

to continuously analyze student data by cohort, grade level, and teacher to ensure that school systems consistently meet the student population's needs. Anticipating risks would mean analyzing enrollment trends and changes in demographics and finding solutions to upcoming challenges. Although being resilient is about creating stability, a resilient organization can handle internal change resulting from external changes or pressure (Berraies et al., 2021). Change requires adapting resources, interpersonal processes, and organizational routines to address the impacts of disruptive events (Williams et al., 2017). A resilient organization is further defined by the fact that in times of adversity, teams work together to ensure it does not show regressive behavior (Hillmann et al., 2021). Shared leadership has the potential to foster organizational resilience.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy refers to nurturing leadership, individuality, individual interdependence, and empowering the collective group (Eells, 2011). According to John Hattie's (2018) Visible Learning research, using a synthesis of more than 1,500 meta-analyses, collective efficacy has an effect size of 1.57. The confidence in a team's collaborative ability, collective belief in the team's influence, and work are significant features of collective efficacy (Goddard, 2001, 2002; Goddard et al., 2004, 2011, 2015, 2017). Bandura calls this thought-provoking pattern in social behavior collective efficacy, which he defined as a group's shared belief in its combined capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment (Bandura, 1997). The most frequently mentioned disposition in teams that display collective efficacy is the significance of being able to work with others towards the shared goal of increasing student achievement and deprivatizing instruction (Bean et al., 2012). Research shows (Hattie et al., 2021) that collective efficacy focused on student outcomes inspires teams to improve combined efforts toward achieving collective student goals. Schools

with a robust sense of efficacy for serving all students, regardless of background, are the most likely to successfully mitigate achievement gaps (Goddard et al., 2017).

Collective efficacy is produced when a group of teachers in a school community believes that a joint effort and their set of skills can yield better academic results for their students (Donohoo et al., 2018). Under Bandura's theory, teachers should be able to use their conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment (Bandura, 1977). Teams learn and grow through collaborative efforts (DeWitt, 2019) teams become a community of individuals with varying knowledge, skills, and expertise to share with others (Eaker et al., 2020). DeWitt (2017) argued that collective efficacy motivates groups of individuals through increased effort and tenacity. According to Goddard et al. (2015), once individuals on a team mutually agree to conquer barriers and create anticipated results due to combined efforts, groups enhance effectiveness.

Studies demonstrate a correlation between teacher well-being and a sense of collective efficacy (Bellibas et al., 2022; Skaalvik et al., 2018). The teams' working environment also plays a vital role in teachers' well-being, particularly regarding relationships and feeling appreciated and respected (Benevene et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2019). Herrera et al. (2022) referred to individuals' perceptions of fairness in organizations as organizational justice and of great importance to schools, as it is proven to have an impact on teachers' commitment, well-being, motivation, and behavior (Capone et al., 2019; Jameel et al., 2020; Sugi et al., 2018; Widodo et al., 2021). Organizational justice in school settings focuses on improving work environments through professional learning communities, fostering positive and collaborative relationships within teams, and creating a climate of trust (DuFour et al., 2016; Eaker et al., 2020; Goodard et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2018). School systems that develop collective efficacy can overcome

daily challenges through the support of school leaders and colleagues (Herrera et al., 2022). Fostering collective efficacy in teachers is essential to the complex educational demands, not only because of achievement gaps that continue to widen but also because of how the school environment has changed after the COVID-19 pandemic. Collective efficacy supports the educational community's mental health and emotional well-being and is critical to school environments in the current era (Sugi et al., 2018).

Collective efficacy becomes evident when principals clarify goals by identifying new opportunities for the school and include staff in collaboratively developing, articulating, and inspiring with a vision of the future (Leithwood et al., 2010). School leaders use these strategies to promote cooperation and collaboration among staff toward achieving common goals. A school climate that is open, collegial, professional, and focused on student achievement provides the atmosphere for productive teacher empowerment in teaching and learning decisions, but the link to student achievement is through collective efficacy (Donohoo et al., 2018). Teacher performance is dependent on motivation, capability, and support within the working environment (Boru, 2020). This means that leaders need to recognize the significance of incremental changes in school routines and practices to allow teachers sufficient time to develop and adjust to new practices and expectations (Yeigh, 2019). Providing teams with systems of support aligned with Bandura’s self-efficacy elements of Mastery Experiences, Vicarious Experiences, Social Persuasion, and Physiological Feedback will create collective efficacy for teams and support staff well-being.

Collective Teacher Efficacy

School leaders affect the building's beliefs and values and nurture a culture that boosts collective teacher efficacy. Increasing collective teacher efficacy influences teachers' actions and

student perceptions (Hattie, 2018). The power and promise of collective teacher efficacy can be influenced within schools, focusing on efficacy as a change point, a viable path to greater student achievement, a more significant commitment to learning, and a more inviting place to learn (Donohoo et al., 2018). When leaders focus on high expectations and the growth of educators, staff begin to think differently about student learning. A culture primarily focused on shared leadership is most commonly associated with increasing collective teacher efficacy (Eaker et al., 2020). Student learning becomes about the challenge and meeting the high expectations, and complex tasks become an opportunity to learn (Goddard et al., 2017). This focus on learning rather than teaching creates a collaborative student responsibility that influences conversations, strategies, and instructional decisions (Dufour et al., 2016).

When individuals within a school function collectively to implement effective instruction, it develops collective teacher efficacy due to the success experienced as a community of learners (Evans et al., 2019; Goddard et al., 2017; Neugebauer et al., 2019). Collective teacher efficacy becomes possible when the school leader establishes a safe environment for teachers, allowing educators to take risks, grow, and learn from one another (Goddard et al., 2015). As a result, the school culture shifts from teachers functioning in isolation to collaborating as a team (DuFour et al., 2016). Collective teacher efficacy then focuses on setting high expectations for the students served, applying research-based instructional practices, and continuously assessing teacher efforts to enhance student learning by closing achievement gaps (Eaker et al., 2020). It is now more than ever increasingly difficult for any leader to have all the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to lead all aspects of knowledge in the field (D'Innocencio et al., 2016). Therefore, leaders and teachers need to share data and work together to jointly improve student learning using current assessment results (Hadfield et al., 2018). One advantageous concept

regarding collective teacher efficacy is the sense among team members that together, the team has the capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to achieve the most important goals (Goddard et al., 2017). Therefore, collective teacher efficacy has the potential to close literacy gaps in schools.

Relationship between Shared Leadership and Collective Teacher Efficacy

The success of collective teacher efficacy depends on shared collaborative practices and the power to believe that leaders, staff, and students can accomplish the team's highest potential. To tap into each teacher's expertise, educators need to be motivated, and not every teacher is motivated enough to share knowledge (DeWitt, 2017). Leaders then engage and encourage teachers by modeling what shared leadership looks like through actions and behaviors aligned to Mastery Experiences, Vicarious Experiences, Social Persuasion, and Physiological Feedback. School leaders use these elements to connect teacher expertise to build collective teacher efficacy and transform campuses. Research demonstrates that teacher leadership tasks focused on classroom level practice are likely to show student effects due to collective teacher efficacy (Shen et al., 2020). Other studies show that when leaders focus on practices directed toward sharing responsibilities, collective teacher efficacy increases job satisfaction and has a significant connection to commitment, level of stress, and decrease in burnout (Lui et al., 2021). Principals see the job as empowering individuals to make decisions; leaders give the teachers the needed resources and help keep the focus on student learning (Bean et al., 2012; Park et al., 2018; Sedrine et al., 2020). According to Hadfield et al. (2018), commitment level increases when teachers have support, training, resources and feel empowered. Shared leadership is one of cultivation, transformation, and coordination of the actions of others to realize organizational goals and build efficacy rather than a model of command and control (Brown et al., 2019).

Changing how school personnel share leadership roles increases efficacy, a necessary aspect of closing literacy gaps (Boru, 2020). Shared leadership practices foster collective teacher efficacy when job satisfaction reflects positive emotional feelings achieved from positive experiences within an individual's job (Amels et al., 2016). Leaders build a culture that supports collaboration among teachers and cultivate shared leadership by creating conversation networks that support ongoing deliberation about practice (Gichuhi, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Spillane, 2012). Collaborative teams use the results of student assessments to improve individual practice, build the team's capacity to achieve goals, intervene, and enrich learning for individual students (Marzano et al., 2018). There lies the power of collective teacher efficacy.

Cycles of Inquiry

Student achievement increases when school systems are reorganized as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs involve collaborative teams cultivating the abilities and skills essential to working together in continuous cycles of inquiry, which center around teacher actions focused on student learning outcomes (DuFour et al., 2016; DeWitt, 2022; Eaker & Marzano, 2020). Inquiry cycles intend to assist teams in leading the learning within the organization. The work of Dewey (1956) inspired cycles of inquiry. He claimed that there are four primary interests in children and adults. Those four interests are communication, inquiry, construction, and expression. Inquiry is inspired by questions we want to ask to challenge the status quo (DeWitt, 2022). Cycles of inquiry provide the evidence necessary to build teachers' confidence in the capacity to be agents of change (Eaker et al., 2020). Engaging in cycles of inquiry allows teams to positively impact student learning and develop the collective efficacy necessary to analyze and reflect on the impact. Schools are learning communities where collaborative inquiry enables the improvement of practice (Hadfield et al., 2018). School

improvement and closing literacy gaps are complex, connecting to mastery experiences as the most intentional way to cultivate self and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Inquiry cycles increase collaboration and student learning outcomes by continuously analyzing instructional practices and finding solutions to closing literacy gaps.

Evaluating the effectiveness of practices and processes to ensure student learning links to increased student achievement and maximizes a student's probability of success (DuFour et al., 2016). Student achievement commits to students successfully mastering educational goals. The fundamental purpose of a school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels (DuFour et al., 2016). The role of educators is to guarantee that students leave each grade level prepared for the demands of the next grade level. Consistently monitoring and measuring student achievement reduces the odds of creating literacy gaps in student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Comprehensive research studies have shown that teachers' choice of instructional practices has a meaningful impact on student learning outcomes (Bellibas et al., 2020; DeWitt, 2017; Eaker & Marzano, 2020; Thornton et al., 2020). Student achievement and closing literacy gaps rely on educators' ability to improve instructional practices. Finally, to ensure that each student learns at high levels, educators work collaboratively and collectively commit to the success of all students.

Influences on Closing Literacy Gaps

The team members' confidence in one another's abilities and perceptions of the influence of the team's work are essential components that set groups focused on increasing student achievement and closing literacy gaps apart. Effective school leaders focus on building a culture that increases collective teacher efficacy, affecting teachers' behavior and student beliefs (Donohoo et al., 2018). Effective leadership is indispensable if organizations are to produce

desired outcomes. (Belibas et al., 2021). Collective efficacy holds power and the possibility of creating influence amongst all team members. The focus becomes on increased student achievement, a commitment to student learning, and resilience to finding answers through cycles of inquiry.

Decades of research have demonstrated that the most effective way to teach beginning readers to recognize words is to explicitly teach them how letters represent sounds and how to blend those letters into words (Bernstein et al., 2019; Bowers et al., 2018; Duke, 2019; National Reading Panel, 2000; Scarborough, 2002). Many schools in the United States minimize this kind of instruction or sprinkle it with other ineffective literacy strategies (Schwartz, 2022). The philosophy of teaching reading is as deep as religion; compared to our country's politics, it is highly controversial (McGeehan et al., 2020). Various states created training for teachers in evidence-based reading practice two decades ago, intending to raise student achievement, especially for students with disabilities (Jensen, 2021). Implementation of the course varied district by district and school by school, meaning that receiving that evidence-based instruction needed to be more consistent for students (McGeehan, 2020). These state-wide mandates aim to standardize access to high-quality instruction (Merga, 2020). Understanding the research is one thing but putting it into practice is another. Many states mandate that teachers and principals take training aligned with the Science of Teaching Reading. Reading courses give teachers and administrators a thorough grounding in reading research, but it doesn’t always translate to the adoption of new practices or increase in student achievement (Muir, 2022). Teachers’ practices are deep-rooted and result from years spent in teacher-preparation programs, hours of professional development, and advice handed down from mentors and promoted by literacy coaches (Ortiz et al., 2021). Communication and support for teachers need to be well-planned.

Otherwise, asking teachers to change could feel like an attack on professional credentials and expertise.

Teachers play an essential function in linking campus-level approaches and classroom practices. The increasing pressure on school improvement, closing literacy gaps, and teachers' crucial role create a need for shared leadership (Shen et al., 2020). Teacher leadership is leveraged to improve student outcomes. Collective teacher efficacy indirectly influences closing literacy gaps through intentional collaboration and cycles of inquiry. This deliberate collaboration revolves around implementing high-yield strategies. Nothing has a more significant impact on student learning than organizing teachers into collaborative teams and convincing teams that working together can positively impact the learning of all students (Eaker et al., 2020). Teams comprised of high levels of collective teacher efficacy and a belief in joint capability to help all students achieve high levels of learning create increased self-confidence in learners. Collective teacher efficacy and student achievement reveal that teacher beliefs about students and school are strongly and positively associated with student achievement across subject areas and in multiple locations (Eells, 2011; Hattie, 2018; Hattie et al., 2021). As a result, learners trust that learning requires productive struggle, high expectations, and challenges that lead to mastery and deeper understanding.

Shared leadership practices positively impact instructional quality (Bellibas et al., 2020). Shared leadership creates a campus commitment, and the increase in collaborative practices affects instructional quality. Individual self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy can influence lesson planning, instructional decisions, and student interactions throughout the organization (Thornton et al., 2020). Teacher collaboration is a collective action among teachers working together to improve student achievement and close literacy gaps. Collective teacher efficacy is

enhanced when educators see evidence of instructional improvements and student outcomes (Neugebauer et al., 2019). The best teams spend a vast amount of time analyzing student data and using this data to shape a purpose owned to create change (Goodall, 2013). Collective teacher efficacy allows teams to recognize the need to collaboratively interpret and use the results of student performance to inform literacy instruction and design support (Bean et al., 2012). These improvements are confirmed through assessment data and student confidence to successfully engage in productive struggle.

A collaborative leader models the type of ongoing learning the leader wishes to see in the staff (DeWitt, 2017). Continuous learning consists of shared dialogue and proven research that encourages action and positively affects student learning. Educators need guidance and support to help them comprehend the connection between collective actions and student outcomes (Donohoo et al., 2018). Teachers then analyze and understand the collective influence through student results. This collaborative process requires educators to examine explicit evidence of student learning by engaging in inquiry cycles to determine if classroom practice changes positively influenced student outcomes or if adjustments need to be made (Eaker & Marzano, 2020). The shared leadership process fosters collective teacher efficacy and confirms teachers' actions in relation to student learning and efforts to close literacy gaps. Today’s leaders are expected to recognize and assume shared leadership not only for the intellectual development of students but also for the personal social, emotional, and physical development (Brown et al., 2019). This critical factor behind student achievement centers around shared leadership, allowing for teachers’ collective influence.

Summary

The self-efficacy component of Bandura's social cognitive theory serves as the theoretical framework to support self-efficacy's profound influence on an individual or team. Self-efficacy impacts the direction of behavior and effort toward goals (Bandura, 1997). Shared leadership consists of the ability to relinquish any rank centered around a position and focus the attention on elevating the status of other individuals. Shared leadership increases efficacy when teachers share expertise, learn from one another, can take risks in a safe environment, and experience success (Amels et al., 2021; Bellibas et al., 2021; Goddard et al., 2011, 2017; Hattie et al., 2018). When individuals share leadership, teams acquire ownership, which drives persistence toward challenges and increases momentum. These positive experiences enhance self-efficacy.

This chapter outlines some of the reasons literacy gaps exist (Ahram et al., 2011; Fergus, 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Ratcliff et al., 2016;), teacher perception and expectations influence closing literacy gaps (Bambaeeroo et al., 2017; Bean et al., 2012; Kapasi et al., 2022; Saphier, 2016;). The research highlights that shared leadership requires the distribution of influence and responsibilities by all team members (DeWitt 2017, 2019, 2022; DuFour et al., 2016; Eaker & Marzano, 2020; Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Complex tasks and vast demands involve team members working collectively to achieve organizational goals (D'Innocencio, 2016; Liu et al., 2021; Northouse, 2019). In addition, (Amels et al., 2021; Bean et al.,2012; Bellibas et al., 2021; Goodall, 2013) examined the positive relationship between shared leadership and collective efficacy, which identifies the critical role of teacher efficacy in shifting instructional practice through cycles of inquiry (DeWitt, 2022; DuFour et al., 2016; Eaker et al., 2021; Thornton et al., 2020). Collective efficacy is the degree of self-confidence an individual has in the capacity to

influence student success (Donohoo et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there is limited research on the collaborative approaches that lead to closing literacy gaps for students.

A gap in the literature exists related to a culture of shared leadership practices that close literacy gaps and build collective teacher efficacy in elementary schools. The effect of self and collective efficacy on shared leadership and how the approach shifts school culture and improves literacy remains unclear. The role of shared leadership, efficacy, and outcomes has been researched at the organizational level. A gap in literature exists at the school and classroom levels. Today, schools face complex challenges and expectations (Shen et al., 2020). Examining how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy supports the multifaceted demands of urban elementary schools. In addition, finding the connection between collective teacher efficacy and organizational resilience, the practices that lead to high expectations regardless of the challenge, can help district and school leaders create structures and practices that support closing literacy gaps. It would be impossible to close literacy gaps alone. However, when a school system focuses on shifting mindsets and establishing a collaborative culture across the organization, it creates equitable opportunities for all students to learn at high levels. The self-efficacy component of Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977) serves as the theoretical framework for this study's purpose. This research aims to contribute to Bandura's self-efficacy theory by illustrating examples of how school leaders focus on Mastery Experiences, Vicarious Experiences, Social Persuasion, and Physiological Feedback to strengthen school culture and behavior and increase literacy performance.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). Current research shows that leaders focus primarily on student behaviors instead of the culture and beliefs needed on campus by all staff to shift student outcomes (Amels et al., 2021; Bellibas et al., 2020; Fiarman, 2016; Preis, 2020). The participants in this study were a school principal, assistant principal, teachers, and instructional support staff who work in an urban Title I elementary school in a PK-12 public school District in Texas. The data gathered utilized interviews, focus groups, and observations. This approach allowed for a deep understanding of the culture and beliefs prominent on the campus by all staff related to student ability, expectations, student performance, and how these impact daily decisions to close literacy gaps. This chapter will outline the details of this case study including the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the role of the researcher, the data collection methods, and data analysis. The chapter will close with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design

Leaders are positioned to shape the culture and expectations that dominate school buildings. A qualitative approach was used to examine factors that leaders use to create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy. Using qualitative research provides a lens to focus and describe the culture and beliefs prominent on a campus by all staff

related to student capability, high expectations, efficacy, and how these impact daily decisions. Creswell and Poth (2018) defined qualitative research as “an inquiry approach into the process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p.8). Based on this definition, this study used a qualitative approach to address the research questions.

A single instrumental case study was utilized for this qualitative study. This was the correct method for this study because the intent was to collect data through interviews, focus groups, and observations, which created an in-depth depiction, inquiry, and understanding of the impact of teacher, instructional support staff, and leader behaviors. The single case study research approach allowed for the development of a thorough description and analysis of an exemplary Title I elementary school that has been able to close literacy gaps for kindergarten – third grade students. Additionally, it generated an understanding of shared leadership practices used to foster collective teacher efficacy and organizational resilience to close literacy gaps successfully. A single-embedded case study demonstrated how leadership expectations shape school culture and teacher behaviors and actions.

Case studies are the preferred method of research when the following conditions exist: (a) the questions to be answered are how and why questions, (b) the investigator has little control over the events being studied, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with a real-life context (Yin, 2008). It is important to present the different perspectives connected to assumptions, expectations, and behaviors. Yin (2018) noted that case studies allow for gathering information from multiple sources, such as interviews and direct observations. Stake (1994) says that "as a form of research, a case study is defined by an interest in an individual case(s), not by the method of inquiry used" (p. 236). This particular approach was adapted to this study because

of the central research question (How do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in urban elementary schools?). Case study research involves the study of a case(s) within a real-life contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2014). Yin (2018) stated that a case study is a method of inquiry used to investigate a real-life case through in-depth, real-world context, mainly when the boundaries concerning phenomenon and context are unclear.

Case study research has a long, distinguished history across many disciplines. According to Yin (2018), the researcher can modify any of the general approaches by applying five specific techniques for analyzing case studies: pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and within-case synthesis. The challenge throughout the research is to pay close attention to all information gathered and thoroughly investigate plausible rival interpretations, which address the significant aspects of the case study, by proving the power of other influences rather than discovering a reason to reject those influences (Yin, 2018). In addition, it was essential to validate the understanding of prevalent thinking and literature about the case study topic. Based on the findings, the goal is to shift current practices that create student literacy gaps. A single-embedded case study is being utilized to research “an existing theory” at one campus using organizational literacy data for the campus selection (Yin, 2018, p. 52). This single-embedded case study would assist in understanding how the practices this exemplary Title I campus has implemented have allowed for the closing of literacy gaps for students. The justification for single-case designs cannot typically be met by multiple cases as the “revelatory case” involves only single case studies (Yin, 2018, p. 54).

Research Questions

The subsequent section addresses the case study's central research question and three sub-research questions. These questions serve as a focal point for the theoretical and design framework of the study. In addition, the questions seek to address, The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017).

Central Research Question

How do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in urban elementary schools?

Sub-Question One

How are leaders prepared to address literacy gaps?

Sub-Question Two

How do leaders inspire and influence teachers to create systematic cultural change that eliminates literacy gaps?

Sub-Question Three

How do teacher expectations affect student literacy performance?

Setting and Participants

This case study took place within the Sunshine (pseudonym) Independent School District located in Texas. The Sunshine Independent School District is a large, urban PK-12 public school district. In addition, the Sunshine Independent School District is a highly diverse district encompassing Title I, middle-class, and affluent communities. The participants in this study were

selected using purposeful sampling. Participants for the study were selected based on student groups and data aligned to literacy scores on the 2019, 2021, and 2022 State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and 2019 – 2022 Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. The participants who agreed to participate in the study were the site principal, former assistant principal, teachers, and instructional support staff who all have three or more years of experience as teachers and have worked at the research site for three years or more.

Setting

The study occurred within the Sunshine Independent School District. Sunshine Independent School District is a large, urban school District in Texas. It comprises of 67 campuses: 46 Elementary, 14 middle schools (MS), seven high schools (HS), and magnet schools within schools at MS and HS, thirty of the schools are Title I. Sunshine Independent School District is ranked in the top 15 largest districts in the state. The demographics of the Sunshine Independent School District students include 59% economically disadvantaged, 18% emergent bilinguals, and 12% special education. Sunshine Independent School District was selected for this study due to its diverse student population and demographic shifts in recent years. Additional demographic data includes 14% foreign-born population, 11.3% live below the poverty line, and 39% have attained a bachelor's degree or higher. The economically disadvantaged student population increased by 10% in the last two years. A superintendent leads the district. The superintendent's executive staff consists of the following: chief instructional officer, chief financial officer, chief of schools and leadership, chief of maintenance and operations, and executive director of communications.

Sunshine Independent School District is a highly diverse district. The district serves Title I communities, middle-class, and affluent neighborhoods. The study was conducted at Ray Elementary School (pseudonym), a Title I school with 97% economically disadvantaged students.

Participants

The participants in this study were the site principal, former assistant principal, six teachers, and three instructional support staff members who all have three or more years of experience as teachers and have worked at the research site for three years or more.

Participants for this study were selected based on student group data aligned to literacy scores on the 2019, 2021, and 2022 STAAR and 2019-2022 MAP exams. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that the researcher needs to select a site or sites to study, such as events, programs, processes, activities, individuals, or several individuals. Participants were identified based on knowledge of the study site and ability to provide an in-depth understanding through experiences. The aim was to reach data saturation through the information gathered from the participants. Therefore, the initial recruitment entailed 12 participants.

Recruitment Plan

The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to recruit both campus educators and principal participants. The researcher selected the sample group purposely based on the last three years of state and local assessment data, as these individuals share an informed perspective and familiarity with the existing research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling also allowed for examining different perspectives from each participant. The researcher selected individuals and a site for the study because these can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The total number of elementary principals in the district; sample pool is 46, and elementary teachers are 1,306. The intended sample size was one principal, one assistant principal, seven teachers, and three instructional support staff members, but the plan was to interview until saturation was achieved. The intended principal, former assistant principal, teacher, and instructional support staff sample obtained a participation request through an email, a copy will be available in Appendix D and E. All participants received a consent form, a copy will be found in Appendix C. The participants signed the consent form via email and returned it via email. Sampling can shift during a study, and the researcher needs to be flexible, but despite this, plan ahead as much as possible for the sampling strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The number of interviewees, practices, policies, or actions included in a study can easily fall in the range of 25-50, such units will depend on "the complexity of the study topic and the depth of data collection from each unit" (Yin, 2011, p. 91). Yin (2012) emphasized that students and scholars appear to assume the existence of a formulaic solution to determine the needed sample size for case studies, but no such formula exists.

The commonly proposed criterion for determining when a sufficient sample size has been reached in qualitative research is saturation (Charmaz, 2003; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Morse, 1995). When the researcher finds similar instances over and over; the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated; "going out of the way to look for groups that stretch the diversity of data as far as possible to make certain that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category" (Glasier & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). Given (2016) considered saturation as the point at which "additional data does not lead to any new emergent themes" (p.35). Urqhart (2013) and Birks and Mills (2015) related saturation primarily to the termination of analysis rather than the

collection of new data. The researcher no longer finds new or further information that adds to the study.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher positionality section focuses on the motivation for conducting the case study. This section outlines the interpretive framework, philosophical, ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, as well as the researcher's role within the case study framework. Personal experiences, beliefs, values, and biases are a part of philosophical assumptions. Creswell and Poth (2018) underscored that it is essential to become aware of these assumptions and beliefs. As the researcher, I have worked in the field of education for 23 years, and I acknowledge that I have biases about leadership and teaching practices. These viewpoints and beliefs will be noted in a journal in Appendix I.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework that shaped this case study is the transformative framework. Based on the findings, the goal is to change current practices that create literacy gaps for students. Knowledge is not neutral and reflects the power and social relationships within society; thus, the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people in improving society (Mertens, 2003). The components studied sought to raise consciousness and improve educational systems that focus on closing literacy gaps for students. The transformative framework allows the researcher to provide a voice for marginalized students who leave third-grade reading below grade level. Students who fail in school have difficulty securing a job, thereby running the risk of living in poverty, spending time in jail, and having a shorter life span (Buffum et al., 2010). This approach aims to create reflection and discussion so that change can occur (Creswell & Poth,

2018). This research attempts to raise awareness and enhance foundational literacy practices in elementary schools so that students succeed throughout their educational careers and life.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumption that led to my choice of research enabled me to use methods that consist of collaborative processes through interviews, focus groups, and observations. These data collection and analysis processes highlighted issues of concern. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that researchers embrace different realities with the intent of reporting these multiple realities. It will be necessary to present the different perspectives connected to assumptions, expectations, and behaviors. Yin (2018) highlighted that assumptions allow researchers to augment existing theories to compile, analyze, and interpret data to shape and understand the meaning of the research. The study begins with a foundation and scope of directionality gleaned from the researcher's beliefs and perspectives (Yin, 2018). The ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions aim to inform existing biases.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological nature of the study allowed me to dig deeper into the reality of the participants through interviews, focus groups, and observations. The research design intended to report multiple realities using various forms of evidence. The numerous forms of evidence enabled me to report on the different themes and perspectives. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that evidence of multiple realities is presented using various individuals' actual words and different perspectives. This process assisted me in learning about the participants' reality from different viewpoints and experiences. These perspectives were reported through the themes that emerged from the analysis of data.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption addressed the relationship between the researcher and the focus of the case study. Conducting a qualitative study with the epistemological assumption means that researchers attempt to get as close as possible to the participants being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The evidence gathered from the interviews, focus groups, and observations were used for categorical aggregation. Quotes from the interviews, focus groups, and observations were utilized to justify the evidence. Additionally, the time spent on the campus allowed me to collaborate and participate fully with those interviewed and observed.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption demonstrates the values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with those of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have served in the field of education for the past 23 years as a teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, principal, director of professional learning, executive director of curriculum and instruction, and currently executive director of school administration. I have a passion for serving Title I schools and have devoted most of my career to being a school-turnaround educator and leader focusing on transformational and shared leadership practices. As a Christian, equity is valued, and the belief that we should find ways to serve others who have different circumstances and need additional support to reach an equal outcome is at the forefront of my daily work.

Researcher's Role

I have worked in the field of education for 23 years in multiple roles. For eleven of those years, I served as a school principal. As the researcher, I acknowledge that I have experience serving in that role, which may cause bias about my beliefs, values, and how I led the campuses. These perceptions will be noted in Appendix I through a reflective journal. "Reality is co-

constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). As an educator experienced in serving disadvantaged communities and turnaround schools, I focused on creating systems that close opportunity gaps. Theoretical coursework and personal experiences have allowed me to experience firsthand how to foster a culture of high expectations for all students. In my current role, observing 67 leaders has caused me to question leadership practices, culture, and beliefs prominent on campuses by staff related to student ability, expectations, and student success and how these impact daily decisions.

While my experience as a school leader may lead to biases, various methods will be utilized to ensure transparency and objectivity. Data, preliminary analysis, interpretations, and themes will be shared with participants. This process is important because the participants can assess the accuracy, share views and reflect on the authenticity of the information gathered. Writing reflexive comments about what is being experienced throughout the study and reactions from observations, focus groups, and interviews will allow for deeper connections. As the researcher, it is essential to protect the participants and campuses by guaranteeing confidentiality throughout the case study using aliases. Being open-minded to responses, actively listening by seeking first to understand, and utilizing probing questions to obtain in-depth responses will be vital to understanding multiple perspectives and making meaning. Journaling highlights the immersion in self-understanding of personal preconceived notions, beliefs, and experiences brought to the study. Qualitative research empowers individuals to share their stories and voices, diminishing power relationships between a researcher and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To minimize a power relationship, direct collaboration with the participants was implemented through the study's data analysis and interpretation phases.

Procedures

First, approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was acquired (see Appendix A). Second, District and site approval was sought (see Appendix B). Third, the recruitment letter (see Appendix D and E) was emailed to prospective participants (urban title I teachers, instructional support staff, and school leaders with at least three years of experience at the identified site and at least three years of teaching experience) using the staff district e-mail address. Responses were received from six teachers, three instructional support staff, and two principals who met the criteria, for a total of 11 participants. The participants submitted the approved consent form by email (see Appendix C). The teacher and instructional support staff consent forms outlined the commitment to participate in an interview, focus group, observation, and member checking. The principal consent form requests participation in an interview, observation, and member checking. After receiving the signed consent forms, a schedule was created with dates and times for the interviews and focus groups using Zoom and Otter AI and in-person observations at the site (see Appendix J). The participants chose dates and times that worked best with their instructional schedules and school responsibilities. Once the interviews, focus groups, and observations were complete, the data collected was organized using Dedoose as a platform to organize and maintain the data securely. The data was carefully analyzed using triangulation and categorical aggregation.

Data Collection Plan

Data was collected using three different sources: individual interviews, observations, and focus groups, in that order. Individual interviews were held with the principals, teachers, and instructional support staff using an interview protocol (see Appendix F). Focus groups were conducted in a group setting using a protocol (see Appendix H) with participants who had been

interviewed, helping to provide cohesive answers to the questions. An observation protocol was used to observe interactions with students in classrooms during instruction, including passing periods, and PLC collaborative team meetings (see Appendix G). Data collection is a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Maximum variation was utilized for the teacher, instructional support staff, and principal interviews. The data collected from interviews, focus groups, and observations was organized using the Dedoose management database, which allowed me to code, interpret, synthesize the codes, and generate themes based on the patterns.

Individual Interviews

An interview is considered a social interaction based on a conversation (Rubin et al., 2012; Warren et al., 2015). Individual interviews allowed me to build an in-depth picture of the role shared leadership practices play in closing literacy gaps. Open-ended questions were used for individual interviews with the principals, teachers, and instructional support staff. The interviews were held via zoom and recorded in a distraction-free, private zone area. It was essential to build rapport with the interviewees. Marshall and Rossman (2015) noted that an effective way to break the ice is through a grand tour question. Case study interviews require the researcher to function by employing two levels simultaneously. According to Yin (2018), level 1 questions are open-ended non-threatening relevant questions and level 2 questions correlate to the inquiry topic. The objective of the interview was to engage in a fluid conversation with the interviewee.

Individual Interview Questions

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) emphasized that an interview is where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Below are the questions

that were used for interviewees based on their roles. In addition, an interview protocol was used to allow for consistency within the transcription of the data collection process.

Principal Questions:

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. How do you create a literacy-focused lens? SQ1
3. How do you highlight literacy achievement across the campus? CRQ
4. How do you strengthen core instructional literacy practices? SQ2
5. How do you utilize shared leadership practices? SQ2
6. How do you empower teachers? SQ2
7. How do you respond to resistance? SQ1
8. How do you replace marginalized settings with growth-oriented cultures? SQ2
9. How do you promote equitable access to the literacy conditions and resources needed by all students to succeed academically and emotionally? SQ1
10. How do you address data demonstrating literacy disparities within student groups? SQ1

Teacher Questions:

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. What types of leadership roles do you serve on campus? CRQ
3. How do you determine the learning outcomes and rigor of your lessons? SQ3
4. How do you communicate student literacy outcomes to parents? SQ3
5. How do you group students for literacy instruction? What factors do you consider? SQ3
6. How do you respond when your student data shows disparities in literacy within student groups? SQ3

7. How do you approach students that demonstrate behavioral concerns? CRQ
8. How do you respond to a colleague(s) that blames the students for assessment outcomes? CRQ

Instructional Support Staff Questions:

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. How do you use shared leadership practices in your role? CRQ
3. How do you assist teachers in developing the learning outcomes and rigor of lessons? SQ3
4. How do you support communication of student literacy outcomes to parents? SQ3
5. How do you assist teachers with grouping students for literacy instruction? What factors do you consider? SQ3
6. How do you respond when campus student data shows disparities in literacy within student groups? SQ3
7. How do you approach students that demonstrate behavioral concerns? CRQ
8. How do you respond to a colleague(s) that blames the students for assessment outcomes? CRQ

The purpose of the interview questions was to create a rich dialogue through the answers provided by the interviewees. Yin (2018) highlighted that case study interviews will resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries. This process is called a fluid interview (Rubin et al., 2011) and an "intensive, in-depth, unstructured interview" (Weiss, 1994, p. 207). The first principal, teacher, and instructional support staff question attempted to break the ice, build background, and gain knowledge about the interviewees' experiences. This first question helped the participant ease into the rest of the questions as it was something familiar and

personal. The principal questions number two-four focused on understanding how the leader sets the school's culture, which aligns with the study's self-efficacy theoretical framework. Questions five-seven enabled me to learn how the leader distributes leadership across the campus, which connects with the empirical literature on shared leadership, collective teacher efficacy, and organizational resilience. Questions eight-ten align with the problem and purpose of the study.

The teacher and instructional support staff question two enabled me to understand how campus educators perceive shared leadership within roles. Questions 3-5 aimed to help me understand the school's culture from each interviewee's perspective. Questions 6-8 relate to the problem and purpose of the study. The questions were written in the how format. This format aligns with the case study method (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018) and supports soliciting answers that allow for the analysis of the case (Yin, 2018). The questions were discussed and reviewed by the dissertation committee. Once the interview questions were reviewed and approved by the dissertation committee, IRB approval was sought.

Focus Groups

Focus groups offered an opportunity to collaborate with numerous participants simultaneously and foster discussion between interviewees in relation to the study. The primary intention of focus groups is to draw upon participants' thoughts, viewpoints, opinions, experiences and reactions in a manner that would not be possible utilizing individual interviews and observations (Ryan et al., 2014). In comparison to one-to-one interviews, which seek to gather individual thoughts, attitudes and feelings, focus groups stimulate a variety of interpretations and emotional processes within a group setting (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Yin (2018) shared that the goal of a focus group is to deliberately try to surface the views of each person in the group through the questions. Utilizing focus groups enabled me to gather rich data

to create triangulation applying all sources of evidence employed in the case study.

Focus Group Questions

The focus groups allowed participants to talk to one another, clarify, ask questions, and share doubts and opinions. The moderator has little control over the interaction other than generally keeping participants focused on the topic (Krueger & Casey, 2015). By its nature, focus group research is open-ended and cannot be entirely predetermined (Ryan et al., 2014). The questions outlined below were utilized for the focus groups. In addition, a focus group protocol (see Appendix H) and recording was employed to allow for moderation of the group and consistency within the transcription of the data collection process.

Teacher Questions

1. What do you value the most about working at your campus? CRQ
2. How do the leadership roles you serve affect literacy practices on campus? SQ2
3. What does challenging the status quo mean to you? SQ3
    a. How does this look like in your classroom in regard to literacy instruction? SQ2
4. What are some challenges you are facing to address your students' literacy gaps? SQ1
    a. How do you overcome those challenges? CRQ
5. How does your professional learning community support your growth? SQ2
6. How does the professional learning you engage in help build your literacy knowledge? SQ1
    a. How do you incorporate the knowledge into practice?
7. How do you encourage students who need to meet grade-level reading expectations? SQ3
    a. How does their work change from those who are meeting grade level standards?

8. Suppose that you had one minute to talk to other educators about the topic of today's discussion – a culture of shared leadership practices that improves literacy gaps. What would you say? CRQ

Instructional Support Staff Questions

1. What do you value the most about working at your campus? CRQ
2. How do the leadership roles you serve affect literacy practices on campus? SQ2
3. What does challenging the status quo mean to you? SQ3
    a. How does this look like when you support teachers with literacy instruction? SQ2
4. What are some challenges you are facing to address campus literacy gaps? SQ1
    a. How do you overcome those challenges? CRQ
5. How does your professional learning community support your growth? SQ2
6. How does the professional learning you engage in help build your literacy knowledge? SQ1
    a. How do you incorporate the knowledge into practice?
7. How do you encourage students who need to meet grade-level reading expectations? SQ3
    a. How does their work change from those who are meeting grade level standards?
8. Suppose that you had one minute to talk to other educators about the topic of today's discussion – a culture of shared leadership practices that improves literacy gaps. What would you say? CRQ

Observations

An observation protocol was utilized for all observations and included in Appendix G. The observations are based on the research purpose and questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Two classroom observations were scheduled to allow for viewing staff interactions with students, literacy focus, expectations of students, how students are asked questions during the lesson, rigor

of activities, differentiation, student placement in groups, and reaction to student behaviors. One scheduled PLC collaborative team meeting demonstrated how; teachers share leadership roles, discuss student outcomes, develop action plans, demonstrate mindset regarding students, reflect on student literacy outcomes, provide support based on data, and address barriers. I served as a participant as an observer during the different observations. Jotting and note-taking techniques were applied (Marshall & Rossman, 2015) for observations that assisted with writing field notes.

Data Analysis

The qualitative research interview "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of experience, to uncover the lived world" (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 3.) Interviews were completed via zoom and transcribed word for word using Otter. Notes were taken while reading through memoing and detailed descriptions of the responses. Seidman (2019) highlighted that the researcher wants to avoid imposing meaning from one participant's interview onto the next. Therefore, analysis of interview data began once all interviews were complete. Notes and observations were organized through Dedoose, which allowed me to create and characterize codes and classify common themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patton (2002) emphasized advice regarding coding; read the data repeatedly. Data was continually analyzed using coding and analysis of themes. Yin (2014) suggested that the researcher create a logic model that represents an initial theory about the case and provides a framework for analyzing the data. Analysis of data allowed for naturalistic generalizations, enabling others to learn from the case and apply the findings to schools or organizations. Yin (2018) noted that in case study research, the objective is to extend and generalize theories and not to make generalizations that are not known with certainty.

Dedoose was used as a management tool to organize the data, secure it, and ensure it could be easily located. Yin (2018) emphasized that software tools are not meant to perform the analysis for the researcher, but rather serve as an organizational tool. This process provided a detailed view of the facts and allowed me to organize all aspects in one place. Interview data was triangulated using field notes, memoing, and audio recordings along with the two other data collection methods, focus groups and observations, to constitute a scope of trustworthiness and credibility.

Focus groups were completed via Zoom and transcribed word for word using Otter. A focus group protocol (see Appendix H) was used as well as a recording. Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested that the researcher listen carefully for notable quotes and key phrases, the well said statements that illuminates an essential point of view. Focus group notes and observations were generated and categorized as codes utlilizing Dedoose to organize codes into common themes (Yin, 2018). The evidence gathered from the focus group was analyzed to determine the practices utilized to close literacy gaps. The data was categorized and analyzed based on the theoretical framework and central research questions. In addition, this data was analyzed using the coding of categories and analysis of themes. Using multiple sources of evidence in case study research allows for in-depth findings that can be supported through multiple measures (Yin, 2018). Categorical aggregation from the focus group data enabled me to create meaning and seek categories and themes based on information, insight, and data produced by the interaction between participants and responses.

Information observed from the classrooms and PLC collaborative team meeting observations was summarized using field notes. The field notes were categorized and analyzed based on the research purpose and central research questions. Notes and observations, also called

codes, will be made to distinguish common themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The observations were coded using the information gathered on the observation protocol form (see Appendix G).

This process began by transcribing the narrative observations and examining the text for meaningful sentence fragments that connect with the research questions. Next, these sentence fragments were used to create categories pertinent to the research questions and matching codes. Coding patterns discern trends in a way that "solidify our observations into concrete instances of meaning" (Saldaña, 2021, p.8). Codes were employed to sort the data and find potential themes and pattern-matching logic. A pattern is repetitive, regular, or consistent occurrences of action/data that appear more than twice (Saldaña, 2021). Yin (2018) emphasized that one of the most desirable techniques is to use pattern-matching logic. These processes are vital because these steps allow for credibility in the data analysis process and strengthen the internal validity of a case study.

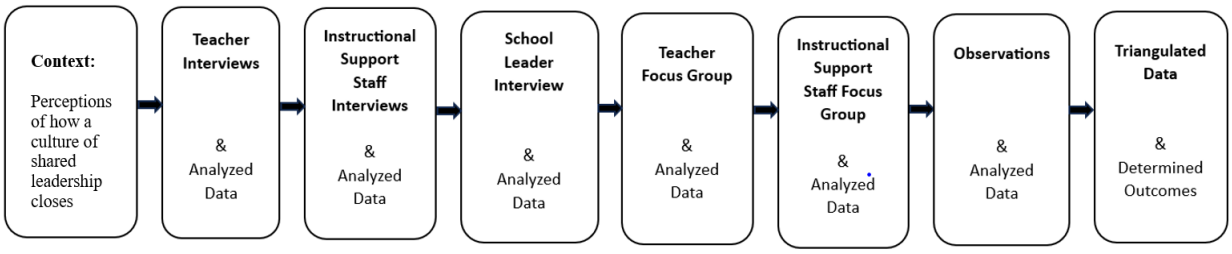
Dedoose was used as a management tool to organize the data, secure it, and ensure it can be easily located. To triangulate the data to search for patterns of thoughts and behaviors from the interviews, focus groups, and observations codes will be described and classified into themes (Saldaña, 2021). This technique allowed me to synthesize the case, its context, and a detailed view of the facts as it aligns with the research purpose, questions, and theoretical framework. Categorical aggregation was used to form patterns and categories (Stake, 1995). It also allows for identifying recurring themes, demonstrating the relationship through comparison and contrast, and within-case analysis through a logic model (Yin, 2018). In addition, a logic model was used to explicitly indicate the organizational connection between shared leadership practices that lead to high expectations, efficacy, organizational resilience, closing literacy gaps, and equitable

support for all student groups. Finally, interpretations were developed and assessed based on evidence from interviews, focus groups, and observations.

These methods showed the lessons learned by analyzing and synthesizing the data. Naturalist generalizations built on data analysis allow others to learn from the conclusions based on themes by comparing and contrasting the case (Yin, 2018). The within-case analysis was utilized to examine themes and discern commonalities and differences in the case (Stake, 1995; Charmaz, 2006; Yin, 2009). When a thorough analysis of all the data from this case study was triangulated, themes emerged. These themes answered the central research question and sub-questions as I transitioned from inductive to deductive reasoning and finalized my data analysis to present the findings of this case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Yin (2018) asserted that researchers need to attend to all evidence collected, examine plausible rival interpretations, address the most meaningful aspects of the case study, and establish an understanding of the prevalent thinking and literature regarding the case study topic.

Figure 1

Data Collection Process



Note. Data Collection Process. Adapted from *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, 4th Ed.* (p. 157), by R.K. Yin, 2009, SAGE Publications.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness allows for confirmation that the research is thorough and valid. A qualitative study must be trustworthy, which means it needs to be credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable (Lincoln et al., 1985). Thoroughness is evidenced by the processes used to collect, analyze, and interpret the data throughout the study. Most importantly these components ensure the validity of the research. Collection and analysis of data from interviews, focus groups, and observations, security, and confidentiality used credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable processes. Patton (2015) stated that while working inductively, the analyst is looking for emergent patterns in data. This methodology allowed the researcher to deeply review the data collected, assess differences, identify common themes, and draw conclusions about the information gathered.

Credibility

Credibility is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research and is concerned with the aspect of truth-value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is essential to use strategies that are suitable for the research and ensure credibility. Structural corroboration was used through various types of data to support or oppose the interpretation of the data. The data sources include interviews, focus groups, and observations to provide corroborating evidence. The different sources of data provide depth. The corroborating evidence was utilized by means of data triangulation. Yin (2018) emphasized that when you have triangulated the data, a case study's findings will have been supported by more than a single source of evidence. This process was critical for credibility as it allowed the researcher to find recurring behaviors, actions, and evidence for the themes or perspectives. The researcher used analysis of themes to enable comparisons between the analysis and resulting theories (Stake, 1995). Using analysis of themes

was vital in establishing credibility for the patterns that developed from the information. It enabled explicitly highlighting the codes and categories utilized to generate the theories.

Transferability

The research was conducted in a manner that enables others to be able to follow a similar procedure. While the results and conclusions of the study may not be the same, other researchers would be able to implement the same strategies that were used in this research (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Transferability was established by employing a rich, thick description of the setting and participants (Baillie, 2015). The rich, thick descriptions allow readers to utilize information within alternative settings through the contextual details and explanations provided. In addition, an audit trail, which will demonstrate the step-by-step process was applied to establish the study's conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The audit trail is included in Appendix J and will allow for the transferability of this study.

Dependability

Dependability was employed through member checking by seeking participant feedback. Interview transcripts, data, preliminary analysis, interpretations, and themes were shared with the participants. This is a vital step because the participants were able to assess the accuracy of the information collected and the themes developed. Participants had an opportunity to share views and reflect on the accuracy. The same interview, focus groups, and observation procedures were used across the campus. Consequently, the findings have continuity because of its consistency and repetition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, an inquiry audit helped validate the accuracy of the findings. The inquiry audit included an outside researcher assessing the case study's data collection, analysis, and results. This process confirms the accuracy of the outcomes and ensures the conclusions support the collected data.

Confirmability

Confirmability was established through the interpretation of the data in an unbiased manner. Yin (2018) highlighted that the researcher needs to set clear rules and follow them to help minimize bias in research. Immersing myself in self-understanding about the preconceived notions, beliefs, understandings, and experiences brought to the study was essential. This approach was key because it involved communicating past experiences and how these shape interpretation and findings. Writing reflexive comments about what was experienced throughout the study, reactions from observations and interviews were used to accomplish this component. Interviews were transcribed entirely, reviewed, and coded to ensure an understanding of the participant's perceptions and experiences. Triangulation enhanced validity through the use of multiple sources of data providing corroborating evidence, validation, and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

This case study has several ethical considerations that remained at the forefront of the research. Creswell (2013) reported the significance of maintaining ethical considerations at the center of the research process, which was extremely important from the study's beginning to completion. Examining the urban Title I teachers, students, administrators, and school community could produce stereotypes or misrepresent the community. An additional ethical consideration was preserving the identity of participants' which was realized by utilizing pseudonyms for the school, District, and staff. The data collection process and participant confidentiality measures followed Liberty University's IRB guidelines. Approval from IRB was acquired before sampling. The participants submitted signed consent forms before providing any data (Yin, 2018).

Permissions

Once approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received, the research approval began (see Appendix A). Permission from the School District's research department to conduct the case study within the District and selected campus was obtained (see Appendix B). The research started by sending a recruitment letter to participants from the selected elementary school via email (see Appendix D and E). Once participants agreed, participants submitted the consent form (see Appendix C). Consent forms allowed me to schedule individual interviews, focus groups, and observations.

Other Participant Protections

The consent forms inform participants of the voluntary nature of the study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, the form emphasized the confidentiality of the site and participants by implementing participant and site pseudonyms. A statement of confidentiality was included as part of the interviews, focus groups, and observations to convey "an ethical commitment not to release results in a way that any individual's responses can be identified as one's own" (Dillman, 2014, p. 163). Additionally, when I met each participant prior to beginning each interview, I reiterated that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I emphasized that all information was confidential and that their personal data or school name would not be included. I shared with participants that identities would be masked by assigning aliases to the school and individual names and developing composite profiles of each participant. Finally, I allowed the participants to ask questions, seek clarification, or share concerns. Seeking participant feedback through member checking, as described in the dependability section, allowed for sharing of preliminary results. The privacy of each participant was respected, and any identifiable information was kept in a secure, password-locked location.

Other ethical considerations that were utilized include a commitment to protect human subjects (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). All research data was stored and password-protected utilizing Dedoose. Continuity was employed throughout the process, and objectivity was utilized in the analysis of the data through notetaking and memoing using the data collection protocols. The data will be maintained for three years. After three years, all of the information will be deleted.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). Chapter three focuses on the research design and methods that were utilized for this case study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from Liberty University's IRB. Additionally, permission to conduct the research within the School District was requested from the research department. Participant interviews, focus groups, observation of classroom instruction, and team meetings were utilized to analyze the data in-depth and generate themes and patterns. Data analysis involved multiple perspectives through aliases and composite profiles. Continuity was employed throughout the process, as well as objectivity in the data analysis by utilizing notetaking and memoing through the data collection protocols. Codes were used to develop themes. The process guarantees trustworthiness by conducting research that is credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable (Lincoln et al., 1985).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Students are leaving third-grade without proficient literacy skills (Casey, 2010, 2013; Gilmore et al., 2019; Muir, 2022; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022; Paisini, 2018; Reardon et al., 2016; Samuels, 2015; Scammacca et al., 2020). Third-grade students who are not reading at grade level are among the most vulnerable to dropping out of school in later years (Fiester et al., 2010; Hernandez et al., 2011; NAEP, 2019: Weyer et al., 2019). The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Shared leadership practices are defined as transformational through instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). This case study focuses on one exemplary Title I elementary school that has successfully closed literacy gaps in kindergarten through third-grade. The leadership practices, beliefs, and expectations evident on the campus demonstrate the influence of shared leadership and collective efficacy. Understanding how perception and behavior contribute to positive, safe, and supportive learning environments correlates to Bandura's self-efficacy theory.

Chapter four presents the data analysis results using thick, rich descriptions that allow the participants' views, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and voices to resonate. The data analysis methods utilized multiple sources of evidence for triangulation, illustrating and categorizing the themes across three different forms of evidence; interviews, focus groups, and observations. In addition, this chapter reports the data in the form of narrative themes, charts, and tables presented by theme; outlier data; and research question responses.

Participants

The process of recruiting candidates took place via email. Eleven elementary educators responded and volunteered to participate in this study. The participants in the study have served in the field of education for three or more years as teachers and have worked at the research site for three or more years. The participants currently serve in the role of teachers, instructional support staff, and campus principals. A portrait of each participant is highlighted below followed by tables 1-3 outlining participant information.

Alejandra

Alejandra, who self-identifies as Hispanic, joined public education circuitously. Education is her second career. She earned a business bachelor's degree, with a marketing concentration, from Texas A&M at Kingsville. After college, Alejandra worked at the Glady's Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas. She shared that working in the public relations department and volunteering in the zoo education department for two years was exciting. Volunteering in the zoo education department led to her passion for teaching. Alejandra then enrolled at Texas A&M at Kingsville and completed an education degree focusing on early childhood education.

Alejandra was born in Alice, Texas, but spent most of her life in Harlingen, Texas. Education was a must in her household. Her father was the first in his family to graduate high school at 16 years old, and by the time he was 20 years old had earned his college degree. Her grandparents' first language was Spanish. They both quit school at an early age. Her grandmother was approximately ten years old when she had to leave school due to the impact of the Great Depression. She vividly recalls the numerous stories of her great-grandfather's unexpected death. Her great-grandmother had no choice but to find work and survive as a widower. This event left her grandmother to stay home to babysit her siblings. Her parents told Alejandra stories about

how her grandmother learned to read and write when her father went to school. Education was not an option for any of them. She is confident her grandmother would be proud that she found her niche as a teacher. Alejandra has been teaching for 21 years.

Amanda

Amanda, who self-identifies as Hispanic, shares a passion for early childhood special education. Amanda graduated from Texas State University in 2018. Her bachelor's degree concentrates on special education at every grade level. She started her teaching journey as an early childhood special education teacher; she served in that role for three years. Amanda then transitioned into a special education co-teaching position serving students receiving special education services in the general education classroom for grades third through fifth. This year is Amanda's fifth year teaching and her first year as a general education teacher. She is now teaching second grade and is able to use her early childhood and special education knowledge to support students' developmental needs. Amanda is in her 20s and loves seeing the laughter in students when learning clicks for them, and they demonstrate growth.

Anabelle

Anabelle, who self-identifies as Hispanic, loves to learn and grow. Anabelle graduated from Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies. Anabelle also holds a special education certification. Anabelle began her teaching career as a pre-kindergarten teacher who was not certified; she served in that role for eight years. Anabelle fell in love with children and knew it was her calling. Therefore, she pursued getting her career started with a public school district as she wanted to impact children's lives on a larger scale. This reflection caused Anabelle to move to the Sunshine School District and take a job with Ray Elementary, where she has been for the past five years. She started as a special education instructional

assistant while finishing her degree and certification. When she finished her degree, she transitioned to teaching kindergarten, which she absolutely loves. Anabelle is in her 30s and has served in the field of education for the past 14 years.

Ariana

Ariana, who self-identifies as Hispanic, was born and raised in Corpus Christi, Texas. She moved to San Antonio when she was 18 years old to attend the University of Texas at San Antonio. Ariana graduated from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies, early childhood through sixth grade. Ariana started teaching immediately after graduation during the pandemic year, leading her to truly understand how to adjust and be flexible daily. Arianna has been teaching kindergarten for four years. Ariana believes in the power of collaboration and emphasizes the impact collaboration has on helping her be a better teacher, which, as a result, helps her students grow and learn. Ariana gravitated towards education after working as a babysitter and nanny; she loved spending time with the kids, watching and helping them grow emotionally, socially, and academically. Ariana is in her 20s and shares that she has an amazing husband, a high school special education teacher, and a football coach. During her free time, Ariana loves to visit her family, who have been instrumental in her journey. They are all still living in Corpus Christi, Texas. Ariana's passions include her faith, family, and teaching. She also enjoys returning to her hometown to spend time with family and friends at the beach, bike riding, outdoor activities, and baking.

Danielle

Danielle, who self-identifies as Black, was born and raised in the windy city and home to the original deep dish pizza and the Bears, Chicago, IL. While in Illinois, Danielle obtained her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Illinois State University in 2003 and her

master’s in educational leadership from Concordia University in 2014. Danielle shares that from the beginning of her education journey, she has been blessed to impact the lives of impoverished students. She served the Chicago Public Schools as a teacher for eleven and a half years. Danielle taught second through sixth grades in the south and west side of Chicago, which is 96% economically disadvantaged. Danielle passionately discussed that literacy achievement in the Chicago schools she served was low in relation to growth and academic achievement due to the barriers the communities faced. While teaching, Danielle pursued her national board certification and challenged herself to pursue a master's degree in reading because she knew these courses would help her best support her students. Danielle emphasized that she wanted to be better equipped to serve her students, who often came to her two to three grade levels below in reading. Danielle transitioned to becoming a high school assistant principal at a Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) magnet school in the Austin neighborhood, which was another Chicago neighborhood that was full of crime, drug activity, gangs, and violence. The school had a very high mobility rate, and they worked hard to motivate students and increase their attendance. Danielle then moved to San Antonio, Texas, where she has been an instructional coach since relocating; this is her fifth year. Danielle is in her 30s and loves her job; her educational experiences and background have all involved serving Title I schools in urban settings. Danielle accentuated that her heart is with Title I communities.

Eliza

Eliza, who self-identifies as White, has a true passion for early childhood. Eliza received her bachelor's degree in journalism in 2011 from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. After graduating, she joined Teach for America, which placed her in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she taught preschool for two years while getting her master's degree in early childhood from the

University of Nevada at Las Vegas in 2014. As a child, Eliza did not know she wanted to be a teacher, but once she received her master's in education, it all came together for her. After teaching in Las Vegas for four years, Eliza moved to Atlanta, where she taught first and second grades before relocating to Texas. Upon arriving in Texas, she was hired at Ray Elementary, where she taught first grade for a year and a half. Eliza was quickly promoted to instructional coach due to her early childhood knowledge and expertise. Her instructional coaching role focused on supporting kindergarten through second grade teachers and students in literacy and numeracy. At that time, the early childhood coaching role was a new position at Ray Elementary due to achievement data demonstrating a high need for a focus on early literacy and numeracy. After COVID, the instructional coaching role transitioned to solely early literacy. Eliza facilitates the Professional Learning Communities process with collaborative teams, instructional planning sessions, assists teachers with disaggregating data, and everything literacy-encompassing: reading and writing. Eliza is in her 30s and has passionately devoted eleven years to her career in education. Eliza enjoys spending time with her family during her free time.

Holly

Holly, who self-identifies as White, has a diverse teaching experience. Holly was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. Holly holds a bachelor's degree in communication from the University of Southern California. She has a master's degree in teaching from Trinity University and a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Texas San Antonio. Holly taught students who received special education services in Los Angeles for three years before teaching overseas for two years in the Czech Republic. She took a break from teaching for four years to run a non-profit, Children's Association for Maximum Potential, an organization that provides summer camp opportunities for children with special needs. She returned to

education to continue growing students as she refers to them, “our future”. Holly shared that her passion for education comes from educators' greatest impact on “our future”. She emphasized that public school education exemplifies what it means to be able to reach and surpass any goal be it academic, vocational, social or emotional. Holly is in her 40s and has been in the field of education for twenty years. Holly enjoys running, reading, traveling, and animal rescue during her free time.

James

James, who self-identifies as White, is a passionate educator willing to do whatever it takes to meet the needs of his school community. James was born and raised in Sacramento, California. Immediately after graduating high school, James enlisted in the Marine Corps for four years. After the Marine Corps, James obtained a bachelor’s degree in government from Sacramento State University in 2005. When he first moved to San Antonio, he worked for AT&T. While at AT&T, James tutored a fourth grade student and fell in love with teaching and that age group. He received his teaching certification and began his educational career as a teacher, teaching fourth grade for six years and third grade for one year. While teaching, James pursued his master's degree in education from Trinity University, graduating in 2013. James then moved into administration, becoming an assistant principal at a Title I school within the Sunshine Independent School District. He was an assistant principal for four years before being transferred to Ray Elementary School as the assistant principal for one year. After his first year at Ray Elementary, he was promoted to principal. He has served as the principal at Ray Elementary for five years. James is in his 40s and loves to spend time with his family, traveling, and watching his four boys play sports. James’ sister is also an educator and a first-grade teacher in the Sunshine Independent School District.

Jessica

Jessica, who self-identifies as Hispanic, knew from an early age that she wanted to be an educator. Jessica shared that she knew she wanted to be a teacher since she was a little girl, bossing her little cousins around and playing school with her younger neighbor. As a child, Jessica always loved school! She feels the fantastic teachers who influenced her as a student throughout the years left a lasting impact. She has core memories of her kinder teacher and their classroom activities. Jessica loved getting her hands on the school supply list and going back to school shopping. Jessica's father worked as a custodian and then in food services for the Sunshine School District. Her father would bring home chalk holders and supplies for her to play with that teacher discarded. She would use these supplies to pretend play that she was a teacher.

When Jessica was sixteen, she started working with children, babysitting, and shortly after working at a daycare as an afterschool care teacher. She then worked as a preschool teacher and transitioned to an instructional assistant position with the Sunshine Independent School District. Jessica returned to school after she got married and finished her teacher certification in 2018. She received her bachelor's degree from Texas State and is certified in English as a Second Language. Jessica is in her 30s and has been teaching for seven years. She loves teaching and the reward of learning that happens within her classroom! Jessica enjoys crafting, volleyball, and spending time with her family during her free time.

Kendall

Kendall, who self-identifies as White, loves to connect with her students daily. Kendall was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. Kendall graduated from Texas State University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She is certified to teach early childhood through sixth grade. Kendall also holds an English as a Second Language certification. Kendall has been

teaching at Ray Elementary for six years. During her time at Ray Elementary, Kendall has taught first, third and fourth grades. This year is her fourth year in fourth grade, and she plans and teaches reading, writing, phonics, and social studies. Kendall is in her 20s and has a younger brother and sister, both attending Texas A&M University; she serves as a role model for them and the students' lives she touches daily. Kendall is getting married within the next few months and is excited to begin her newlywed journey.

Renee

Renee is a passionate educator who self-identifies as White. Renee was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. Renee attended a Catholic high school. While in high school, students had to choose a vocation, and during her senior year, she chose education. She was placed in a Title I school as a teacher's assistant and tutor. This experience ignited her passion for education; Renee fell in love with teaching. After graduating high school, she attended Texas State University and obtained her certification and bachelor's degree in early childhood through sixth grade, with an English as a Second Language concentration. She student taught in an affluent school within Sunshine Independent School District. Upon completing her student teaching experience, she was hired at Ray Elementary, where she has worked since starting her career. Renee has been in education for ten years; she has taught eight years in kindergarten, and the last two in first grade. Renee shared that she comes from a family of educators. Her dad was an elementary art teacher for 32 years, her mother was an emergency room nurse educator, and her sister is a college professor. Teaching comes very naturally to her; she loves being with early childhood the most. Renee emphasized her passion for early literacy. Renee is a lifelong learner, always searching for new strategies, training, and techniques to enhance her classroom practice. Renee is in her 30s and enjoys camping, cooking, gardening, and traveling during her free time.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Amanda	5	Bachelors	Reading Language Arts	2nd
Anabelle	14	Bachelors	All Content Areas	K
Ariana	4	Bachelors	All Content Areas	K
Jessica	7	Bachelors	All Content Areas	3rd
Kendall	6	Bachelors	Reading Language Arts	4th
Renee	10	Bachelors	All Content Areas	1st

Table 2

Instructional Support Participants

Instructional Support Staff Participant	Years in Education	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Levels
Alejandra	21	Bachelors	Targeted Support Teacher	3rd – 5th
Danielle	19	Masters	Literacy Instructional Coach	3rd – 5th
Eliza	11	Masters	Literacy Instructional Coach	K-2

Table 3

Principal Participants

Principal Participants	Years in Education	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Holly	20	Masters	N/A	K-5
James	18	Masters	N/A	K-5

Results

I conducted a single case study grounded in the self-efficacy theory. The self-efficacy framework and principles influenced the language utilized within the focus group and interview questions. The theory also enabled the analysis of the data focusing on interviewee responses and observations centered around how school leaders have successfully created an environment and processes that close literacy gaps for students through shared leadership practices. The recorded transcripts gathered from the one-on-one interviews and focus groups, along with the different school observations, provided rich data to analyze this single case study. Throughout the data collection process, I used journaling to memo my feelings and thoughts to eliminate biases. As a 23-year educator who is passionate about closing literacy gaps, it was necessary to separate personal thoughts and feelings, so I could focus on the study and make biases consciously known. I used Dedoose as a data management organizational tool, which allowed me to code interview and focus group transcripts along with school observations. The interviewees' insights facilitated an understanding of the participant's experiences and how the campus succeeded and transformed the school culture. The codes allowed for the data to be analyzed further and themes and sub-themes to be developed, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Theme and Sub-theme Development

Theme	**Sub-themes**
Valuing All Team Members	Support
	Encouragement
Building Shared Knowledge and Decision-Making	Trust
	Professional Learning Communities
	Cycles of Inquiry and Response

Desire for Success	Resilience
	Change agents
Commitment to Closing Literacy Gaps	High Expectations
	No excuses

Valuing All Team Members

The administrators on the campus have fostered an environment that values all members of the team. The staff plays a critical role in the day-to-day decisions, and teachers are considered contributing experts who share leadership responsibilities across the campus. When speaking about shared leadership, James expressed his thoughts with strong trust and respect for his staff, “It is important to delegate responsibilities, share content knowledge, allow them to lead, everyone has strengths, it is important that we value each team member; this is not my school, it is our school.” It was clear that the teachers’ voice is an essential part of the vision of the campus. James proudly emphasized what empowering teachers means on the campus, “If teachers are involved in all conversations from day one, whether it be planning the central focus or creating the response plan, they own it.” Former assistant principal Holly stressed how important teacher voice is on the campus, “Teachers were empowered, had say, were part of all conversations, through that they became the voice of support. Voice created space that allowed it to be okay to make mistakes.” Teachers feel appreciated and value the respect and leadership roles provided. Kendall highlighted with joy, “We all take on our own leadership role; we are experts in what we are doing; we come to vertical meetings and share ideas with each other.” The tone across the campus is one that focuses on the collective team; there was never an I mentioned; it was always about what we can accomplish together for our students. Eliza shared with a tone of appreciation, “We are a team; everyone is open-minded, open to feedback,

everyone has a safe space where we try out things and talk through and share ideas that help us grow together." Team members across the campus have multiple avenues to provide feedback, share ideas, and learn from one another. The campus culture recognizes that every team member brings expertise and offers numerous opportunities using various methods for all voices to be heard and feel valued.

Support

The resources, professional learning, and support available to the teachers on the campus are vast. The teachers rely on one another, the instructional support team, instructional coaches, targeted support teacher, administrators, and district specialists. Danielle passionately expressed, "Teamwork makes the dream work, this isn't work you can do in isolation. We need to collaborate in partnership, talk through kids, strategies, seeing each other in action with instruction, giving each other feedback." All teachers view the instructional coaches on the campus as a vital resource on the team. Vertical team meetings and planning sessions allow the different grade levels to calibrate and learn from each other. Ariana spoke gratefully about the assistance provided by the instructional coaching team, "They are very supportive, give honest feedback, help, let's plan together, come together, what can we do when something isn't working. We analyze what students need to learn before they learn it." Anabelle respectfully echoed Ariana's perspective about the capacity building coaches foster, "Our coaches help make it easier to teach, they guide us. Eliza has molded me into a reading specialist. She has walked me through how to teach. Our coaches have been amazing." The staff on the campus feel confident in the resources, support, modeling, instructional strategies, and professional learning available to help them grow as educators and effectively perform their roles.

Encouragement

The teachers felt strongly about the effects of the praise all school team members provide. Praise, support, and assurance are actions modeled by the administration. Renee enthusiastically shared her appreciation, “The way our admin team supports us, gets us what we need, helps and cheers us on, is very special. That encouragement towards what we’re doing and can do for kids is recognized and seen.” The entire staff enacts the actions modeled by the administrative team. Ariana agreed with Renee and added, “We are all in this together, know what we're going through. We encourage one another, it helps create a bond, a support system formed because we are here together, going through the same thing.” Kendall agrees and passionately includes, “Because of our admin, because of how great our faculty is we're always looking for the best method to teach our kids and get them where they need to be. James enthusiastically states, “We highlight things going really well, empower teachers to own their story, own kids learning. We've always been super intentional about celebrating, not placing blame.” The campus looks for ways to celebrate and find wins, small gains to highlight. The staff utilizes a strengths-based approach to highlight practices that are going well. Once those celebrations are discussed, it allows for conversations about what areas are growth opportunities.

Building Shared Knowledge and Decision-Making

Teams participate in weekly collaborative meetings allowing for discussion of best instructional practices, reviewing student assessment results, and building action plans in response to findings. Amanda asserted, “We review data, make decisions to improve instruction, or provide specific interventions. I use shared leadership to take accountability for the part I play helping our team accomplish goals for student success.” Eliza emphasized, “Collaboratively as a team, looking at assessments and understanding what part is essential for our kids to know, then

backwards plan." Renee's commitment is expressed, "Guiding teachers who are a little bit lost or using that as mentorship, between yourself and the other teachers, not even just on your team, but as a faculty." Alejandra believes team shared knowledge has contributed to the results, "Using our data wall, discuss every single student, tools they used, and how they answer questions. We're constantly reassessing looking at student artifacts and evidence of learning and thinking next steps." Teachers on the campus learn from one another using student data to monitor and adjust their plans. The staff meets consistently to identify solutions to challenges, share best practices, and explore new ideas.

Trust

Trust is evident across the campus with all stakeholders, from the administrators to the teachers, and students. From the instructional support perspective Danielle passionately stated, "Being a true thought partner, we talk through things, try them, give feedback. How did that work? How does that not work? We serve as thought partners walking side by side with teachers." From the student perspective Amanda proudly established, "I evaluate relationships with students, what can I do to foster, build relationships? How can I get them to trust me? What motivates them? What do they like? What can I do to engage them in learning?" Holly shared the administrator's viewpoint, "The principal was able to bring out leadership qualities in people they didn't know they had. Saying, you have the skill, I know you're capable of producing high levels of literary scholars. Trust built leadership in teachers." There is a clear sense of unity and purpose, not only amongst staff but also with students. The campus's actions, behaviors, and decisions rely on relationships and what is best for all students.

Professional Learning Communities

The professional learning communities (PLC) process serves as the means for making decisions about student learning outcomes, discussing the support needed by every learning community member, and assessing the impact of the instructional plans. Eliza intensely asserted, “The PLC process, especially with fluency being one of our essentials, has shown that the systematic approach to phonics is making a difference for our kids.” Kendall proudly added, “This is about the PLC process. That's my most effective role, how I affect literacy on campus, a perfect example of shared leadership. It was reflection on my teaching how we can better things for students.” Jessica confirmed Kendall’s feelings about the PLC process, “I took advantage of coaches, worked side by side with them, my team, all grade levels, the principal, AP, all collaborated together.” The PLC process on the campus centers on improving student learning. The intentional focus is evident through planning practices aligned to essential standards, goal-setting with students, data analysis protocols, and action planning. The staff is committed to continuously learning new strategies to enhance their practice.

Cycles of Inquiry and Response

The participants shared that the PLC process has increased teacher collaboration and student outcomes by intentionally focusing on instructional practices. These cycles of inquiry within the PLC process enable teams to focus on results and develop action plans. Kendall elaborates on the process, “We look at all data as a team, we see who's struggling with a specific skill, zoom in as much as we can, on what specific part of that skill they're having trouble with.” Jessica thoughtfully shared, “The PLC process helped me grow as a teacher. It also helped students because I was learning from it. It was very reflective, I kept thinking, what could I have done differently?” Alejandra highlights the thought process, “Is there anything we missed during

instruction, going back and deeply analyzing data. Do they understand the question? How does this align with the TEKS? That's how we plan for everything, lesson plans, small group, and interventions." Anabelle confirms, "We all work collaboratively, very purposefully, and intentionally, to look at student data, and make decisions to improve." The team engages in collaborative cycles of inquiry that acknowledge and assist with solving challenges related to student learning based on assessment results. Staff members collect and analyze student data, share ideas, and examine new strategies.

Desire for Success

The passion the participants exuded when speaking about the students and campus was contagious. It demonstrates that staff view the educator role not just as a job or a career. The staff is committed to shaping students' lives and providing students with the tools and resources to achieve at high levels and to prepare students for the challenges potentially encountered in the future. Kendall impatiently shared, "We are always looking for the best method to teach our kids. get them where they need to be. We are never set in our ways, always changing and adjusting based on student needs." Anabelle's connection with her students was evident, "My priority is fostering strong relationships with kiddos. If I had a problem, I'd reevaluate my relationship, ensure I'm doing everything possible, I'm clear, getting down on their level, creating that trustworthy bond." Eliza firmly expresses, "Our conversations revolve around what are we doing for Black students that is different than Hispanic students? Because it's showing they're not growing as much. What are the differences? One of the biggest pieces is having eye-opening conversations." Holly attributes staff commitment to the following, "Always trying to explain the why behind something, there's a purpose, a vision, this is where we are, and where we're headed. Being able to communicate a clear plan, a clear vision, helps mitigate resistance." Through the

observations, interviews, and focus groups, the vision of the campus became very clear. The vision guides the work and assists in motivating and inspiring the staff to persist in achieving the common goals.

Resilience

The participants emotionally shared how turning challenges into solutions improves student academic outcomes. Kendall firmly asserted, “To close literacy gaps you share responsibility. If kids can't read it’s everybody's problem. We must collaborate, be willing to speak openly about what's best for kids, put all personal biases, doubts aside, do what's best for kids.” Ariana devotedly added, “It starts with teachers, then it trickles down to students, helping them believe they can do it. Once they are in that mindset, they believe it with us, we all work together as a campus.” Jessica believes all students can learn at high levels, “Whenever I give a lesson, I ensure that I am reaching every student, I make sure I know where they are, what they need in order for them to reach the same understanding.” Holly animatedly states, “Creating a level playing field for students, they don't have access to actual books at home, which is very eye-opening to people, ensuring students who may not have access to certain things do.” A culture of collaboration and self-reflection allows staff to endure and adapt and, most importantly, find solutions when there are challenges to overcome.

Change Agents

One key practice visible on the campus is consistent reflection about the school’s current state. The continuous reflection and examination of student artifacts and assessment data effect transformation, facilitating difficult conversations that help shape the school's culture. Ariana faithfully stated, “My first year on campus we were an F campus. We all came together, believed we are going to change that, worked together as a campus, challenging the status quo.” Holly

discussed how the staff shifted practices that materialized into success, “We saw a lot of growth in a very short amount of time once we started having conversations, emphasis in kindergarten through 2nd, then we're going to see the results, in 3rd through 5th. That’s exactly what's happened.” Kendall passionately adds, “I think it’s the mindset, we just squash that our kids cannot do it. We will find a solution and think outside of the box, no matter what it is.” Eliza assures, “We are constantly not just trying to compete or outperform schools like us, but we know our kids deserve everything that all students in this city and anywhere else deserve.” The administrators have fostered a shared sense of purpose across the campus. As a result, staff members' collective efforts and contributions have transformed campus practices and increased student achievement.

Commitment to Closing Literacy Gaps

Student data walls demonstrate the purposeful conversations about each individual student. Data walls include student pictures and assessment data tracking students by skill, ensuring staff is accountable for growing every child. Amanda described, “We evaluate data, move students into new groups, sort by student populations, discuss what we're doing differently with each group. Intervention groups are flexible, interventions are put in place directly targeting specific learning gaps within student populations.” PLC observations reveal that grade level collaborative teams discuss grade level assessment data and teachers are familiar with each students’ level of literacy proficiency not only individual classes. Teams discuss effective strategies, resources, and groups that students can be shifted to utilizing the assessment data and skill(s) of focus to create a new plan of action. The data wall in the PLC room allows for the discussions to revolve around student learning, it is an accountability piece that is monitored. Eliza shares during a PLC session as teachers discuss specific student results, “There is a direct

correlation with the data and how students were serviced in small groups." James highlights, "Look at the student results, let's look at where the students entered at the beginning of the year, we have so much to celebrate." Renee adds, "We know what we need to focus on more in small groups." Holly attributes the success to the commitment and focus, "Disparities in literacy data were addressed through the PLC process, it was very transparent, narrowing down the focus, so that students' gaps were truly addressed." The conversations staff engage in are intentional, digging deep into root causes using individual student data to ensure the needs of each child are met. When the student data does not show the increase they are expecting to see, the team discusses additional strategies, support, and techniques that can be utilized to assist individual students. The staff is committed to fostering a literacy culture because they are aware of the challenges students will face if they move to the next grade level with literacy gaps.

High Expectations

The core campus culture centers on engaging all learners without lowering the cognitive demand of the learning target, standard, or skill when students are struggling or haven't mastered the learning outcome(s). Renee keenly shared, "Be intentional with proven practices and strategies, especially phonics, consistent observations, taking lots of data checkpoints to make sure kids are in the right group, keeping expectations high no matter kids' backgrounds or abilities." During classroom observations, lessons are chunked for students, giving learners the opportunity to process learning, use student discourse to answer questions, and write responses. All students are held accountable to participate in the lesson through group roles. Expectations are not lowered when students struggle to answer the question, Kendall tells students, "I am going to give you more time to look at the text evidence and come up with a response." Students work together to come up with the correct answer. Jessica affirms, "We must ensure we're giving

students a productive struggle; we're asking ourselves, what is the outcome you want? How are you going to get them there? How are you going to reflect on your teaching?" Danielle firmly expresses, "Bringing awareness to our own biases, expectations we're placing on students. Looking at our mindsets, making sure we're reaching all students not just a small group, constantly having conversations, not being afraid to have the conversations." Eliza adds, "This team, we're all pushing each other to be better constantly. So, it's just like a culture of high achievement for all of our students." Teachers hold students accountable to grade level expectations. The bar remains high, regardless of student experiences and performance. The staff believes that all students can engage and accomplish grade level tasks. The reflective practices and challenging goals created for students allow them to reach their full potential.

No Excuses

The school values and commitments are communicated clearly through a coherent culture and vision that establishes all staff members to take responsibility for shaping all students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral support. James proudly shared the principal standpoint, "It's important to engage with all grade levels, it's a big rock. If I'm saying, we must ensure kiddos can read, it becomes a focus for everybody." Renee fervently shared the teacher's perspective, "If they're struggling with attendance start working towards that, if behavior is causing gaps be intentional with time, use this to build better relationships with kids, and use time to get academics down." Eliza passionately voices, "Fighting for equity amongst teaching practices, making sure teachers are including all students, how much money parents make, or their backgrounds or anything like that don't have any bearing on the quality of education they receive." Holly shared how no excuses became the norm, "There are outside factors that are, quote, unquote, outside of our control, focusing on the control that we have in our building.

Those conversations became a lot more authentic." Staff members have high expectations of themselves and the students they serve. They don't make excuses when students are struggling. Instead, the staff focuses on their circle of control and how to impact student learning through the instructional practices used in their classrooms and relationships built with students.

Outlier Data and Findings

Communication with parents about student literacy outcomes and expectations is evident but shared using different methods across the campus. Through interviews, focus groups, and observations, teachers, instructional support staff, and administrators shared that this is an area the campus wants to continue to strengthen. The participants realize that there aren't currently consistent, common language or expectations for sharing literacy results and at-home support with parents across the campus. The administrators' goal is to increase parent voice and engagement.

Sharing Literacy Results with Parents

Sharing communication of literacy outcomes with parents is a component the campus is still trying to refine and strengthen. Danielle explained, "This is a growth area for us right now. We talked as a team about doing quarterly check ins, bringing parents on campus, doing more literacy meetings." Alejandra contributes to connections with parents, "I do make a point to reach out or make a little note and send it home and say, hey, they did so great in small groups." Amanda was the only participant that shared, "I send home decodables or readers for practice. Sometimes, it'll be a decodable they've mastered, or even one that is specific to their area of need, so they get extra practice." Ariana added, "I like to show parents, their student's data. It's hard to understand sometimes as parents they've never seen the charts and reports we use to

analyze data." The methods in which student literacy outcomes and expectations are shared with parents differ across the campus.

Research Question Responses

This section provides an overview of the study's central research question and three sub-questions. It offers direct narrative answers to each research question using the themes developed in the previous section. The participant quotes aligned with each pertaining research question were utilized to respond to the research questions, keeping the theoretical framework in mind.

Table 5

Research Question Theme and Sub-theme Alignment

Research Question	**Theme**	**Sub-themes**
Central Research Question How do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy outcomes in urban elementary schools?	Valuing All Team Members	Support Encouragement
Central Research Question How do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy outcomes in urban elementary schools?	Building Shared Knowledge and Decision-Making	Trust Professional Learning Communities Cycles of Inquiry and Response
Sub-Question One		

How are leaders prepared to address literacy gaps?	Commitment to Closing Literacy Gaps	High Expectations No excuses
Sub-Question Two How do leaders inspire and influence teachers to create systematic cultural change that eliminates literacy gaps? **Sub-Question Three** How do teacher expectations affect student literacy performance?	Desire for Success	Resilience Change Agents

Central Research Question

This research question aimed to understand how the teachers, instructional support staff, and school administrators perceived the effect of shared leadership on closing literacy gaps. Teacher leadership is an essential component in achieving school success. Creating a culture that centers around shared leadership fosters efficacy and collaboration.

How do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in urban elementary schools? The participants' perspective is that the PLC process allows for collaborative teams to focus on student results, through recursive cycles of inquiry, teacher teams develop action plans that follow a model of teach, assess, and respond, aligning to the valuing all team members and building shared knowledge and decision-making themes. Renee outlines, "When working with my team, questioning each other, talking about strategies. Asking ourselves, did this work? What does our data show from these strategies and

activities? Do we need to change it up?" Anabelle shares how she contributes, "I share my leadership practices, take accountability, work collaboratively, very purposefully, intentionally look at student data, make decisions to improve, that plays a big part on our team to ensure we're accomplishing each student's goals." Eliza, "The culture is very important, culture to take risks, we pride ourselves on how we're able to lean on each other, admit, I don't know all answers, but we're gonna figure this out together for our kids."

From the administrator lens it is valuing everyone's strengths, allowing staff opportunities to share and grow together, and being vulnerable by relying on those who may have the answers when he doesn't. James stated, "I ask questions, how do we know kids are learning? How do we know kids are moving? That way I get feedback from teachers." Holly stressed that collaboration is key to improving literacy, "It was addressed through the PLC process. It was very transparent. Teachers took ownership of instruction, that intentionality used to narrow the focus, so that students' gaps were truly addressed."

Sub-Question One

The literature findings demonstrate that leaders do not receive literacy training through administrator programs. Sub-question one aimed to discover how leaders overcome a lack of literacy background and training.

How are leaders prepared to address literacy gaps? Through the interview and campus observations it was evident that the principal on the campus has very clear expectations around literacy. The principal shared that he did not teach foundational grades as a teacher but has prioritized surrounding himself with those who understand foundational literacy practices to gain deeper knowledge. In addition, he asks a lot of questions of the teachers, visits classrooms on a consistent basis during the literacy blocks and attends literacy professional learning. James

shared, “What I've done is I've been able to put some really good people around me, I rely on their expertise, ask a lot of questions I don't know answers to. I am not trained in those foundational principles.” Anabelle emphasized, “It's very important, especially in my role, to ensure we do a lot of early intervention, accurately and appropriately collecting data on what we know kindergarteners are supposed to be doing.” Holly shares the principal’s vision and consistent literacy focus, “You guys are going to leave kinder readers, move up to first grade reading and eventually comprehending.” Alejandra validates that the entire campus has a literacy focus, “I do want to give a lot of credit to our librarian, she did a good job of getting students excited about literacy, it was an extension of those who were excited in the classroom.”

Sub-Question Two

This question is intended to gather data that would demonstrate how leaders replace marginalized settings with growth-oriented cultures to influence literacy outcomes.

How do leaders inspire and influence teachers to create systematic cultural change that eliminates literacy gaps? The participants believe that building relationships with all students, getting to know student interests, and being culturally responsive to individual needs has assisted in closing literacy gaps. James stresses, “We track and select resources that ensure equity, that everybody has access and we have a consistent message on campus. All that goes into creating that equitable space for kids and consistency.” Alejandra highlights enthusiastically, “We are really lucky, it’s about building relationships with kids, especially with literacy, we want an authentic text that will tap into what they like, we always look for their interests to connect with them.” Amanda shares how she responds to student specific needs, “I group students with partners whom they can foster deeper learning or process information similarly. During intervention time, I work with students in a very small group getting more intensive instruction.”

Ariana adds, “I create very intentional stations, getting down to the root of exactly what they're getting stuck on, their group could be completely different from the group exceeding in that area, differentiating small groups and activities.”

Sub-Question Three

This question intends to find out what factors are considered and how staff responds when student data shows disparities in literacy, especially within student groups.

How do teacher expectations affect student literacy performance? It was very clear from the observations, interviews, and focus groups that teachers hold students to high expectations and are very intentional about providing additional support for students who are reading below grade level. Eliza indicated, “In addition to our intervention time, there are different supports for our struggling learners, they are always getting doubled up, getting more specialized support, additional groupings.” Observations indicate that the literacy block includes many strategies within one lesson: grammar, spelling, compound words, plurals, blending words, and writing. Small group instruction allows students to practice and apply what was learned within the whole group lesson and an opportunity for the teacher to work with students in small groups. During a classroom observation, Renee asks students, “Sound out the word, let’s read it together. What is the vowel team that you see? Check your mouth when you are unsure.” Amanda proudly describes how she provides additional support, “Our intervention groups are flexible, change depending on current student data. Interventions are put in place directly targeting the specific learning gaps within student populations.”

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school.

The self-efficacy theory framework provided the focus of analysis for the interview, focus group, and observation data; the emerging results and themes demonstrated that the educators have successfully created an environment and processes that close literacy gaps for students through shared leadership practices. High levels of trust modeled by the administrators by valuing all team members and building shared knowledge and decision-making were solid and consistent themes throughout this case study. Teachers consistently stated that the support and encouragement cultivated allow for a focus on closing literacy gaps primarily due to the leadership opportunities provided through the Professional Learning Communities process, which fosters efficacy for all staff.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. In this chapter, I discuss the interpretation of the findings relating to the central research question, sub-questions, and theoretical framework. I share the implications for policy and practice for researchers, administrators, teachers, and District office leaders, as well as the limitations and theoretical and empirical implications. The conclusion of this chapter will include limitations and delimitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This study sought to understand how an urban Title I campus creates a culture focused on closing literacy gaps. This single case study utilized Bandura's self-efficacy theory to examine the perceptions of eleven participants; teachers, instructional support staff, previous assistant principal, and the principal, who have actively worked to shape the narrative of Ray Elementary School. In addition, this study sought ways educators could evaluate and self-reflect on current practices employed to close literacy gaps for elementary students before it is too late. This case study's findings contributed to previous research on shared leadership practices. The following discussion outlines how the findings associated with the existing empirical and theoretical literature related to the phenomenon. The findings in this section include five major subsections, including (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Policy or Practice; (c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and (e) Recommendations for Future Research.

Interpretation of Findings

Following the data collection process, the information was organized, coded, and analyzed. The table below represents the thematic findings that emerged from data triangulation, as discussed in Chapter 4. There were four major themes and nine sub-themes identified in this case study. These themes and sub-themes are supported by the content of the literature review in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework.

Table 6

Theme and Sub-theme Development

Theme	Sub-Theme
Valuing all Team Members	Support
	Encouragement
Building Shared Knowledge and Decision-Making	Trust
	Professional Learning Communities
	Cycles of Inquiry and Response
Desire for Success	Resilience
	Change agents
Commitment to Closing Literacy Gaps	High Expectations
	No excuses

Summary of Thematic Findings

A single case study design was utilized to examine how school leaders create a school culture that increases student achievement by closing literacy gaps; four themes emerged from the data triangulation and analysis process. The themes were; valuing all team members, building

shared knowledge and decision-making, desire for success, and commitment to closing literacy gaps. The themes aligned and assisted in answering the central research question and sub-questions. The eleven participants' knowledge, experiences, and views were shared through individual interviews, focus groups, and observations. These were used to gain a deep, rich perspective of how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy. The participants shared experiences also provided concrete examples and processes that other schools can use to improve early literacy.

The findings reveal that the staff perceives valuing all campus team members as a campus priority. Two sub-themes emerged within the valuing all team members' theme. The initial identified sub-theme was support. Support directly correlates with Bandura's self-efficacy theory through vicarious experiences. Utilizing vicarious experiences of modeling, observing, and coaching, these educators support each other in accomplishing tasks. Increasing individual or team efficacy involves demonstrating, modeling, organizing, planning, and stretching one another's knowledge and thinking (Bandura, 1977). Having a staff member to always count on fosters a culture of feeling valued as an essential team member.

The next subtheme was encouragement; regardless of the difficulty or challenge, the participants felt encouraged to persevere, aligning with Bandura's self-efficacy theory component of social persuasion. Teachers consistently shared that instructional coaches, other teachers, and the administration provided encouragement by sharing strategies and tools that would assist with meeting the academic needs of students. Social persuasion affects self-efficacy when a highly respected individual provides assurance of the capability to achieve a challenging task (Bandura, 1978; Goddard et al., 2004). The participants in this study work collaboratively with coaches, other teachers, and administration, whom are held in high regard due to

experienced success; these team members are willing to share best practices and support, resulting in feeling like a valued contributing team member.

The theme of building shared knowledge and decision-making included three sub-themes trust, professional learning communities, and cycles of inquiry and response. Participants indicated the feeling of being trusted as professionals and educators; participants feel safe learning together, sharing perspectives, and providing recommendations. This outlook aligns with the literature on shared leadership practices. Shared leadership generates substantial trust, commitment to the organization, and persistence regardless of the barriers and challenges encountered (Berraies et al., 2021; Gichuhi, 2021; Margolis et al., 2016; Sedrine, 2019).

The sub-theme of using the professional learning communities (PLC) process to guide the participants' collaborative team time was emphasized throughout the data collection process. The PLC process allows teams to develop collective commitments that enable staff to learn together, model for one another, determine misconceptions, analyze student data, and immediately respond to the data by differentiating student support and instruction. Participants attributed success in closing literacy gaps to the PLC process as participants were able to experience success in classrooms, and it motivated participants to continue to refine and enhance the process. The PLC process directly correlates to Bandura's self-efficacy theory component of mastery experiences. Mastery experiences are the most influential and generated when an individual completes a task successfully (Bandura, 1997).

The final sub-theme connected to building shared knowledge and decision-making is cycles of inquiry and response. The participants shared how collaborative teams within the PLC process consistently seek new teaching and learning methods, test the methods, and then meet to reflect on the results; this process aligns with the existing literature. Consistently monitoring and

measuring student achievement reduces the odds of creating literacy gaps in student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Cycles of inquiry are critical to the campus culture and allow staff to build shared knowledge and decision-making.

The theme of desire for success has two sub-themes: resilience and change agents. The participants in the study exuded a desire for success that was contagious. The participants' experienced success has created resilience and a can-do attitude. Bandura's self-efficacy component of physiological feedback is determined by how an individual feels about performing a task. When one experiences success, self-efficacy increases. The teachers and instructional support staff attribute success to the administrators' leadership style, as administrators create conditions and ensure support is available within the organization from a peer, leader, or mentor. These experiences at Ray Elementary also align with the empirical literature. A key determinant of employee emotions in the workplace is the individual's relationship with the leader (Harland et al., 2005).

Change agents is sub-theme two. The participants believe in challenging the status quo, asking challenging questions, and facilitating difficult conversations to shape the culture of Ray Elementary. Collective efficacy is defined as the perception of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty, as a whole, would positively affect student learning (Goddard, 2001). The participants' collective efficacy drives further examination of results, finding the best option, and disrupting the complacency to enhance and refine practice for students.

The final theme of commitment to closing literacy gaps has two sub-themes, high expectations, and no excuses. Participants emphasized the importance of closing literacy gaps for students by the end of second grade. Participants explained that it is vital for students to leave each grade level, kindergarten through second grade, mastering key essential standards that will

set students up for success in the next grade level. Participants stressed that each student is held to the highest expectations even when not reading at grade level. Participants explained that lowering expectations for students would mean students would never have the opportunity to reach grade-level expectations. Instead, the staff works with students in targeted small groups, and students needing intensive support receive double and triple doses of foundational literacy skills-based instruction throughout the week.

The sub-themes of no excuses and high expectations relates to marginalized populations that tend to have more significant gaps when compared to all students; Black, Hispanic, and Special Education. The participants made no excuses for the student groups; on the contrary, participants were aware that the student populations require extra attention and monitoring to ensure students are meeting grade-level standards. PLC protocols enable participants to monitor the success of all students. These sub-themes are associated with Bandura's self-efficacy theory component of physiological feedback, the participants feelings about accomplishing a task, and the existing literature. Collective teacher efficacy focuses on setting high expectations for the students served, applying research-based instructional practices, and continuously assessing teacher efforts to enhance student learning by closing achievement gaps (Eaker et al., 2020).

Professional Learning Communities Fosters Shared Leadership. The study revealed that Ray Elementary relies on the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) process to drive all instructional decisions on the campus. Each team member plays a critical role in the process. One participant described it as work that has to be accomplished by everyone on the team, all hands on deck. The administrators have provided opportunities for team members to lead and facilitate collaborative team meetings through modeling and support, aligning with Bandura's self-efficacy theory component of vicarious experiences and the empirical literature. Time,

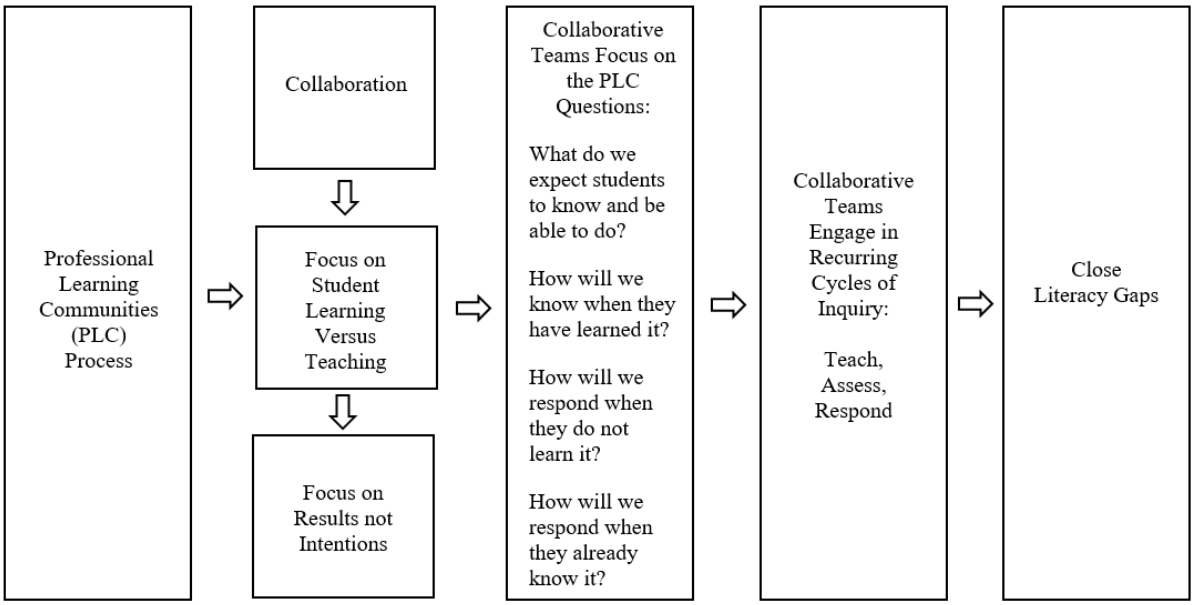
resources, and support are provided to enable teacher teams to engage in discussions revolving around student learning outcomes. Through the principal interview it was shared that he began by modeling a few PLC sessions, then transitioned that responsibility to the instructional coaches, who then shifted that role to the teachers. Principals see the job as empowering individuals to make decisions; leaders give the teachers the needed resources and help keep the focus on student learning (Bean et al., 2012; Park et al., 2018; Sedrine et al., 2020). Participants shared that observing other staff members experience success from sustained efforts led to a belief that it was possible to be successful and lead these sessions, aligning with vicarious experiences. One participant emphasized that this is not work that can be accomplished in isolation, everyone works collaboratively in partnership. Participants highlighted how leadership roles are shared, and the PLC process has enabled the distribution of leadership by building shared knowledge, discussing research-based strategies, modeling for one another, analyzing assessment data, and creating response plans.

The administrative team at Ray Elementary has utilized the PLC elements to connect teacher expertise to building collective teacher efficacy and transforming the instructional practices and results on the campus. Participants expressed that closing literacy gaps required every team member to share the responsibility, share data, with a perception that these are all of our students, and as a team the staff will find ways to meet students' individual needs. Engaging in shared leadership through the PLC process has allowed Ray Elementary to reach campus goals. In a school that practices shared leadership, often called a professional learning community (PLC), all adults continually learn together to achieve high levels of learning for every student (Wilhelm, 2013). Yiegh et al. (2019) similarly noted that the distributed perspective allows principals to facilitate and support teachers to take leadership roles which

build ownership, efficacy, and student success. Providing teams with the structures, modeling, and support to engage in the PLC process has allowed all staff members to experience shared leadership. The participants felt the teams would not be able to function without the PLC process; participants rely on the protocols and process to find solutions, which is a part of the culture. Participants felt strongly that in addition to the weekly team time, the time devoted to vertical team meetings once a month engages the staff in school-wide leadership opportunities and conversations that create common instructional language and address any gaps in school-wide data. Shared leadership develops self-efficacy and reinforces the importance of schools functioning as learning communities (Buffum et al., 2010; DeWitt, 2017, 2019, 2022; DuFour et al., 2016; Eaker et al., 2020; Goddard et al., 2015, 2017; Hattie, 2018). The figure below demonstrates the progression used by the professional learning communities model to transition from one stage of the process to another utilizing a logic model.

Figure 2

Logic Model Focus on Student Learning



Note. Logic model. Adapted from Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods, 6th Ed. (p. 193), by R.K. Yin, 2018, SAGE Publications.

Shared Leadership Builds Collective Efficacy. A contributing factor aligned with shared leadership is collective efficacy. The participants' responses and observations made it clear through actions, behaviors, and beliefs that there is no task too difficult to achieve when it comes to student learning. Participants are determined to find solutions to barriers and challenges and have successfully demonstrated that it is possible through the student results. Bandura (1997) classified collective teacher efficacy as the most important factor influencing student achievement. Educators demonstrating high levels of collective efficacy set ambitious goals and are relentless in efforts to succeed (Tschannen et al., 1998). Each participant continuously attributed success in student achievement to the afforded opportunities to build knowledge, collaborate with peers, and receive and give feedback. The principal emphasized the importance of treating each team member as an expert by valuing strengths and contributions to education, aligning with Bandura's self-efficacy theory component of social persuasion and the existing literature. Leaders build a culture that supports collaboration amongst teachers and cultivates shared leadership by creating conversation networks that support ongoing deliberation about practice (Gichuhi, 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Spillane, 2012). These findings suggest that collective teacher efficacy can potentially close literacy gaps in schools.

Collective Efficacy and Shared Leadership Create Organizational Resilience. The participants' commitment to student learning proved a resilience to finding answers and solutions through cycles of inquiry. Participants agreed that if students cannot read, it is everyone's problem; kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers, instructional support staff, and administrators are all responsible for the data and searching for ways to meet the individual

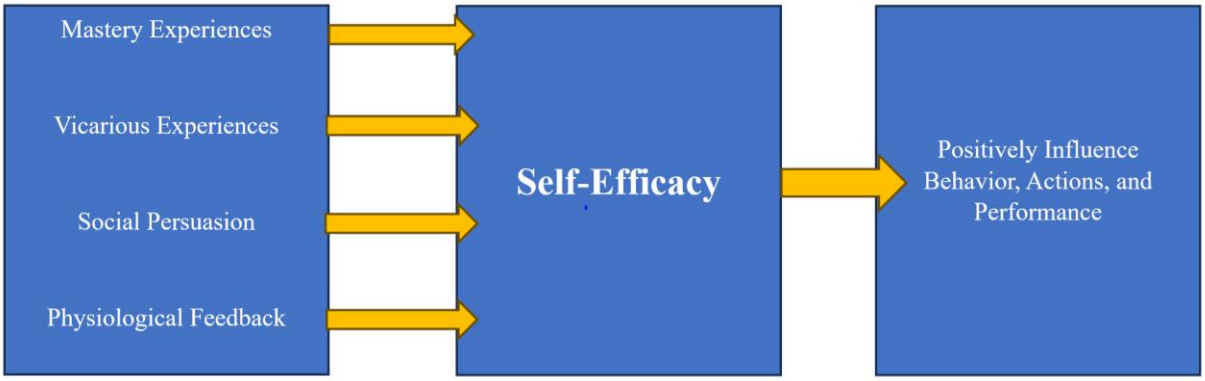
needs of each student. Data walls are located in the PLC room and are utilized to track students by name, grade level, essential standards, and artifacts. Teams do not only rely on assessments to evaluate student responses, but also perform validity checks. Validity checks enable teams to analyze student artifacts and responses through success criteria to determine where each student's gaps in knowledge, thinking, or strategy fell short. Teachers' collective efficacy beliefs affect what they aim to accomplish, how resources are used to attain goals, the strategies developed, the amount of effort placed, and the ability to persevere when results are not evident, or discouragement is encountered (Bandura, 1997). Literacy planning is approached with fierce intentionality, research, and strategies, as described by one participant.

Participants are motivated and inspired to make a difference for all students daily. The passion and resilience to motivate students are acquired through the relationships built with students. The participants attribute success with closing literacy gaps to intentionally utilizing time with students, a laser focus on foundational literacy practices through systematic phonics and phonemic awareness approaches, building content knowledge through experiences and vocabulary, and the specific skills-based support provided during small group instruction. Resilience is a trait that is also fostered in students. Participants shared that providing support and encouragement for students through goal setting, data chats, students creating individual goals and plans, focusing on growth in small increments that students can visually track to feel successful, builds motivation and efficacy within students to work harder. Students are part of a culture that allows one to take risks, experience success, and are celebrated for wins through school-wide incentives. One participant shared that the staff at Ray Elementary will squash the perception that the students cannot achieve due to demographics and zip code; the staff will find a solution and think outside the box; regardless of the challenge, proving that all students are

capable of achieving high levels of success. An organization can only be as resilient as its individuals (Hillman et al., 2021). Participants shared that, as a staff, the team is proud of the culture that is built. A culture in which staff can lean on each other and admit to not know or have all the answers but will figure it out together for the students served. These findings align with empirical literature and Bandura's self-efficacy theory components of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological feedback. Increasing individual or team efficacy involves demonstrating, modeling, organizing, planning, and stretching one another's knowledge and thinking (Bandura, 1977). Woolfolk believed there was a correlation between self-efficacy and student achievement when teachers set the bar high, did not give up on students, and continued to try different strategies if the one used was ineffective (Shaughnessy, 2004).

Figure 3

Theoretical Framework



Note. Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977, 1997) model of how the four principal foundations influence behaviors, actions, and performance.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The endured literacy gaps in the United States of America are alarming. One of the most significant continuing challenges schools and researchers endure is accelerating student learning while closing existing gaps. Teachers are critical to closing literacy gaps. If PLCs can potentially increase student achievement, a culture of shared leadership through the PLC process is essential to a school's success. Principals' effects on student achievement are primarily indirect, coming through efforts to recruit, develop, support, and retain a talented teaching staff and create conditions to deliver effective instruction (Grissom et al., 2021). Principals then create a school culture that supports teachers by valuing staff expertise and providing leadership opportunities using individual strengths. Bandura (1997) classified collective teacher efficacy as the most important factor influencing student achievement. Educators demonstrating high levels of collective efficacy set ambitious goals and are relentless in efforts to succeed (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. The following section considers implications for policy and practice according to the study's findings.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study indicate that teachers, instructional support staff, and administrators perceive shared leadership through the PLC process fosters collective efficacy, which in turn closes achievement gaps. This case study has implications that can benefit federal and state education policymakers, universities, and school districts. Researchers and scholars argue that present-day education policy has adverse and detrimental outcomes on equity, including driving increases in drop-out rates, especially among Latino and Black students,

deskilling and deprofessionalizing teachers, exacerbating the effects of economic disparities among schools and districts through unfunded mandates, failing to consider students with special learning needs, and narrowing curriculum and forcing teachers to teach to the tests (Goodard et al.,2017; Haney, 2000; Klein, 2001; McNeil, 2000; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001; Valencia et al., 2001; Valenzuela, 2005). Knowing the complexities of the United States of America's educational system and how these policies influence student achievement, a rich research-based understanding of effective practices leaders employ to operate and achieve equity in the current policy need to be used. The PLC process may need to be considered as a component of education policy that supports a laser focus on student learning versus teaching. Federal and state education policymakers may offer resources, protocols, and training that foster a school climate of shared leadership to increase literacy achievement. University programs may begin to offer content, models, and scenario practice through principal certification and master's in administration programs. School districts may develop professional learning and academies that support leaders in understanding how school leaders build a climate of openness and trust in a school that empowers teams to make decisions based on student needs. Adopting this process as a part of a district culture would require school districts to allot weekly time, modeling, and resources for teacher teams to meet and create a collaborative culture that is open to educators learning from each other, sharing decisions, and consistently analyzing student data and response plans for student improvement.

Implications for Practice

A practical implication for school leaders is to lead a campus by valuing everyone's expertise, strengths and using these to empower teachers and distribute leadership. Closing literacy gaps for students is dependent on an efficacious and resilient staff. A school culture

utilizing the PLC process builds efficacy and resilience, improving student achievement. PLCs involve collaborative teams cultivating the abilities and skills essential to working together in continuous cycles of inquiry, which center around teacher actions focused on student learning outcomes (DuFour et al., 2016; DeWitt, 2022; Eaker & Marzano, 2020). School improvement and closing literacy gaps are complex, connecting to mastery experiences as the most intentional way to cultivate self and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997). School leaders should use the PLC process to increase collaboration and student learning outcomes by continuously analyzing instructional practices and finding solutions to closing literacy gaps. Equally, school leaders would benefit from enhancing knowledge and leadership skills through professional learning, collaboration with other leaders that have experienced success with the PLC process, attending a PLC conference/summit, observations, and book studies. Participants in this single case study utilized the PLC process to transform the school climate and increase student achievement. This single case study found that urban Title I teachers, instructional support staff, and school leaders perceived valuing all team members, building shared knowledge and decision-making, collaboration, shared leadership, modeling, support, trust, and resilience to influence school climate and student achievement positively. Ray Elementary offers ongoing opportunities for staff to engage in professional learning during early release days, after school, staff development days, and embedded within the school day, ensuring that staff members are best equipped to facilitate the PLC process within the collaborative and vertical team meetings. To achieve the success Ray Elementary has experienced, a commitment to professional learning has to be a part of the campus mission, vision, and collective commitments. School leaders must allot time in the master schedule for weekly collaborative team meetings giving staff time and resources to work on the process. The implication for teachers and staff is to be patient with the process. The

process involves teachers and staff growing and learning together, allowing for reflection, refinement, and enhancement along the way.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This section presents theoretical and empirical implications correlated to a Title I urban school that has experienced success in closing literacy gaps for students by fostering collective efficacy.

Empirical Implications

This case study has notable empirical implications for closing literacy gaps for students in an urban Title I school. The findings that emerged prove that shared leadership opportunities through the PLC process provide staff with the knowledge, resources, and decision-making ability to close literacy gaps. Shared leadership develops self-efficacy and reinforces the importance of schools functioning as learning communities (Buffum et al., 2010; DeWitt, 2017, 2019, 2022; DuFour et al., 2016; Eaker et al., 2020; Goddard et al., 2015, 2017; Hattie, 2018). Limited research has centered on urban Title I administrators, teachers, and instructional support staff perceptions of how school leaders create a culture driven by shared leadership practices that positively affect closing literacy gaps. This case study contributed to a gap in the empirical literature focused on this phenomenon and presents processes that enable leaders to create a school culture focused on closing literacy gaps. Another implication of this study is that all participants recognized that the shared leadership opportunities provided through the PLC process increased efficacy, allowing participants to find solutions to literacy gaps. When teachers are given opportunities to build knowledge and collaborate with peers through given feedback and treated as experts, schools improve student achievement and build collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2015). The participants deemed that there was not any task that was too difficult to conquer because of the support systems that have been created, which corroborates with

organizational resilience. Shared leadership generates substantial trust, commitment to the organization, and persistence regardless of the barriers and challenges encountered (Berraies et al., 2021; Gichuhi, 2021; Margolis et al., 2016; Sedrine, 2019). The findings extend previous research that shared leadership generates organizational resilience. In addition, the findings validate that a principal alone cannot accomplish all the tasks required of the principalship. Leadership is not equivalent to a position or a person; leadership is the process of influencing and mobilizing people toward desired change (Gichuhi, 2021). The findings indicate that administrators, teachers, and instructional support staff value the positive impact shared leadership through the PLC process has allowed participants to achieve, shifting to a resilient school culture focused on student learning outcomes versus teaching intentions. The experiences shared by school administrators, teachers, and instructional support staff of how an urban Title I school has increased student achievement through the PLC process may be utilized by other schools to close literacy gaps.

Theoretical Implications

This study utilized Bandura's self-efficacy theory as a framework to examine actions and behaviors that leaders utilize to shape the culture of a school that generates a greater sense of collective efficacy and increases student literacy achievement and organizational resilience. Bandura (1997) classified collective teacher efficacy as the most important factor influencing student achievement. This study expands on the theoretical implications confirming Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. In Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, four components are identified that positively affect self-efficacy and outcomes: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological feedback. All participants in this study indicated that the four

components contributed to self and collective efficacy influencing closing literacy gaps. This case study contributes to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

A theoretical implication this study validated is that leaders can use the components of the self-efficacy theory to increase the collective efficacy of staff. The participants perceived that the modeling received from the administrators, instructional coaches, and peers helped participants gain content knowledge, confidence, and effective instructional practices, aligning with the vicarious experiences component. The study's findings confirmed that staff who experience success through mastery experiences, endure increased levels of self and collective efficacy. Of these four principal foundations, enactive mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Once the participants experienced success in the classrooms, all participants believed that obstacles, challenges, and barriers were easy to overcome, and the school culture focused on finding solutions, supporting mastery experiences. In addition, all participants shared that collaborating with colleagues through the PLC process helped feel better prepared for lessons, analysis of student assessment outcomes, and develop plans of action that closed literacy gaps, corroborating with physiological feedback as participants felt confident in achieving the task at hand. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy suggests that individuals with high self-efficacy believe in performing well and have a greater opportunity to view complex tasks as something to be conquered instead of avoided (Bandura, 1997). The participants also shared that despite tough situations with student behavior, data, or classroom environment, the team feels like a valued member of a collaborative team where high levels of trust, assurance, encouragement, and support allow staff to conquer any situation, relating to social persuasion. Social persuasion impacts self-efficacy when a highly respected individual provides assurance of the capability to achieve a challenging task (Bandura, 1978;

Goddard et al., 2004). Utilizing Bandura's theory of self-efficacy components of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences. social persuasion, and physiological feedback may increase a staff's collective efficacy and resilience to focus on closing literacy gaps, as evidenced by the findings.

Limitations and Delimitations

This section acknowledges and outlines the limitations and delimitations of this case study. Delimitations of a research study are consciously set by the researcher, while limitations are restrictions outside the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The delimitations resulted in some limitations to the study. A single case study method was utilized to examine practices at an Urban Title I school that has experienced success in transforming culture and closing literacy gaps. This delimitation narrowed the number of educators participating in the study to only those serving the Urban Title I campus.

Limitations

The teachers and instructional support staff participants were all women because the campus does not have any males serving in those roles. The researcher is a 23-year educator who served as a principal for 11 years. A journal was kept throughout the data collection process in order to memo feelings, thoughts, and views, eliminating bias. Journaling allowed the researcher to separate bias and make personal viewpoints consciously known while collecting data.

Delimitations

The single case study took place in a large urban school district in Texas. The case study site, Ray Elementary, is a Title I elementary school serving 97% economically disadvantaged students within the urban school district. Purposeful sampling was used to identify an exemplary elementary school with diverse demographics that had proven results in closing literacy gaps for students by third grade. The participants in this study were educators with three or more years of

experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more. One site principal and the previous assistant principal, who is now a principal at a different campus, participated in the case study. The criteria ensured that the participants had background, perspective, and experience with the topic of discussion.

Recommendations for Future Research

Limited correlated research exists on shared leadership and efficacy's influence on closing literacy gaps. Closing literacy gaps by third grade is essential to students' future success. If students are not proficient readers when entering third-grade, half of the curriculum will be incomprehensible (Weyer et al., 2019). Since this study focused on an urban Title I school, future studies can examine a larger sample of educators, including rural and suburban areas, since schools vary across the state regarding the environment, demographics, staffing models, size, socioeconomics, and percentage of students mastering literacy achievement. A similar study focusing on the state of Texas or other regions across the United States can offer a distinct representation of educators' experiences that could potentially assist in identifying additional processes that educators use to close literacy gaps. These exemplary campuses can serve as model schools for others wishing to observe the practices in application.

This study included teachers, instructional support staff, and the site principal. Further research can include the insights of other school employees and parents. In addition, future research can focus on the influence of shared leadership and efficacy on mathematics achievement, as it was recently impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research can utilize a comparative case study focused on school leaders' and teachers' experiences of the school culture necessary to close literacy gaps in affluent versus Title I urban, suburban, or rural schools. Another recommendation would be to perform a mixed methods study utilizing the self-

efficacy instruments designed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) or Gibson and Dembo (1984) to collect quantitative data and use interviews and focus groups for the qualitative component. Scholars can use the interpretations from this single case study for future research: the professional learning communities process fosters shared leadership, shared leadership builds collective teacher efficacy, and collective efficacy and shared leadership create organizational resilience. Finally, another future research recommendation can focus on a longitudinal study comparing students' literacy proficiency and growth over time when attending a school that uses shared leadership and the PLC process. Previous empirical research suggests that a culture primarily focused on shared leadership is most associated with increasing collective teacher efficacy (Eaker et al., 2020). Student learning becomes about the challenge and meeting the high expectations, and complex tasks become an opportunity to learn (Goddard et al., 2017). The focus on learning rather than teaching creates a collaborative student responsibility that influences conversations, strategies, and instructional decisions (Dufour et al., 2016). Future research studies can corroborate or negate empirical and theoretical findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. Bandura's self-efficacy theory served as the theoretical framework of the study. The examination of this phenomenon contributed to the gap in the research and can further support how to close literacy gaps for students. Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify an exemplary school having experienced success in closing literacy gaps. The participants were eleven educators with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more. The data collection process included individual interviews, focus groups, and

observations. Triangulation was used to analyze the data. In this study, the participants attributed success in closing literacy gaps to the PLC process, which allows the use of shared leadership practices and increases efficacy. Four major themes surfaced from the analysis of data: valuing all team members, building shared knowledge and decision-making, desire for success, and commitment to closing literacy gaps. Three major interpretations emerged from the study's findings. The professional learning community process fosters shared leadership. The second interpretation identified that shared leadership builds collective teacher efficacy. Finally, collective efficacy and shared leadership create organizational resilience. This case study contributes to Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the empirical research aligned to shared leadership practices that increase efficacy which can result in closing student literacy.

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Appendix A

Institution Review Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 27, 2023

Jennifer Gutierrez
Darren Howland

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-834 A Case Study Examining How Culture and Shared Leadership Practices Improve Literacy

Dear Jennifer Gutierrez, Darren Howland,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair

Appendix B

Site Approval

March 11, 2023

Dr. [redacted]
Director of Performance and Planning
[redacted]
Office of Research and Planning
[redacted]

Dear [redacted]

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. The title of my research project is A Case Study Examining How Culture and Shared Leadership Practices Improve Literacy. The purpose of this case study is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. At this stage in the research, shared leadership practices will be generally defined as transformational and instructional leadership that ensures all stakeholders are included as active participants, and that collaborative objectives are carried out (DeWitt, 2017). I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at [redacted] Elementary School in the [redacted].

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview, focus group, classroom observation, faculty meeting observation, and team meeting observation. The evidence collected from this study will inform school and district leaders on the forms of shared leadership systems that increase collective efficacy and provide equitable practices that close literacy gaps. Additionally, it would assist educators in evaluating and self-reflecting on current practices employed to close literacy gaps for elementary students before it is too late. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval or respond by email to [redacted].

Sincerely,

Jennifer Gutierrez
Doctoral Candidate

[redacted]

March 22, 2023

To Jennifer Gutierrez,

A review committee has evaluated your request to conduct research this school year at [redacted] regarding A Case Study Examining How Culture and Shared Leadership Practices Improve Literacy.

Contingent upon the express written approval of IRB, and any research surveys to be administered to students remaining fully compliant with the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), the district approves this research at the district level only, meaning you may now approach the campus principals to inquire about campus participation. If the principal approves the research, please note the additional terms and conditions of this approval:

1. **The study makes minimal interruptions to the regular school program and makes no undue demands upon the time of students, teachers, administrators, or other district personnel.**
2. **The study does not involve research during the first and/or last 30 days of the school year as determined by the adopted [redacted] calendar.**
3. **The study is not scheduled during district-wide testing periods.**
4. **The district reserves the right to decline future solicitations for this project.**

Please note – participation in your study by individual district personnel is strictly voluntary. **A copy of this letter should accompany your solicitation to district personnel.** Additionally, prior to publishing any part of the information provided by the [redacted], its trustees, employees or representatives, prior approval must be obtained from the Research and Planning committee and advisors included in this document, unless such information is to be used without being attributed to the [redacted] or any person affiliated with the [redacted]. Such prior approval requirement includes any use of the [redacted] name or logo by you. Should you have questions or need additional information, please contact me at [redacted]

Regards,

[redacted]

Dr. [redacted]
Director - Performance and Planning

[redacted]

Cc:
[redacted], Executive Director of Finance & Accounting
Chief Financial Officer

Appendix C

Research Study Consent Forms -Teacher

Title of the Project: A Case Study Examining How Culture and Shared Leadership Practices Improve Literacy

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Gutierrez, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a teacher. The participants in this study are teachers with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this case study is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. The results of this study would assist educators in evaluating and self-reflecting on current practices employed to close literacy gaps for elementary students before it is too late.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Focus Group: Participate in a 90 minute focus group that will be audio recorded.
3. Observation:
    a. Participate in one observation taking place during classroom instruction for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    b. Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    c. Participate in one team meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
4. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Case studies are designed to help educators and administrators learn about the effects of practices being implemented on campus. This case study is designed to highlight and celebrate a school's success in helping students become proficient readers and close literacy gaps in kindergarten through third grade. It will allow the researcher to review the findings and reflect on current

practices and student data at all campuses. The intent is to reflect and replicate the shared leadership practices that have successfully closed literacy gaps in schools.

Benefits to society include: approaches that close literacy gaps, leadership practices that have proven to close literacy gaps successfully, and school culture that supports learning for all students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The researcher is a mandated reporter and will be required to report child abuse, child neglect, or intent to harm self or others. Participation in this study will be terminated if mandatory reporting is required.
The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms/codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Gutierrez. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Darren D. Howland at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Please save a copy of this consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

_____

Typed Subject Name

_____

Date

Research Study Consent Form- Principal

Title of the Project: A Case Study Examining How Culture and Shared Leadership Practices Improve Literacy

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Gutierrez, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a school principal and have worked at the research site for three years or more. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this case study is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. The results of this study would assist educators in evaluating and self-reflecting on current practices employed to close literacy gaps for elementary students before it is too late.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Observation: Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
3. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Case studies are designed to help educators and administrators learn about the effects of practices being implemented on campus. This case study is designed to highlight and celebrate a school's success in helping students become proficient readers and close literacy gaps in kindergarten through third grade. It will allow the researcher to review the findings and reflect on current practices and student data at all campuses. The intent is to reflect and replicate the shared leadership practices that have successfully closed literacy gaps.

Benefits to society include: approaches that close literacy gaps, leadership practices that have proven to close literacy gaps successfully, and school culture that supports learning for all students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The researcher is a mandated reporter and will be required to report

child abuse, child neglect, or intent to harm self or others. Participation in this study will be terminated if mandatory reporting is required.
The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms/codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Gutierrez. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Darren D. Howland at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Please save a copy of this consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

_____
Typed Subject Name

_____
Date

.

Research Study Consent Form- Instructional Support Staff

Title of the Project: A Case Study Examining How Culture and Shared Leadership Practices Improve Literacy

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Gutierrez, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must serve in an instructional support staff role. The participants in this study are instructional support staff with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this case study is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. The results of this study would assist educators in evaluating and self-reflecting on current practices employed to close literacy gaps for elementary students before it is too late.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Focus Group: Participate in a 90 minute focus group that will be audio recorded.
3. Observation:
    a. Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    b. Participate in one team meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
4. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Case studies are designed to help educators and administrators learn about the effects of practices being implemented on campus. This case study is designed to highlight and celebrate a school's success in helping students become proficient readers and close literacy gaps in kindergarten through third grade. It will allow the researcher to review the findings and reflect on current practices and student data at all campuses. The intent is to reflect and replicate the shared leadership practices that have successfully closed literacy gaps.

Benefits to society include: approaches that close literacy gaps, leadership practices that have proven to close literacy gaps successfully, and school culture that supports learning for all students.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The researcher is a mandated reporter and will be required to report child abuse, child neglect, or intent to harm self or others. Participation in this study will be terminated if mandatory reporting is required.

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms/codes.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Gutierrez. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Darren D. Howland at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records/you can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Please save a copy of this consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

_____

Typed Subject Name

_____

Date

Appendix D

Recruitment Template: Email - Teacher

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. The purpose my research is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants in this study must be teachers with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Focus Group: Participate in a 90 minute focus group that will be audio recorded.
3. Observation:
    a. Participate in one observation taking place during classroom instruction for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    b. Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    c. Participate in one team meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
4. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] to schedule an interview and observation.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to save a copy of the consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Gutierrez
Doctoral Student

Recruitment Template- Principal

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. The purpose of my research is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants in this study must be a school principal and have worked at the research site for three years or more.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Observation: Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
3. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] to schedule an interview and observation.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to save a copy of the consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Gutierrez
Doctoral Student

Recruitment Template- Instructional Support

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. The purpose of my research is to examine how school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in an urban Title I elementary school and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants in this study must be instructional support staff with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Focus Group: Participate in a 90 minute focus group that will be audio recorded.
3. Observation:
    a. Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    b. Participate in one team meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
4. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] to schedule an interview and observation.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to save a copy of the consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Gutierrez
Doctoral Student

Appendix E

Recruitment Template: Follow Up Email- Teacher

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants in this study must be teachers with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Focus Group: Participate in a 90 minute focus group that will be audio recorded.
3. Observation:
    a. Participate in one observation taking place during classroom instruction for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    b. Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    c. Participate in one team meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
4. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] to schedule an interview and observation.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to save a copy of the consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Gutierrez
Doctoral Candidate

Recruitment Template: Follow Up Email- Principal

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants in this study must be a school principal and have worked at the research site for three years or more.
Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Observation: Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
3. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me [redacted] or [redacted] to schedule an interview and observation.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to save a copy of the consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Gutierrez
Doctoral Candidate

Recruitment Template: Follow Up Email- Instructional Support

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. Last week an email was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants in this study must be instructional support staff with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in the following:

1. Interview: Participate in a 60 minute interview that will be audio recorded.
2. Focus Group: Participate in a 90 minute focus group that will be audio recorded.
3. Observation:
    a. Participate in one faculty meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
    b. Participate in one team meeting observation for a period of 45 minutes to one hour.
4. Member Checking: Member checking will occur during a follow-up meeting that will take approximately 45 minutes as a way to ensure that all the data that is interpreted is illustrative of the participants' experiences.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] to schedule an interview and observation.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to save a copy of the consent form on your computer, type your name and date, save the completed form, and return it to me as an emailed attachment.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Gutierrez
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix F

Interview Protocol and Questions - Principal

Principal Interview Protocol adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018).

Date:

Campus Name:

Time of Interview:

Interviewee

Position of Interviewee

Principal Questions:

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. How do you create a literacy-focused lens? SQ1
3. How do you highlight literacy achievement across the campus? CRQ
4. How do you strengthen core instructional literacy practices? SQ2
5. How do you utilize shared leadership practices? SQ2
6. How do you empower teachers? SQ2
7. How do you respond to resistance? SQ1
8. How do you replace marginalized settings with growth-oriented cultures? SQ2
9. How do you promote equitable access to the literacy conditions and resources needed by all students to succeed academically and emotionally? SQ1
10. How do you address data demonstrating literacy disparities within student groups? SQ1

Interview Protocol and Questions - Teacher

Teacher Interview Protocol adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018).

Date:

Campus Name:

Time of Interview:

Interviewee

Position of Interviewee

Teacher Questions:

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. How do you use shared leadership practices in your role? CRQ
3. How do you determine the learning outcomes and rigor of your lessons? SQ3
4. How do you communicate student literacy outcomes to parents? SQ3
5. How do you group students for literacy instruction? What factors do you consider? SQ3
6. How do you respond when your student data shows disparities in literacy within student groups? SQ3
7. How do you approach students that demonstrate behavioral concerns? CRQ
8. How do you respond to a colleague(s) that blames the students for assessment outcomes? CRQ

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Your name or identity will not be used in any of the study findings.

Interview Protocol and Questions -Instructional Support Staff

Instructional Support Staff Interview Protocol adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018).

Date:

Campus Name:

Time of Interview:

Interviewee

Position of Interviewee

Instructional Support Staff Questions:

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position. CRQ
2. How do you use shared leadership practices in your role? CRQ
3. How do you assist teachers in developing the learning outcomes and rigor of lessons? SQ3
4. How do you support communication of student literacy outcomes to parents? SQ3
5. How do you assist teachers with grouping students for literacy instruction? What factors do you consider? SQ3
6. How do you respond when campus student data shows disparities in literacy within student groups? SQ3
7. How do you approach students that demonstrate behavioral concerns? CRQ
8. How do you respond to a colleague(s) that blames the students for assessment outcomes? CRQ

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Your name or identity will not be used in any of the study findings.

Appendix G

Observation Protocol

Observational Protocol adapted from Creswell and Poth (2018).

Classroom Observation	
Length of Observation – Start time:	End Time:
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Passing Periods	
Length of Observation – Start time:	End Time:
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Faculty Meeting	
Length of Observation – Start time:	End Time:
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Team Meeting	
Length of Observation – Start time:	End Time:
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Appendix H

Focus Group Protocol and Questions - Teacher

Focus Group Protocol adapted from Kreuger and Casey (2015).

Focus Group
Date:
Focus Group Members Present:
Welcome and Introductions
Topic: Examining a campus response to closing literacy gaps. **Purpose:** The purpose of the focus group is to understand your perspectives on the topic to better understand how to close literacy gaps in elementary schools. **Selection:** Your school was selected based on local and state assessment results. You were selected because you have been an educator on this campus for three or more years and have served as a teacher for three or more years. **Confidentiality:** You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Your name or identity will not be used in any of the study findings. We will be recording to ensure we capture your experiences and ideas. Everything that you say is confidential. We ask that you do not share what others have discussed with people outside of this group.
Guidelines: This focus group session will take approximately 90 minutes. We will take a 10 minute break at approximately 60 minutes. **1.** There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your opinions and perspectives. **2.** You do not have to agree with everyone else in this group but listen respectfully as others share their views. You may have different views on these questions and that is perfectly okay. **3.** I want you to feel comfortable saying good things as well as critical things. I am not here to promote a particular way of thinking. I just want to understand your viewpoints. **4.** Please speak one at a time. **5.** At this time, I ask that you please turn your cell phones to silent and limit distractions.
Focus Group Questions: 1. What do you value the most about working at your campus? 2. How do the leadership roles you serve affect literacy practices on campus?

3. What does challenging the status quo mean to you?
    a. How does this look like in your classroom in regard to literacy instruction?
4. What are some challenges you are facing to address your students' literacy gaps?
    a. How do you overcome those challenges?
5. How does your professional learning community support your growth?
6. How does the professional learning you engage in help build your literacy knowledge?
    a. How do you incorporate the knowledge into practice?
7. How do you encourage students who need to meet grade-level reading expectations?
    a. How does their work change from those who are meeting grade level standards?
8. Suppose that you had one minute to talk to other educators about the topic of today's discussion – a culture of shared leadership practices that improves literacy gaps. What would you say?

Focus Group Protocol and Questions - Instructional Support Staff

Focus Group Protocol adapted from Kreuger and Casey (2015).

Focus Group
Date:
Focus Group Members Present:
Welcome and Introductions
Topic Examining a campus response to closing literacy gaps. **Purpose:** The purpose of the focus group is to understand your perspectives on the topic to better understand how to close literacy gaps in elementary schools. **Selection:** Your school was selected based on local and state assessment results. You were selected because you have been an educator on this campus for three or more years and have served as a teacher for three or more years. **Confidentiality:** You may be assured of complete confidentiality. Your name or identity will not be used in any of the study findings. We will be recording to ensure we capture your experiences and ideas. Everything that you say is confidential. We ask that you do not share what others have discussed with people outside of this group.
Guidelines: This focus group session will take approximately 90 minutes. We will take a 10 minute break at approximately 60 minutes. **6.** There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your opinions and perspectives. **7.** You do not have to agree with everyone else in this group but listen respectfully as others share their views. You may have different views on these questions and that is perfectly okay. **8.** I want you to feel comfortable saying good things as well as critical things. I am not here to promote a particular way of thinking. I just want to understand your viewpoints. **9.** Please speak one at a time. **10.** At this time, I ask that you please turn your cell phones to silent and limit distractions.
Focus Group Questions: 9. What do you value the most about working at your campus? 10. How do the leadership roles you serve affect literacy practices on campus? 11. What does challenging the status quo mean to you?

a. How does this look like when you support teachers with literacy instruction?

12. What are some challenges you are facing to address campus literacy gaps?

    a. How do you overcome those challenges?

13. How does your professional learning community support your growth?

14. How does the professional learning you engage in help build your literacy knowledge?

    a. How do you incorporate the knowledge into practice?

15. How do you encourage students who need to meet grade-level reading expectations?

    a. How does their work change from those who are meeting grade level standards?

16. Suppose that you had one minute to talk to other educators about the topic of today's discussion – a culture of shared leadership practices that improves literacy gaps. What would you say?

Appendix I

Reflexive Journal Excerpt

May 25, 2023

I completed my interview with James, which started at 11:30 a.m. His energy is contagious, and his passion for his role and the influence he creates on his campus is exuded through his actions, behaviors, and answers. He is highly knowledgeable in the field of education and leadership practices. He thoroughly answered each of the interview questions. I examined the interview questions a number of times before logging in to our Zoom meeting. I prompted myself to remember and think that my role in the interview was to investigate his perspective on the phenomenon and that I should refrain from relying upon or thinking about my leadership knowledge, experiences, viewpoints, or time as a school leader. In addition, I reminded myself that I should not speak about the topic, my experiences, or perspectives in any way that would influence his interview responses. Even though James had already read the consent form, signed it, and agreed to the interview being recorded, I asked him again if he was okay with recording the interview to ensure accurate transcription. I allowed him to ask any questions before the start of the interview and reminded him that his identity would never be released and his name and school name were confidential. He had no questions and said several times that he was happy to participate and assist with the study. I proceeded to ask him the principal interview questions verbatim. He gave me detailed, in-depth responses. I was fascinated with the mindset, shift, and change he has been able to create through his leadership skills, truly impacting the trajectory of urban Title I students. I found it fascinating that although he never taught lower grades, he has prioritized closing literacy gaps in the early grades, K-2. I was a bit nervous about conducting the interview because I wasn't sure if he would be open to extensively answering the questions. Due

to his schedule, I was afraid the responses would not be in-depth and brief. However, as soon as the interview began, I realized his willingness to participate and share his perspective on how culture and shared leadership practices improve literacy.

Appendix J

Audit Trail

Ray Elementary Case Study Audit Trail

Documenting the Research Process

Documenting the Research Process	Details
Research Question	**Central Research Question** How do school leaders create a school culture driven by shared leadership practices to improve literacy in urban elementary Title I schools? **Sub-Question One** How are leaders prepared to address literacy gaps? **Sub-Question Two** How do leaders inspire and influence teachers to create systematic cultural change that eliminates literacy gaps? **Sub-Question Three** How do teacher expectations affect student literacy performance?
Study Design	Qualitative Case Study
Selecting Criteria for Participants	Purposeful Sampling using state and local assessment data. The participants in this study are teachers, instructional support staff, and principals with three or more years of experience as teachers and having worked at the research site for three years or more.
Data Collection Methods	Interviews, Focus Groups, Observations

Data Collection Process

Zoom Interview	Date	Time	Participants
Completed	Wednesday, May 10	1:00 PM	Kendall
Completed	Thursday, May 18	8:00 AM	Renee
Completed	Thursday, May 18	9:00 AM	Eliza
Completed	Thursday, May 18	10:00 AM	Amanda

Completed	Thursday, May 18	11:00 AM	Danielle
Completed	Thursday, May 18	12:00 PM	Ariana
Completed	Thursday, May 18	3:00 PM	Alejandra
Completed	Thursday, May 25	11:30 AM	James
Completed	Wednesday, August 30	4:00 PM	Holly
Completed	Thursday, August 31	4:15 PM	Jessica
Completed	Friday, September 1	3:15 PM	Anabelle

Focus Group	**Date**	**Time**	**Location**	**Participants**
Teachers	Tuesday, May 23, 2023	3:15 PM	Ray Elementary	Kendall, Renee, Ariana
Instructional Support Staff	Thursday, May 25, 2023	2:30 PM	Ray Elementary	Eliza, Danielle, Alejandra

Observation - PLC	**Date**	**Time**	**Location**	**Participants**
1st Grade (in person)	Tuesday, May 23, 2023	10:00 AM	Ray Elementary	Eliza, Renee

Classroom Observation	**Date**	**Time**	**Location**	**Participants**
Literacy	Tuesday, May 16, 2023	9:00 AM	Ray Elementary	Kendall
Literacy	Tuesday, May 23, 2023	8:15 AM	Ray Elementary	Renee

Transcribing and Analyzing the Data

Transcribing and Analyzing the Data	**Details**

Interviews and Focus Groups	OtterAI was used to record all interviews and focus groups. The transcriptions were reviewed immediately following the interviews and focus groups for clarity and accuracy. The transcripts were individually exported to Dedoose. Dedoose was used to house the information. Each interview and focus group transcript was reviewed multiple times, line by line, to determine patterns, trends and ensure saturation was reached. Patterns and trends emerged into codes. The codes were synthesized and generated themes based on the patterns.
Observations	An observation protocol which can be found in appendix g was used to record observation data. Information observed from the classrooms and PLC collaborative team meeting observations was summarized using field notes. The observation data was transferred to Dedoose. The field notes were categorized and analyzed based on the research purpose and central research questions. Notes and observations, also called codes, were made to distinguish common themes. This process began by transcribing the narrative observations and examining the text for meaningful sentence fragments that connect with the research questions. Next, these sentence fragments were used to create categories pertinent to the research questions and matching codes. Codes were employed to sort the data and find potential themes and pattern-matching logic.

Ensuring the Credibility of the Data

Ensuring the Credibility of the Data	Details
Member-Checking	In order to check the accuracy and reliability of the data, member-checking was used. Originally I was going to schedule a meeting with each participant to share the findings. Since this component took place during the participants' summer break, I emailed each participant the findings and asked to please provide feedback and ensure the findings represented experiences shared accurately. I then used the findings from the interviews, focus groups, and observations to triangulate the data. Triangulation involved using all of the data sources to confirm the findings.

Evaluating the Findings

Evaluating the Findings	Details

Procedures used to evaluate the findings and conclusions	Thematic findings emerged from data triangulation using interviews, focus groups, observations, and member-checking. A logic model was used to interpret the findings. Three major interpretations emerged from the study's findings. The professional learning community process fosters shared leadership. The second theme identified that shared leadership builds collective teacher efficacy. Finally, collective efficacy and shared leadership create organizational resilience. This case study contributes to Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the empirical research aligned to shared leadership practices that increase efficacy which can result in closing student literacy gaps.