

**Improving Teacher Efficacy to Increase Emerging Multilingual Learner Success and
Belonging at High Tech Middle North County**

Brittany L. Perro

High Tech High Graduate School of Education

EDU 680: Inquiry Into Practice III

Methods, Findings, and Conclusions

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Looking Back

I stood in front of the classroom, testing guidelines in hand, as 17 sixth grade students looked up at me with fear in their eyes. After reading all the testing directions for the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC), the questions began.

“What if we fail Ms. Perro?” asked Rina. “You won’t fail,” I answered with a reassuring smile, “you just get to show how much you know!”

“What if I don’t know how to answer a question?” asked Manny. “Just try your best to make an educated guess, you will do great,” I said.

“Why do only Brown kids have to take this test Ms. Perro?” asked Yari.

There was an eerie silence as the students looked around at one another. “Uhh, well--” I stammered, but was immediately interrupted. “Is this a test just to call out everyone that speaks Spanish?” asked Edgar. “Not exactly--”

This time I was interrupted by Sara. “I’ve never spoken another language, why am I here? My mom speaks Spanish--so you assume I do too? This is a little racist isn’t it?”

I was stopped dead in my tracks. I felt like the air in my lungs was stuck in my throat, my heart in my stomach. I wanted to scream, cry even. Sara named something I felt deep in my gut about the ELPAC, but failed to face until that moment. I was already uncomfortable about expecting English Language Learners (a population predominantly made up of students of color with bilingual backgrounds) to conform to the unofficial, white-dominant expectations of the English language. The word “racist” is defined by Oxford Dictionaries as, “prejudiced against or antagonistic toward a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized” (2021). After witnessing the impact this test was having on my students of color, then watching them struggle through the test, and finally finding out that only 4 of the 17 students received “passing” results on the test, then rereading the definition of “racist” I knew the answer was, *yes, the ELPAC, in my opinion, is racist*. That being said, if the ELPAC is racist, so is our entire education system, and unfortunately and unintentionally, so is my teaching. I, like many educators, struggle to support students who have language development needs, and fall into patterns and traps that cause us to feed into the racist system.

With those 17 sets of eyes and Sara’s questions burned into my memory, I made a promise to myself. I would make it my mission in the coming years to fully understand this exam and the system in my school that hinder multilingual students from being their best selves, academically and emotionally. After understanding the problem, I would figure out ways for students to feel more prepared to face systemic exams like the ELPAC successfully. I would strategize with my colleagues to develop ways to make sure that racist systems did not hold my

students back from fully loving, appreciating, and embracing their superpowers. With this promise made, I began my research.

Focus of Practice & Why It Matters:

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), schools that receive state funding are required to “Ensure that English learners acquire full proficiency in English as rapidly and effectively as possible and attain parity with native speakers of English,” and “Ensure that English learners, within a reasonable period of time, achieve the same rigorous grade-level academic standards that are expected of all students” (2019). The experience mentioned above took place at a public middle school in the High Tech High Charter School network in San Diego, California. High Tech High (HTH) is a project based learning charter school network in southern California that fosters collaborative, personalized, and authentic student learning. HTH prides itself on being an “equity project” in which “Teachers work to address inequities and help students reach their full potential” (High Tech High, 2020). HTH declares that this approach to learning provides equal access to education to all students, including English Learners (ELs). If this is true, then why are EL students across the HTH network consistently performing significantly lower than their non-EL peers?

High Tech Middle North County (HTMNC) is one of HTH’s school sites in San Marcos, CA. High Tech Middle North County, despite being a fantastic school within the 96th percentile for school culture according to YouthTruth data results, HTMNC is facing a common public school dilemma; supporting its most vulnerable student populations. HTMNC has one of the largest populations of ELs (more recently referred to as Emerging Multilingual Learners, EMLs) across the network. About 28% of the student body is classified as EML or Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). Unfortunately, EML and RFEP students at HTMNC are, on average, performing 76.25 points lower than their peers on California state assessments ([California School Dashboard](#)). To humanize the data, one needs to look no further than HTMNC’s D/F list and summer school rosters; all which see disproportionately high representation of EML students. In the summer of 2020, EML and RFEP students made up 67% of the summer enrichment roster. In November of 2020, HTMNC’s D/F list was made up of 100% EML and RFEP students. This data should raise grave concern for the HTH network, not only because it is not fulfilling its vision of providing an equitable education to all students, but because students deserve better. By not servicing our EL population as the state of California mandates, we are not only ignoring the requirements set by the CDE, but we are also infringing on students’ 14th amendment rights to an equal education. This is a huge issue of inequity. For HTH to truly be the equity project it aspires to be, it must ensure student success for EMLs.

Problem Statement:

EML students at HTMNC are disproportionately represented on D/F lists and in summer enrichment referrals.

Digging into Root Causes:

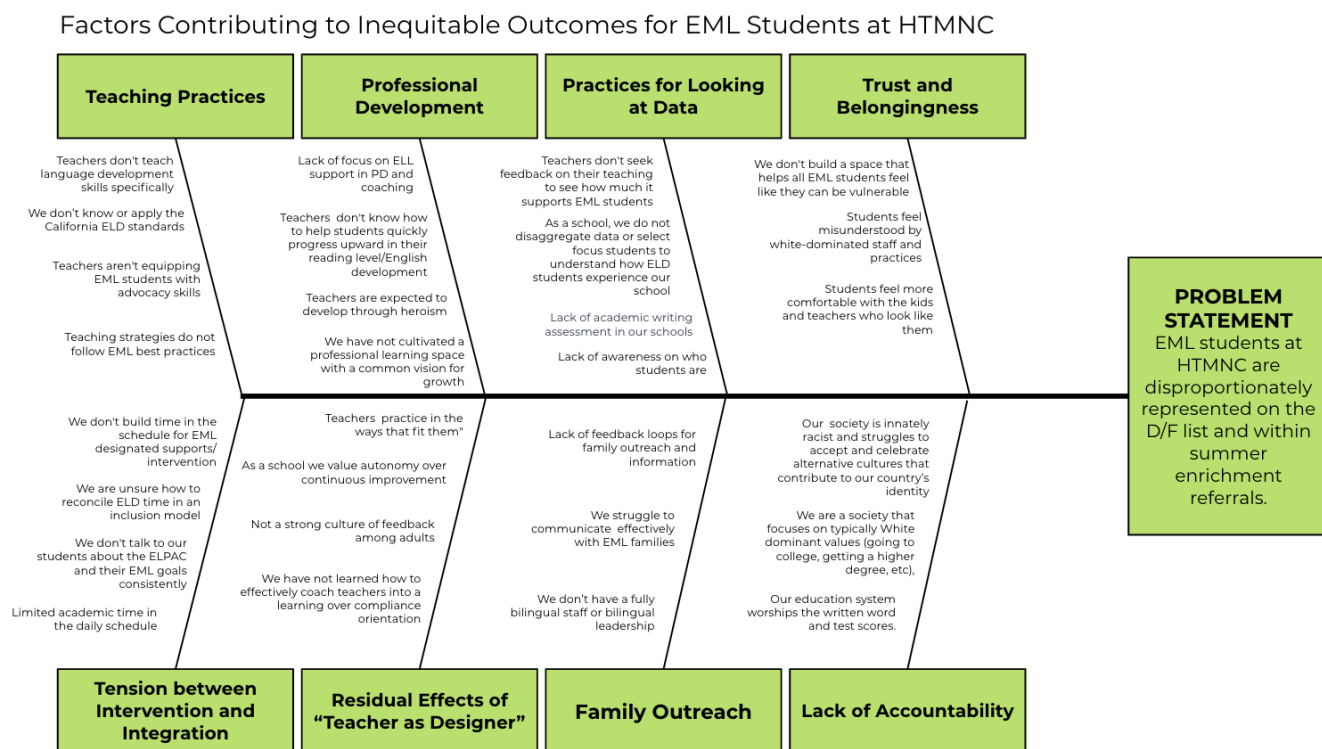


Figure 1. Root Causes Contributing to Inequitable EML Performance

The inequities facing EML students go far beyond the walls of HTMNC and the HTH school network. “On average, ELLs’ academic achievement tends to be low” across the United States (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 14). To be more specific, ELL students are, on average, about 40 percentage points behind their non-ELL peers in both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math exams (Murphy, 2015, p. 2). This trend has been observed with limited improvements for the past two decades. Challenging this inequity and closing the performance gap between EML students and non-EML peers may prove to be difficult for the HTMNC team, but it is completely possible if the issue is addressed, one contributing factor at a time. The fishbone diagram above (Figure 1) was constructed by a team of teachers at HTMNC, and informed by research literature, interviews with teachers, and interviews with students. Three key factors contribute most to the academic performance and success of EML students: the lack of professional development that supports teaching EML students, the lack of teaching practices that serve and support EML students’ language development, and the lack of EML students feeling a true sense of trust and belongingness within the school community. Each of these factors must be addressed in order to improve EML performance at HTMNC.

Lack of professional development that supports teaching EML students:

Whenever I speak to teachers about the hardest part of supporting EML students, they often speak about how they feel like they aren’t trained to do so. Despite the constant pressure to

service multilingual students, they are often left wondering how to do it. In the majority of the empathy interviews I've conducted on this topic, teachers share their deep desire to learn how to better support their EML students, and are frustrated that there is little to no professional development offered to enhance their skills. This is not an issue unique to HTMNC. Despite many studies attributing poor EML performance to inadequate teacher preparation, teachers across the country do not receive the proper professional development to service their students. (Koelsch, Walqui, et al. 2010, p. 7). According to Hanover Research (2007), school districts are responsible for providing all teachers who serve EML students, ongoing, dedicated professional development that "includes teaching techniques that can be applied in classrooms and incorporate some element of peer coaching" (p. 4). It is the responsibility of schools to develop curriculum that teaches teachers who to service EML students, then continuously coach teachers to improve on their practice. This will "build the capacity and skills of teachers and administrators in California so they are more prepared and skilled to work with English Learners and Long Term English Learners" (Olsen, 2010, p. 4). Once the professional development focuses on EML support at HTMNC, teachers will be in a much better position to teach their EML students in the classroom.

Lack of teaching practices that serve and support EML students' language development:

Another key factor as to why HTMNC sees lower performance of EML students is because teaching practices do not support language development. Santibañez (2018) states that, "Many ELs in California do not have equitable access to grade-level core content instruction, and the English language development (ELD) instruction they receive may fall short of state standards" (p. 3). This may be because secondary teachers, including the ones at HTMNC, are overwhelmed by the range of student needs in one classroom. While secondary teachers are prepared to teach 6-8th grade content, they are not prepared to teach students how to read and write. Laurie Olsen (2010) states that "Secondary school teachers are generally not prepared to teach reading and writing skills. They do not have training in language development" (p. 28). This leads secondary teachers, who have the privilege of time and resources, to seek out additional training to service the needs of students.

Teachers may also be stifling EML student achievement by implementing scaffolds and supports incorrectly. Teachers may offer sentence starters or graphic organizers for students, but are those scaffolds appropriate to the student's needs? Rodriguez-Mojica (2019) writes that "Whenever supports are not grounded in contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility--and therefore do not serve as scaffolds--they have been found to limit EBs' access to and engagement with academic content" (p. 55). Without the proper training of influential teaching practices, teachers may be doing more harm than good. One way to combat this inequity is for school leadership to offer professional development around teaching language development. As thoughtfully stated by an HTMNC teacher: "Until EML support best practices] is prioritized in our teacher schedule. it won't be focused on in the classroom" (Perro Interview, 2020). Leaders can go one step beyond offering professional development by allocating and protecting time for teachers to engage in the necessary training.

Lack of EML students feeling a true sense of trust and belongingness within the school community:

The final key factor influencing lower performance of EML students at HTMNC is the lack of a community to develop a sense of trust and belongingness for students. Farrington (2013) refers to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to prove how essential a sense of belonging is to humans, especially students (p. 5). She writes that, "Belonging is particularly important in an educational context because human learning is socially constructed: we come to understand the world through our interactions with others" (Farrington, 2013, p. 5). While HTMNC has a positive school culture and shows positive quantitative data on assessments such as "YouthTruth," you will find that EML students are least likely raise their hands in class, share out loud in front of peers, and are more likely to segregate themselves in communal spaces like the cafeteria.

In middle school, "students begin to more consciously explore their identity and to find their individual role within the family and diverse social groups. It is a time when varied relationships become crucial." (Koelsch, Walqui, Hamburger, Gaarder, Insaurralde, Schmida, & Estrada, 2010, p. 11). Being more socially aware in middle school students do not want to be seen as different or weird. With this in mind, we can thoughtfully elevate and celebrate each individual's role in the classroom and help students develop relationships with other students; especially EML students. In an article published by Teaching Tolerance, Bessie Alexopolous shares that "When students from different languages learn together, side by side, it helps the students feel valued. And when a student feels valued, it gives them a boost of acceptance, confidence and pride" (Kilman, 2009). Classrooms at HTMNC can work to improve conversation between EML students and peers. We can get to know our students more and center the voices of EML students and families. We also must work to "include the contributions of many individuals from many backgrounds to the advancement of knowledge" (Sanchez Sadek, 2006, p. 2). By implementing more elements of EML student culture, and texts from diverse languages, EMLs can begin to feel a sense of pride in their identities which can lead to a higher sense of belonging.

Preliminary Theory of Action:

The aim of this project is to improve EML performance at HTMNC, so that all students are able to achieve their highest potential no matter what their primary language is. To do this, work will need to be done directly with teachers to improve the service and support of EML students. Due to the nature of this work, two aims will drive this work. The first being focused on the teachers: ***By May 2021, teachers at HTMNC will report an increased sense of efficacy and feeling of confidence in their support and teaching of EML students.*** As teachers are increasing their confidence and efficacy, the aim is for students to be positively impacted: ***By May 2021, at least 80% of EML students at HTMNC will make progress towards one or more of their individualized EML language development goals.*** This will help students stay off the D/F List, and will keep students out of summer enrichment referrals. I will work with an

Instructional Coach and a newly developed “EML Team” made up of two other teachers at HTMNC to conduct PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) cycles where we test and refine strategies in our classrooms and professional development spaces that address the root causes discussed above. Specifically, we will focus on three critical drivers to improve EML performance in our classrooms: designing and offering EML-specific professional development, holding teachers accountable to teaching practices that serve and support EML students’ language development, and developing a sense of trust and belongingness for students.

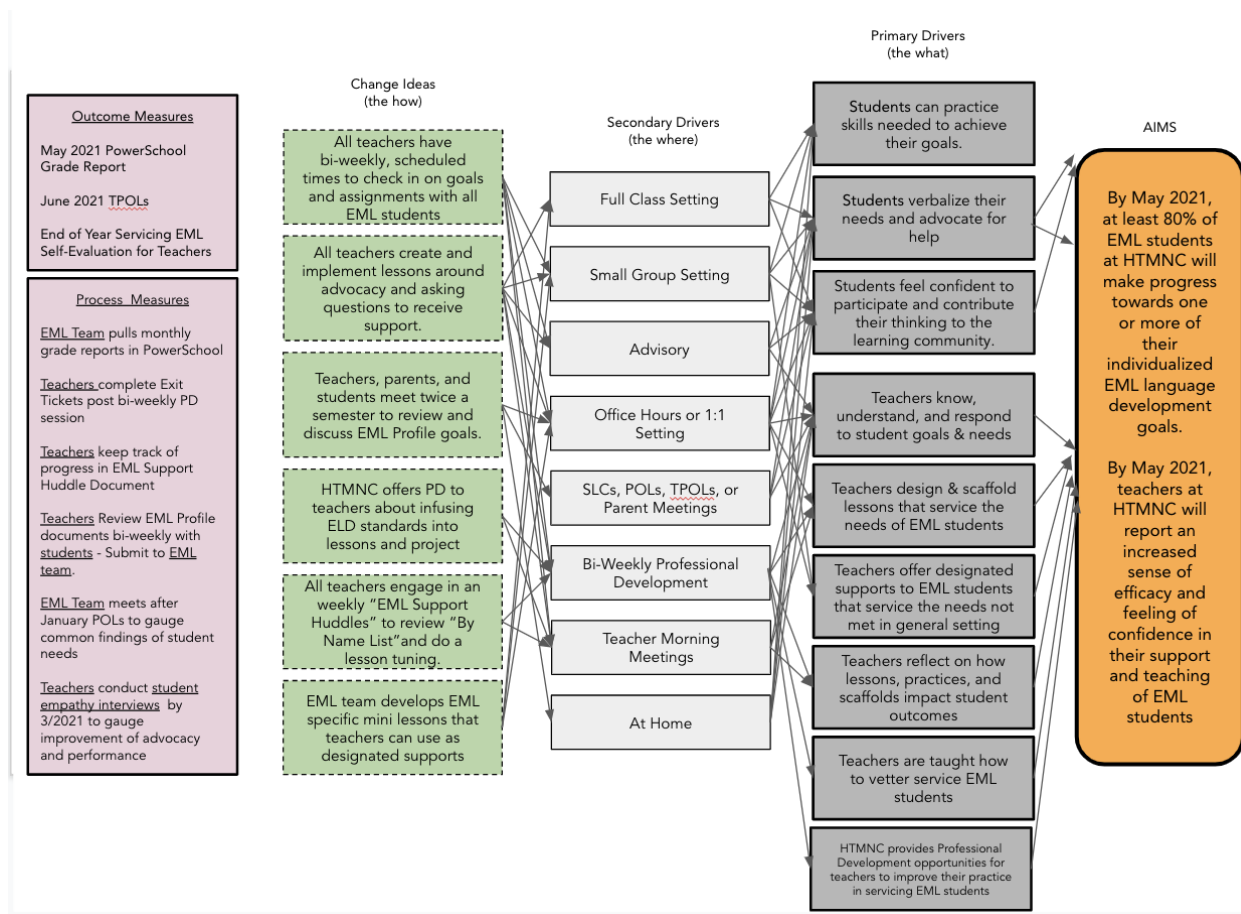


Figure 2. Theory of Action for Improving EML Performance at HTMNC

First, for EML students to succeed, we need to make sure that teachers are equipped with teaching practices that support language development. During bi-weekly professional development, we can inform teachers of the ELD standards and best practices for implementing them. From there, we can also host professional development that helps teach teachers how to implement ELD standards into projects and daily lessons. Teachers can also monitor student growth and success by updating EML profile and goal documents once a month, reviewing them openly with families during the end of semester Student Led Conferences.

Once teachers are equipped with the space to learn about aligning to ELD standards, we will need to hold teachers accountable to implementing ELD standards into the lessons that they create. This can be done through Project and Lesson Tunings, where we can offer strategy banks

to better support EML needs. Finally, we can use our morning meeting space to talk about student needs, gain feedback on lessons, and plan collaboratively for the needs of EMLs. Finally, we can begin to focus on developing a sense of belonging for our EML students. Through our amazing Padres Unidos program, we can host parent workshops to help educate families on how to support EML students with their school work and how to get support. We can also welcome students and families to provide feedback during project tunings. In the classroom schedule, we can create for teachers to have the chance to conference and connect with students more individually or in small groups. We can work on improving small group conversations and provide EML students with the tools to be able to feel confident during discussions with peers. In class, or advisory, after equipping students with more self advocacy tools, we can have students set self-advocacy goals that they can monitor and reflect on throughout the year.

To know if we are making progress toward our aim, we will keep record of our PDSA routines in a consistent professional development document, and EML student assignment completion rates in student EML Profile documents. Since teachers will be updating those documents monthly, we will ask teachers to maintain powerschool and Google Classroom submission data. The hope is that with stronger teaching with EML students in mind, we will see a higher rate of student work submission, however we will need to also consider that there are many external factors that could impact a student's ability to turn in work (especially during a pandemic). With this, our team will need to help support teachers during professional development and morning meeting spaces by offering dilemma protocols that will allow for us to collaboratively identify solutions to problems facing our EML students. We hope that with this Theory of Action we will see that EML students at HTMNC are no longer disproportionately represented on D/F lists and in summer enrichment by May 2021.

Methods:

The Team of Leaders and Participants

I worked with a team of two other teachers to lead eight Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles over the course of nineteen weeks. We dubbed ourselves the "EML Team" -- the first our school has ever had. The team consisted of our school's EML Coordinator (a 27-year-old Latina woman in her fifth year of teaching), an EML Support Teacher (a 26-year-old Hispanic woman in her second year of teaching), and myself, our school's Testing Coordinator (a 32-year-old White woman in my seventh year of teaching). This team formed naturally due to the necessary EML work that was already making progress at HTMNC. These two amazing teachers agreed to participate as part of the team, with the plan of conducting a PDSA cycle approximately every two weeks. PDSA Cycles took place between November of 2020 and April of 2021. All three of us are also classroom teachers in the 7th and 8th grade math, science, and humanities departments, therefore the preparation for most of our EML work took place after school hours. It's important to note that, while this core "EML Team" drove the work, it was supported heavily by additional school leadership. HTMNC's Director, Dean of Students, our Family and Community Engagement Director, an Instructional Coach, and HTH Network's EML Coordinator joined EML Team meetings weekly, and also assisted in the development of the

professional development sessions hosted at our school. All of these supportive leaders are female, have a combined experience in education of over 50 years, and represent Hispanic/Latina, and White backgrounds.

The participants whom I hoped to benefit from the PDSA cycles aimed at improving teacher support of EML students and enhancing academic success and feelings of belonging of EML students at HTMNC were 16 teachers and every single one of HTMNC's 41 EML students. Figure 3, as well as the information outlined below, explains the demographics of the participants of this study.

The 16 teachers ranged in ages, from 26 to 45 and identified as 43% male and 57% female. Of the 16 adult participants, teachers identified their racial backgrounds as 56% White, 25% Hispanic/Latinx, 6% American Indian, 6% Asian/Indian, and 6% Black. Teaching experience in this group of participants ranged from 1 year to 16 years. Thirty-one percent of the staff participants consider themselves "multilingual."

The 41 student participants were between the ages of 11 and 14, 63% of whom were male and 37% female. Students identified as 80% Hispanic/Latinx, 12% White, 5% Asian, and 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. This student population at HTMNC speak Spanish (87%), Vietnamese (5%), Russian (2%), French (2%), and Arabic (2%). Although one would assume that 100% of our EML students identify as "multilingual," 4% of this student population shared that they do not speak a language outside of English and that they were classified as an English Language Learner due to having multilingual parents when they enrolled in Kindergarten.

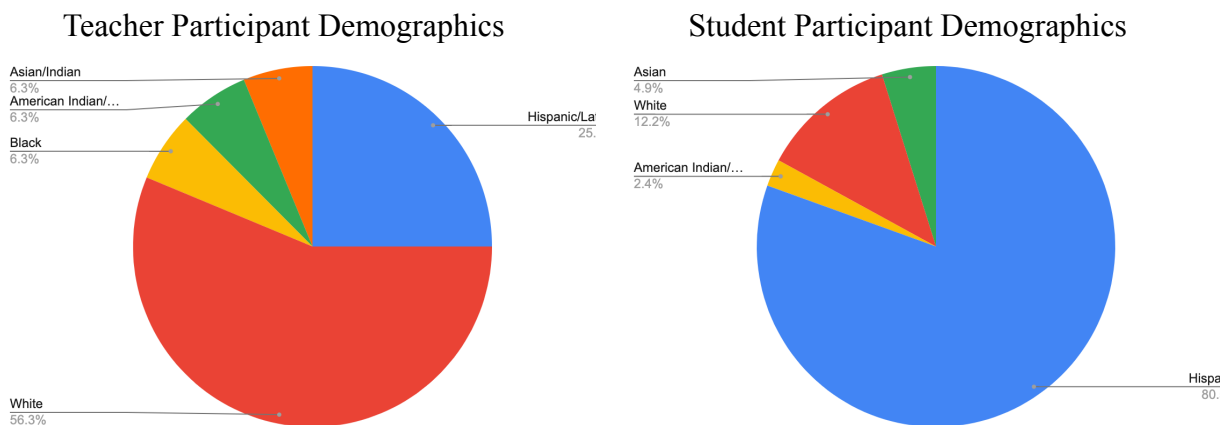


Figure 3. *Participant Demographics*

I would like to acknowledge that the demographics of the teaching staff are vastly different compared to the demographics of the student population, as made evident in Figure 3. In this study, a teaching staff, that is predominately White, will be aiming to service a student population that is predominantly Hispanic. There may be limitations to this study, such as potential implicit biases held by non teachers of color. When a team of teachers that is 31% multilingual looks to improve the academic performance of a student population that is 96% multilingual, teachers may make false assumptions about the academic, linguistic, and

social-emotional needs of students. I will revisit these limitations upon reviewing the results of this study.

The Consistent Space

In order to conduct consistent PDSA cycles that would impact all teachers and EML students, the EML Team needed to secure a consistent schedule for the planning and execution of the work. We set aside a one-hour meeting after school on Tuesdays to plan and design our work together as an EML Team. Since we needed a consistent space to execute the work with the teacher participants, we hoped to use our Monday Professional Development schedule already in place. Our director, being very passionate about our aim, gave us one hour of professional development time with the staff every other Monday. This made completing eight PDSA cycles super accessible for our team. We knew that we would have the dedicated time and space to work directly with our fellow teachers. Once we were allotted the PD time, we mapped out eight professional development sessions on the calendar between November 2020 and April 2021. We committed to collecting data from each PD session, which would then be analyzed and reflected upon during the following week’s EML Team Meeting. With a PDSA plan in place (Figure 4), we were ready to begin the execution of our work and data collection.

<i>Plan</i>	<i>Do</i>	<i>Study</i>	<i>Act</i>
EML Team will plan and design PD for HTMNC staff during weekly EML Meetings	EML Team will lead EML-focused PD during bi-weekly HTMNC PD sessions	EML team will collect data after each PD session, and reflect on results at the following EML Meeting	EML Team will adapt and change plans to ensure the next cycle will help us make progress toward our aims.

Figure 4. HTMNC’S PDSA Cycle Plan

Modes of Data Collection

The EML Team led eight PDSA cycles, all which were driven by “Primary Drivers” identified in the Theory of Action for Improving EML Performance at HTMNC (Figure 2). All cycles directly included all 16 of the HTMNC teacher participants, and indirectly included all 41 of our EML students. Data was collected through a variety of methods such as a “By-Name List,” Google Form surveys, and written reflection and interviews. See Figure 5 below for a summary of PDSA Inquiry Cycles and the modes of data collection aligned to each cycle. The three most powerful modes of data collection were the By-Name List, Self-Assessments, and teacher and student interviews.

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Primary Driver</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Data Collection</i>
Cycle 1: Create an “EML By Name List” System with staff	Teachers know, understand, and respond to student goals & needs	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	By-Name List

Cycle 2: Create accountability measures for breakout room participations	Teachers reflect on how lessons, practices, and scaffolds impact student outcomes	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	Breakout Room Survey Reflection on PD slides
Cycle 3: Coach teachers to develop EML Goals for EML students, then coach on how to facilitate EML Goal Setting Meetings with students	HTMNC provides Professional Development opportunities for teachers to improve their practice in servicing EML students	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	By-Name List w. Goal Setting Check in Survey -- identifying progress and needs of teachers
Cycle 4: Teacher Baseline data collection, ELPAC lesson slice, then practice ELPAC Test	Teachers know, understand, and respond to student goals & needs	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	Teacher Efficacy Survey ELPAC Reflection on PD slides Teacher Interviews Student Interviews
Cycle 5: Introduce EML strategies, then implement Change Idea based on ELPAC findings	HTMNC provides Professional Development opportunities for teachers to improve their practice in servicing EML students	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	By-Name List Feedback form & Change Idea Submission on PD Slides
Cycle 6: Revisit By Name List, then set new Change Idea plans	Teachers know, understand, and respond to student goals & needs	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	By-Name List
Cycle 7: Create EML Small Groups per grade to practice ELPAC test	Teachers offer designated supports to EML students that service the needs not met in general setting	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	Small Groups Survey
Cycle 8: Revisit EML Goals & Reflect on Progress	Teachers know, understand, and respond to student goals & needs	-All Staff & 16 Teacher Participants -All EML students	Teacher Efficacy Survey Progress of Goals Forms Teacher Interviews Student Interviews

Figure 5. Summary of PDSA Inquiry Cycles

By-Name List: Keeping Students at Our Center

During our first EML Team Meeting, our Instructional Coach, who is well-versed in improvement science and conducting PDSA cycles, recommended a style of data collection I was not familiar with. She recommended that our teachers “huddle up” frequently around our EML students to encourage consistent dialogue among teachers about EML student progress and needs. This is when we lead the staff in creating an “EML By-Name List.” As the title suggests, this process encouraged teachers to engage in what we called “The By-Name List Protocol” to check in about students, by name, one at a time. The By-Name List itself was the measure we used to gain initial understanding of student status and needs. 100% of teachers at HTMNC, including all 16 of our study participants, were involved.

This type of data collection helped to address the Primary Driver from our Theory of Action for Improving EML Performance at HTMNC (Figure 2): “Teachers know, understand, and respond to student goals & needs.” By first understanding our EML students better, we could offer professional development that would address real needs of students. It also would help reveal what teachers felt confident to address initially without the additional support from our team.

Teachers also used the By-Name List to identify student academic and social emotional needs. During one of the professional development sessions, teachers used the data collected across the first two By-Name List Protocols to create goals to help students improve performance on the ELPAC exam. Teachers developed goals that would allow students to improve performance in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in both their Math/Science and Humanities classes. Teachers also developed general self-advocacy and communication goals.

This type of data collection presented some flaws and gaps. Some teachers assessed their students using numeric evaluations, and some only used descriptive, qualitative data to evaluate students. Unfortunately, some EML students were not part of the first two rounds of the By-Name List protocol due to a flaw in our PowerSchool Information System. They were added to the rounds late, and did not receive the same attention that was given to some other students. While these flaws and gaps impacted our data, I was still pleased that this data collection approach allowed for a more humanistic analysis of our students' needs and performance.

Identifying Needs of Teachers through Self-Assessments

According to Professor of Educational Leadership, Tschannen-Moran (2020) Education “Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy is the [belief] in their capability to make a difference in student learning, to be able to get through even to students who are difficult or unmotivated.” (Tschannen-Moran 2020) and a team of researchers developed and published *The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale* to support teachers in assessing their capability “concerning instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management.” I felt inspired by the likert-scale format of this survey, and a multitude of other surveys developed by Tschannen-Moran and her team of students and researchers, to design a similar survey that could help teachers at HTMNC express their feelings of self-efficacy in a baseline survey.

I designed a “Teacher Efficacy Self Assessment Baseline Survey” with the support of the EML Team. At first this survey was made up of 30 questions. According to Ferguson (2020), “Narrowing down the scope of exactly what you are trying to measure will help significantly in defining the baseline survey/data.” With this insight, I sought feedback on our questions from our Director, Family and Community Engagement Liaison, and our HTH Network EML Coordinator. We narrowed our question total down to 20. The final draft of the Teacher Efficacy Self Assessment Baseline Survey included questions that would help us support all student needs: academically and socially-emotionally. Questions such as “I feel prepared to help my EML students achieve goals,” and “I feel like I have the capacity to support my EML students,” helped to identify how confident teachers felt in guiding EML students toward success. Questions such as “I embed California’s English Language Development Standards into my classroom lessons,” and “I provide specific classroom accommodations to my EML students that will help them improve their English language development,” helped to identify logistical servicing gaps that would need to be addressed during professional development sessions. We gave teachers response options of “Never,” “Rarely,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Always.”

This baseline survey was administered through a Google Form. Teacher identities were collected in order to help identify specific teacher needs that the EML team could support. This would also allow the EML Team to track specific teacher growth over time and compare data

during the final data collection. During the first data collection, 20 teachers participated in January of 2021. When the survey was administered again in April of 2021, 17 teachers participated. While this data is a bit flawed due to some participants not participating in the endline data collection, it was still a great way to collect a wide range of information from the teacher participants.

The results of the initial baseline survey helped to guide the EML Team to offer multiple PD sessions that would give teachers specific skills, strategies, and tools to support their practice. We identified some of the “lowest” ranking questions to pick topics for our PD. In between the baseline and endline surveys, the EML Team did administer multiple “check-in” surveys to help us make tweaks to our Professional Development. The questions helped us to evaluate the success of each session by asking questions such as “Based on today’s EML PD, how prepared do you feel to help your EML students grow?” Answers ranged from “Less prepared, to more prepared.” When teachers marked “more prepared,” the EML Team knew we were on the right track.

Keeping the Data Human with Teacher & Student Interviews

While the digital format of data collection was helpful amidst the pandemic, it was the humanistic interviews with both teachers and students that helped me truly know whether or not this work was making an impact. Empathy interviews were conducted over the phone and in person with teachers, and over Zoom conferences and in person with students.

Teacher interviews helped to guide the initial choices the EML Team made when beginning our PDSA cycles. We thought a lot about the repeated call for time and space to improve the practice of servicing EML students. Even impromptu, natural conversations with teachers throughout the PDSA cycles helped to guide our work. Student interviews were helpful throughout the PDSA cycles, especially when I was adding data regarding my own students’ needs and performance during the By-Name List protocols. It was also important to gather student voices to gain a better understanding of the impact of all the efforts put into the PD for teachers.

There were definitely limitations to data in the form of empathy interviews. Most of the impromptu feedback came from my fellow teachers on the 8th grade teaching team, and the colleagues I had personal relationships with around the school. I was able to conduct informal interviews with six of the 16 teacher participants, which made up 37.5% of the participant group. I relied on and acted upon their interview feedback the most since I was already connecting to them daily. This means that I wasn’t able to gain as much information from other colleagues and students in other grades.

Findings: Analysis of Learning Cycles

EML Student Results

At the end of our inquiry cycles, our 41 EML students were attached to three goals each

(a total 123 goals) in the areas of Humanities, Math/Science, and Communication/Advocacy. Each goal was also connected to gaining proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills that would allow students to make progress toward proficiency on the ELPAC exam. Figure 6 showcases student results. 38% of all EML students met more than one of their three goals. 51% of EML students met one of their three goals. 12% of EML students did not meet any of their three goals. In total, 88% of the EML population achieved at least one goal! This reveals that the first part of this project's aim was met, because the number of students who partially met or fully met a goal was higher than 80%.

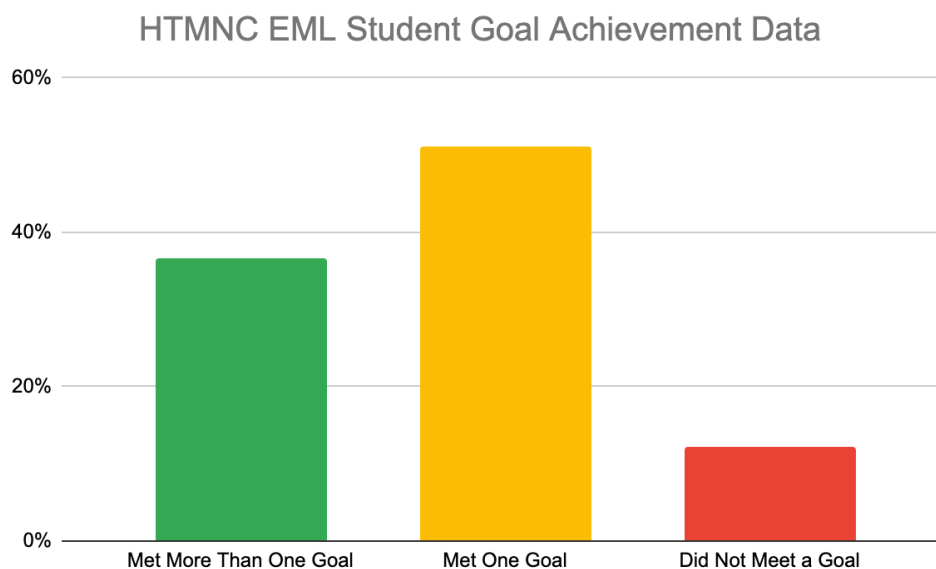


Figure 6. *HTMNC EML Student Goal Achievement Data*

This reveals great success in the work we conducted this year! I think what shows even more success, however, is the qualitative, interview data from students. When students, like Sara, who was quoted in my first experience with the ELPAC test, realized that they achieved a goal of theirs, their reaction was priceless. She shared, “I was really relieved. I was really working hard to succeed. When I asked her about the impact of all the extra support she received this year for her language development, she shared, “It all made me feel a little more powerful. I felt like I could do anything. In the past, we didn’t get as much support but this year, I felt more prepared.”

HTMNC Teacher Results

Incredible progress and growth was made among the HTMNC teaching staff between January 25 and April 7, 2021. Figure 7 showcases the before and after results of the baseline and endline Teacher Efficacy Self Assessment surveys. Improvements can be seen where the “Always” (orange) and “Often” (green) bars increase in size, and the “Rarely” (red) and “Never” (blue) bars decrease in size.

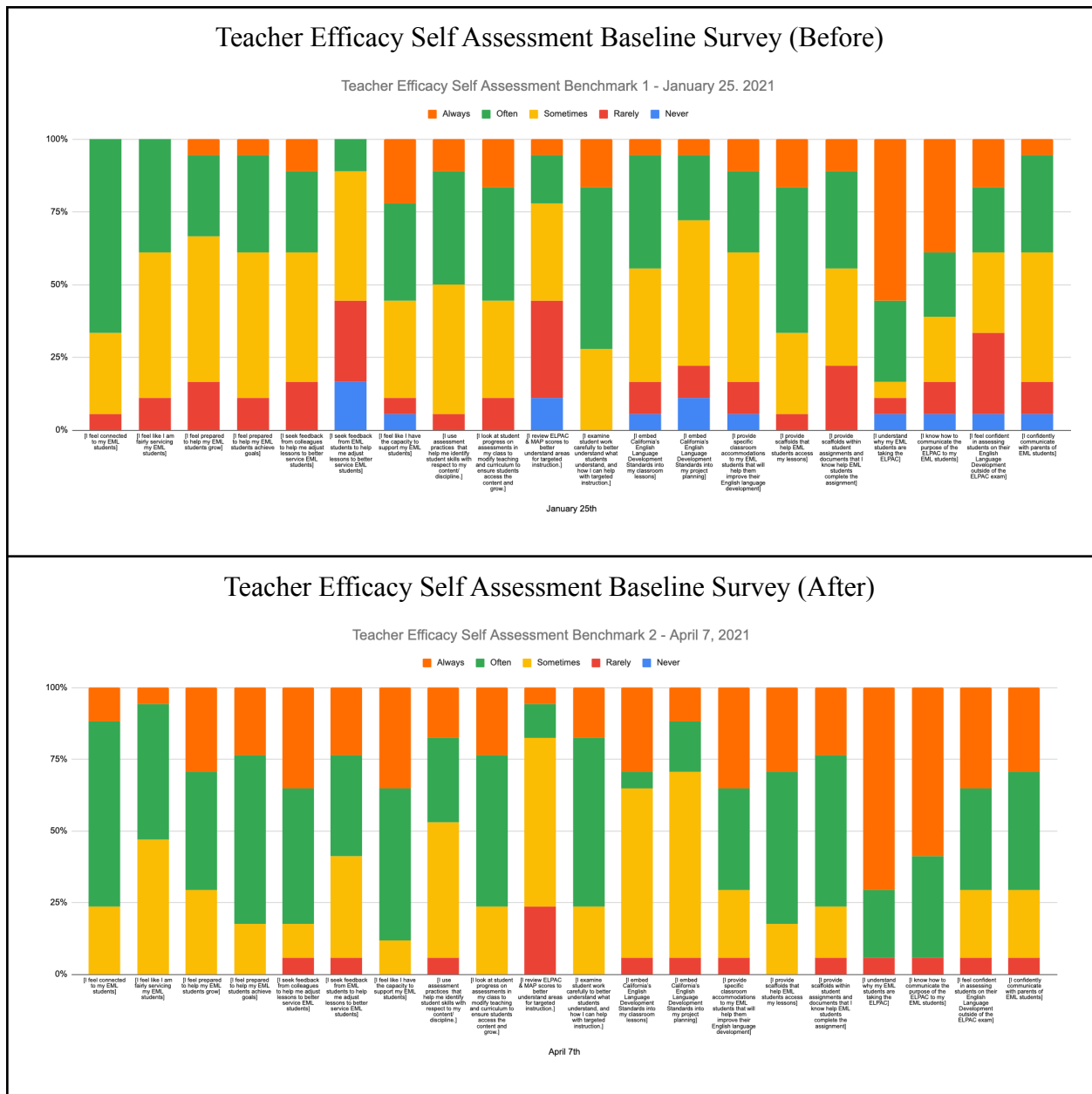


Figure 7. Teacher Efficacy Self Assessment Benchmarks, Before & After

I was ecstatic to see that there were seven target areas that improved by 20% or more from January to April:

1. *I feel prepared to help my EML students grow*
2. *I seek feedback from colleagues to help me adjust lessons to better service EML students*
3. *I seek feedback from EML students to help me adjust lessons to better service EML students*
4. *I embed California's English Language Development Standards into my classroom lessons*

5. *I provide specific classroom accommodations to my EML students that will help them improve their English language development*
6. *I know how to communicate the purpose of the ELPAC to my EML students*
7. *I confidently communicate with parents of EML students.*

The details of this data are showcased in Figure 8 below:

	Baseline Data Collection (January 2021)	Endline Data Collection (April 2021)																								
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Figure 8. Teacher Efficacy Self Assessment: Growth Highlights

Summary of Findings

Through this process, I learned three very important takeaways:

1. *Teachers need the time, space, structures, and focused professional development to service their EML students*
2. *Goal setting is an art that also needs to be explicitly taught to teachers and must include students*
3. *Empathy & Understanding Motivates the People to Act*

Teachers need the time, space, structures, and focused professional development to service their EML students

We witnessed a huge increase in teacher efficacy of servicing EML students at HTMNC this year. When speaking to teachers individually, many attributed their feelings of efficacy and confidence to the dedicated time and space to commit themselves to their EML work. They felt that the vision was very clear from the beginning: that as a team, we would work together to improve EML performance at our school. The constant reminder of the importance of this work,

as well as the consistent support through professional development, helped teachers increase their efficacy substantially, and in some areas, over 20%.

The EML team found that teachers were truly craving strategies to support their teaching. We found that teachers were not actively avoiding providing support to students; they just needed tools to do so. Once teachers were given the strategies and skills to support EML students, they immediately implemented them into their lessons and classrooms. As you can tell from the data in January, only 11% of teachers always provided specific classroom accommodations to EML students. By April, that number jumped to 35% of teachers always providing those accommodations. While we hope to eventually get to 100% of teachers always providing accommodations, this growth is important to celebrate.

Goal setting is an art that also needs to be explicitly taught to teachers and must include students

When we combed through the student goal achievement data, we found that more 7th grade students met their goals than did 6th and 8th graders. When we surveyed the 7th grade teachers, we found that the goals they set for their students were very specific, focused, and attainable. The goals that were achieved by students truly matched skills that the students were working on and supported the students natural progression of growth. Many 6th and 8th grade teachers expressed that they weren't 100% sure if the goals they set for their students were the right fit for their students' needs. It will be critical for the EML Team to seek out more resources to ensure that all teachers know how to set such goals for students.

Another important finding from combing through the data of students who met their language development goals, was that each of them were heavily involved in the creation of their goals. The students explained that since they helped to create their goals, they felt more invested in the process of achieving their goals. They also shared that they revisited their goals often which helped them to keep their aim at the forefront of their minds.

Empathy & Understanding Motivates the People to Act

I noticed a big shift in teacher investment in our work after Cycle 4 of our PDSA cycle, because in this cycle teachers put themselves in the shoes of our EML students. In an attempt to have teachers better understand the expectations of the ELPAC exam, the EML Team presented a section of the ELPAC test with a volunteer teacher acting as student. The task asked the teacher to embody a student, and summarize an academic presentation about evaporation and condensation cycles. The task required students to be able to be familiar with academic vocabulary, actively listen to and understand multi-step directions the first time the information is presented, take notes on the presentation, then effectively present the information back to the testing proctor. When teachers got to feel the pressure of performing correctly within the first opportunity of the task, and witnessed the complicated nature of the ELPAC test for themselves, motivation to help students increased. Teachers were very angry about the expectations the test had for students. Teachers voiced that they felt like their classes were not currently preparing students for the test. We tasked teachers to take the ELPAC exam for themselves, then develop

action plans to help students succeed on the exam. Teachers passionately shared their ideas at the next Professional Development.

It was inspiring to see the motivation shift after this activity. This is a great example of how appealing to the emotions of a group can genuinely cause them to act. According to Heath & Heath (2010)

“The sequence of change is not ANALYZE-THINK-CHANGE, but rather SEE-FEEL-CHANGE. You’re presented with evidence that makes you feel something. It might be disturbing to look at the problem, or a hopefully glimpse of the solution, or a sobering reflection of your current habits, but regardless, it’s something that hits you at the emotional level” (p. 106).

Before PDSA Cycle 4, most of the change efforts came from the EML Team. The experience of the ELPAC test helped teachers to see, feel, then change their practices. It is clear that this powerful moment transformed a project driven by the EML Team into a movement driven by an entire staff.

After this activity, teachers across all grade levels formed action groups to support students and prepare them to succeed when faced with the ELPAC exam. In a final push to celebrate and support our students’ hard work in the classroom and in small groups, the 8th grade team created an intervention group with a fun theme to uplift the superpowers of our EML students: The Secret Society. Our team turned the ELPAC test prep experience into a secret agent-themed set of missions, complete with top secret folders, nicknames, and certificates. We wanted all our students to feel valued no matter what the outcome of their tests were.

Conclusions

Give teachers the time, space, structures, and focused professional development to service their EML students

Before engaging the PDSA Cycles, teachers at HTMNC voiced the need for time and space to plan for EML work. They voiced needing the training to also properly support students. This is a trend seen across many teaching staffs who service high-need populations such as EMLs. If you want to see teachers successfully service EML students, set them up for success! Give them the time and space to do the work. Heath & Heath (2010) write about how important it is to clear any roadblocks standing in the way of someone, or a team of people, trying to change. They write that, “Tweaking the environment is about making the right behaviors a little bit easier and the wrong behaviors a little bit harder” (Heath & Heath, 2010, p. 183). Committing to a time and space for teachers to focus on EML work will help to tweak the environment. It was a lot easier for teachers to get the work done when the schedule allowed for it and the content of the development supported the work.

If you are a school leader, how are you providing space for teachers to focus on their EML students and other students in need? How can you utilize your professional development schedule to embed this work into your school schedule? What structures are you enabling your teachers to simply and consistently reconnect about student behaviors, learn about those behaviors with curiosity, without assumptions and judgments? Consider building a professional development schedule that will secure a long-term engagement in your EML work, and consider a structure such as a “By-Name List” to keep teachers centered in their student’s strengths, needs, and goals.

Goal setting is an art that also needs to be explicitly taught to teachers and must include students

In Cycle 3 of our PDSA cycles, HTMNC staff began to set goals for EML students for the first time. This was a critical step in helping teachers better understand the language development needs of their EML students. That being said, creating goals was not an easy task. Most teachers shared in their informal, verbal feedback to the EML Team that they weren’t quite sure how to create a goal for their students and feel like they would have benefitted from more guidance. Next year the EML team plans to adjust our process for setting goals for EML students in the following ways, as advised by educational consultant and content creator, Valetina Gonzalez (2017):

1. **We will collect data through formal assessment and observations.** We plan to examine ELPAC results when we receive them in the fall, then interpret the data to understand potential linguistic needs of each student. From there, teachers will need to observe students in both academic and social settings over the course of one to two months.
2. **We will work with students to establish next steps together.** We will share observations with students and work with them to create goals. Gonzalez (2017) writes that “Sharing with ELLs where they are and where the next step is can be powerful! ... ELLs need to know their direction and we are their “guides on the side.” A World of Language Learners (2020) recommends the sentence structure: “Right now I can _____. My goal is to _____.” Once we create goals with students we will document concrete, actionable steps to help students make progress across each of their language domains. A World of Language Learners (2020) recommends the sentence structure: “My goal is to _____. I need to _____ so that I can _____.”
3. **We will plan instruction to align with student goals and hold one another accountable.** We plan to embed instructional techniques and strategies into our lesson and project planning to align with student goals. We also can establish consistent feedback protocols to allow teachers to look the plans of colleagues to identify evidence of where EML student needs are addressed by the lesson plans.
4. **We will celebrate growth and success with students.** This is critical and will contribute to students’ feelings of pride and belonging!

How are you utilizing goal setting to help your EML students grow? How are you preparing your general education teachers to create goals for students that are impactful? What systems are in place at your school to ensure that goal setting and reflection of progress happens

consistently and often? Consider learning from the pitfalls of our study and engage in similar steps as the ones listed above.

Facilitate opportunities for teachers to step into the shoes of the communities they serve

One way that the HTMNC staff stepped into the shoes of their students this year was by taking the ELPAC text for themselves. We did this in order to develop empathy and understanding for the student experience. After taking the test, the majority of teachers were upset after experiencing how difficult, confusing, and out of context the different parts of the test really were. They built empathy and wanted to join us in our mission. This was very exciting, but I am left wondering how the HTMNC team could have empathized even more with the EML student and family community this year.

According to Will (2020), a survey from 2018 estimated that “79.3 percent of public school teachers are white and 9.3 percent are Hispanic.” With this data informing reality, the world of education is filled with implicit bias and systems dictated by White dominant culture. As a White educator myself, I acknowledge that I cannot accurately or fairly articulate the wants, needs, and goals of the communities I teach. I also acknowledge that the education that served me well is not fairly servicing students of color. This is why it is critical for all educators, especially those who do not mirror the population that they teach, to immerse themselves in the communities they serve and elevate their voices and opinions. Instead of making assumptions about student and family populations, ask questions. Instead of speaking on behalf of your student or parent community, invite them to speak for themselves.

While I am proud of the growth we saw with teacher self-efficacy this year, I admit that it is lacking student and parent insight. Teachers may feel that they serve their students fairly, but do parents and students feel that way? A change I wish I could make to this project is allow more opportunity for students and parents to provide their feedback about how teachers service EML students. This is something I hope to include in our work next year. It is critical that HTMNC teachers conduct empathy interviews with families and students at the beginning of the school year to understand their hopes, dreams, goals, and their personal definition of success.

I invite you to also reflect on how you can empathize more with the experiences of your EML students and families. If you are not multilingual yourself, how can you step into the shoes of your multilingual students and families? How can you include more student and family voice and choice into your plans at your school? How can you work against systems of oppression in your classroom, school, and community? Despite feeling like we could have done a lot more to answer these questions ourselves this year, I look forward to entering the new school year with these questions at the forefront.

Looking Forward

“This is a little racist isn’t it?” Two years later and Sara’s question resurfaces in my memory. Yes, the ELPAC test remains problematic, complicated, and despite perhaps good intentions from its creators, racist. Unfortunately, we can’t just stop administering it (I checked). So we need to do all that we can as educators to prepare our students for all opportunities that our problematic, complicated, and racist world will throw at them. We can empower our students to face obstacles, such as a test, and overcome them with confidence and pride. We can also work hard to allow teachers to lead students to become brave in the face of such challenges. In order for teachers to prepare students for such obstacles, I learned that teachers need the time, space, structures, and focused professional development to service their EML students. I learned that goal setting is an art that also needs to be explicitly taught to teachers and must include students. I learned that empathy and understanding motivates people to act.

This work began after an eye-opening moment of administering a standardized test. Two years later, while HTMNC still awaits the results of this year’s ELPAC test, I reflect back on my first experience with it. I went from feelings of frustration and anger, to motivation and urgency, and finally awareness and understanding. After our year of work, ELPAC testing day sounded very different. Instead of being greeted by a flurry of anxious questions the morning of the test, I was greeted by confident “game faces.” I was amazed at how the very students who showed great fear during testing their sixth grade year, left the testing room as eighth graders with their heads held high.

When I talked to Edgar, who had asked if the test was meant to “call out” kids who spoke Spanish, he told me, “I feel pretty great. It was just like how I practiced in Secret Society. I knew what I was doing this time!”

Manny, who had been afraid of not knowing the answer to a question, said “I feel like I was prepared and less nervous than when I took it last time.”

Sara, who likely will never know the impact of her question two years earlier, shared her feelings after finishing her test: “I felt so relieved. I worked hard to prepare for the test. It made me feel a little more powerful and that I could do anything I set my mind to.” No matter what the test results reveal, I know that I don’t need to see a list of numbers to know that our students have grown into stronger, more resilient versions of their incredible multilingual selves.

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