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Impact of Professional Development on Primary School Teachers' Practices and Student Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Prioritizing student engagement in the classroom, where students want to learn more and be challenged, can lead to future success. This study investigated the effectiveness of providing teachers with professional development focusing on student engagement. The study utilized a mixed-method methodology that examined the effects of professional development on student engagement levels. The participants were 19 teachers who attended professional development at ABC Primary School. Descriptive statistics and paired t-tests were used to test the study's hypotheses. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through observations before and after the professional development sessions. The data collected was used to determine whether there was (l) an increase in student engagement and (2) an increase in the utilization of strategies for student engagement. The study's results revealed a significant difference between the pre-observation and post-observation data collected. From the results, it can be inferred that the increase in scores and use of strategies may be contributed to the participation in professional development. These findings highlight the importance of providing educators with the knowledge and strategies to engage students beyond compliance.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Improving student engagement is a common concern among educators; especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Castro and George (2021) concluded from their study on the impact of COVID on student engagement that student engagement during emergency remote learning significantly declined. This trend continues as schools have transitioned back to in-person learning for our students. It has become more important now that teachers need to continuously increase their knowledge of instructional and behavioral strategies to engage students within the classroom. One way to improve student engagement in the classroom is by teachers participating in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that include professional development workshops. Kennedy (2016) notes the purpose of professional development is to help explore how students learn and teachers learn based on different theories. A broadly accepted concept is professional development nurtures teachers to make improvements. However, teachers are consistently bombarded with what is important, they may focus on too much at one time, compromising the effectiveness of any one thing (Kennedy, 2016). The collaboration within PLCs helps teachers develop their own instructional strategies to be used in their classroom to support students (Bredeson & Scribner, 2000; Harrison & Killion, 2007). PLCs have garnered extensive attention as an essential component in school improvement (Seo & Han, 2012). PLCs have been widely implemented in educational environments to characterize various groups assembled to work collaboratively for many purposes (Teaque & Anafara, 2012). A PLC is a pathway for schools to approach reform and meet school improvement goals, increasing academic and behavioral performance as well as increasing student engagement.

Schmoker (2004) aligned collaborative problem-solving with self-directed, job-embedded characteristics of PLCs. Collaborative problem-solving allows teachers to focus on strategies that

benefit them within the classroom. Teachers often feel that their students are engaged because they actively participate in the lesson or activity they have been given. However, in some situations, the students are compliant and doing what is expected rather than engaged. Student engagement is more than compliance. Students should show investment, independence, and initiation while participating and working in the classroom. When you enlist the problem-solving nature of PLCs with embedded professional development, teachers are given the opportunity to work collaboratively together to help improve the aspect of teaching that enhances student engagement and learning.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to examine how a PLC, with professional development that focuses on improving student engagement, affects teaching practices and student engagement. School districts provide a variety of professional development for teachers. Teachers need professional development to enhance their instruction in the classroom. A better understanding of how PLCs and professional development could impact the classroom environment can be essential for district and school leaders to understand how to support increased student engagement better. PLCs and professional development offer teachers the opportunity to directly impact and improve teaching and learning. They also allow teachers to build stronger relationships with each other and help solidify the goal of improving student learning and engagement; as well as allow time for teachers to reflect on what strategies are working.

Problem Statement

F PLCs and professional development contribute to the instructional climate of a school in how instruction is carried out within a classroom. They offer teachers the opportunity to

directly impact learning and student engagement. PLCs and professional development offer the opportunity for teachers to mentor each other and share ideas along with reflecting on what strategies work. When a PLC is established, one possible benefit is changing teachers' mindsets regarding the work they do every day in the classroom (Vescio et al., 2008). The PLCs and professional development have fundamental characteristics that nurture changes in the instructional climate within the school.

There should be an understanding that a PLC and professional development is a fundamental approach to change. Bakkenes et al. (2010) recognize that teachers are held to a high standard regarding the knowledge and facilitation of student learning. However, despite the vast research on the implications of PLCs and professional development on student achievement, a gap exists between the work in PLCs and professional development regarding student engagement within the classroom. This gap is due to a variety of different reasons, which include students' social and emotional well-being, their individual personalities, their learning styles, and environmental factors.

PLCs with professional development workshops and student engagement are two important components in enhancing students' educational experiences. Teachers learn strategies through PLCs to engage students in their classrooms. Increased student engagement equates to higher student achievement and more students working on grade level. Currently, there is a need to increase the levels of student engagement and use of engagement strategies in classrooms at ABC Primary School.

Purpose Statement

A PLC is a pathway for schools to approach reform and meet school improvement goals, increasing academic and behavioral performance as well as increasing student engagement. The

purpose of this mixed method study was to determine if providing teachers with professional development workshops through a PLC, with a focus on improving student engagement, will affect teaching practices and student engagement. The researcher will investigate whether participation in a PLC, with a focus on student engagement, is related to (1) increased levels of student engagement within the classroom, and (2) increased utilization of strategies to encourage student engagement.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this mixed-method study:

RQ 1. Do professional development workshops improve students' level of engagement?

RQ 2. Do professional development workshops improve teachers' use of strategies to engage students?

Hypotheses

This study was designed to investigate and assess the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference in student engagement in the classroom before and after their teachers participated in professional development workshops with a focus on student engagement.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference in the utilization of strategies for student engagement before and after teachers participated in professional development workshops with a focus on student engagement.

Theoretical Framework

PLCs have been widely implemented in educational environments to allow various groups to work collaboratively for various purposes (Teaque & Anafara, 2012). Not only do PLCs allow for collaboration, they also allow teachers to develop stronger relationships and

reflect on ideas and practices that can overall be utilized to improve student learning. The constructivist and transformative learning theories are used as the framework to allow a better understanding of how teachers use what they learn in professional development workshops, within a PLC, to improve the level of student engagement within their classroom. Thus, improving student achievement.

Constructivist Learning Theory

The works of Bada and Olusegun (2015) describe the constructivist learning theory as taking experiences and constructing knowledge from them. The theory promotes an active learning environment where educators collaborate and share ideas. Constructivist learning theory is often used to support the implementation of PLCs. The work in PLCs have great implications for how teachers teach and learn how to teach. This shows a direct correlation between student engagement and achievement. Bada and Olusegun (2015) see a constructivist environment as one with collaboration and problem-solving.

PLC is a pathway for schools to approach reform and meet school improvement goals. Collaboration is a crucial component of effective PLCs. If collaboration is to be successful, it needs to be a process that is strategic about stimulating participation, which involves sharing, reflecting, and being comfortable taking risks to enact changes (Vescio et al., 2008). Collaboration helps to create a growth-based learning environment, which in turn builds student engagement and improves student achievement. Ultimately, collaboration within a PLC should involve active, willing participants. A leader should see a difference in a teacher's mindset, through collaboration, in the work they do every day in the classroom (Vescio et al., 2008).

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) define PLCs as where teachers collaborate to reflect on practice and student outcomes and make changes to improve teaching and student learning. Dufour et al., (2005) identify that ensuring students learn, building a climate of collaboration, and focusing on results are important conditions for a PLC to be successful. Collaboration is a crucial component of effective PLCs. Collaboration offers teachers the opportunity to develop and have conversations about student engagement, student learning, and what specific skills or strategies will help students the best. If collaboration is to be successful, it needs to be a process that is strategic about stimulating participation, which involves sharing, reflecting, and being comfortable taking risks to enact changes (Vescio et al., 2008). Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that the experiences of individuals generate personal views that are subjective to that experience. Individuals must look at all the different perspectives from one experience. It is essential to seek to understand the different views of participants. Understanding different perspectives helps with avoiding judgment, reduces bias, and increases informed decision-making. "Constructivist learning theory often addresses the processes of interactions among individuals" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8).

Transformative Learning Theory

A transformative learning theory is when a person experiences a significant shift in the way that they perceive or view the world around them. It is part of a process that is conducive to changing one's perspectives. It allows a person to reevaluate their perspective and beliefs. Transformative learning theory can be beneficial in our understanding of PLCs. In adulthood, learning is transformative. Adults are more capable of seeing distortions in their own beliefs, feelings, and attitudes (Mezirow, 1981).

Servage (2008) maintains that transformative learning theory can help shift the mindset concerning collaboration for teacher learning. The current mindset is that collaborative teacher learning is a place for the mastery of technical skills. Transformative learning theory should be seen as a "communicative framework more appropriate for exploiting any transformative potential present in a professional learning community model" (Servage, 2008, p. 69). PLCs, contribute to the instructional climate of a school in how instruction is carried out within a classroom. When a PLC is established, one possible benefit is changing teachers' mindsets regarding the work they do every day in the classroom (Vescio et al., 2008). Without a change in this mindset, teachers will continue to teach the way that they have taught and this will continue to lead to a decrease in student engagement and a decrease in student achievement and learning.

Research Methodology and Design

This mixed-methods study examined the effects of a semester-long professional development within a PLC, on student engagement within the classroom and utilization of strategies for student engagement. The design entails collecting data from qualitative and quantitative sources in a single study and combining the data to understand a research problem more completely (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The problem that was explored in this study was to determine if professional development workshops within a PLC, with a focus on improving student engagement, affect teaching practices and student engagement. Descriptive statistics and paired-sample *t*-tests were used to test the hypotheses of this study with the scientific approach and established procedures (Askarza & Unhelkar, 2017).

The participants of this study were 19 certified primary school teachers who participated in professional development that focused on student engagement. This study utilized observations as the primary data collection tool. Scheduled classroom observations were based

on the Social-Emotional Engagement-Knowledge & Skills (SEE-KS) engagement ladder created by Rubin et al. (n.d.). The ladder allows SEE-KS coaches to measure the degree of engagement of students in the classroom. An engagement score at or above 3.4 indicated that positive engagement was observed more than half of the time. A score of 3.0 indicated a compliant classroom where approximately half of the students were engaged, or students were engaged approximately half of the time. The pre-observation and post-observation student engagement scores were compared as well as the utilization of strategies to enhance student engagement. Also, anecdotal notes were taken by the consultant to provide evidence of investment, independence, and initiation of students within the lesson.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are defined to help the reader understand the meaning of each in the study.

Student Engagement: "a condition of emotional, social, and intellectual readiness to learn characterized by curiosity, participation, and the drive to learn more" (Abla & Fraumeni, 2019, p. 2).

Instructional Climate: "the totality of factors that affect a learning environment" (Cardichon & Roc, 2015, p.1).

Independence: students are "able to access the instruction and routines that support their knowledge and resourcefulness" (Rubin et al., n.d.).

Initiation: students are "learning through action and expression by being strategic and goal-directed with their engagement" (Rubin et al., n.d.).

Investment: students are "learning with purpose and motivation across academic, social, and emotional experiences (Rubin et al., n.d.).

*Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**:*** a place where "educators create an environment that fosters cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p.11).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

It has become more important now that teachers need to continuously increase their knowledge of instructional and behavioral strategies to engage students within the classroom. One way to improve student engagement in the classroom is by teachers participating in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that include professional development workshops. The collaboration within PLCs helps teachers develop their own instructional strategies to be used in their classroom to support students (Bredeson & Scribner, 2000, Harrison & Killion, 2007). PLCs have garnered extensive attention as an essential component in school improvement (Seo & Han, 2012). PLCs have been widely implemented in educational environments to characterize various groups assembled to work collaboratively for many purposes (Teaque & Anafara, 2012). A PLC is a pathway for schools to approach reform and meet school improvement goals, increasing academic and behavioral performance as well as increasing student engagement. PLC is an environment where teachers can work collaboratively to reflect on practice and student outcomes which can lead to changes that improve the teaching and learning of students, as described by McLaughlin and Talbert (2006).

Professional Learning Communities

PLCs have been widely implemented in educational environments to characterize various groups that work collaboratively for various purposes (Teague & Anafara, 2012). In a PLC, the focus shifts from teaching to learning as a fundamental purpose. Teachers are continuously learning to support their students' learning (DuFour, et al., 2008). This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student engagement and student achievement (Dufour, 2004). The goal of PLCs is to enhance teaching practices so that students can reach their fullest potential.

Dufour et al. (2008) assert that effective schools' intentional conversations and actions create a culture within the PLCs and schools to have a laser-sharp focus on what is best for the students. Dufour et al., have developed guidelines to focus on PLCs: (a) What is it we want our

students to learn? (b) How will we know if each student is learning the essential skills? (c) How will we respond when some students do not learn? and (d) How will we enrich and extend learning? Pirtle and Tobia (2014) recommend six guidelines to help district and school leaders and teachers implement and sustain the PLC process: (a) provide a clear structure and purpose for PLC meetings, (b) address the most pressing instructional challenges (c) provide support from all levels of the school system, (d) foster an atmosphere of trust, (e) monitor the work of PLCs and provide constructive feedback, and (f) support teachers with a sense of efficacy and level of professionalism.

Many PLCs are enacted at a superficial level. Because of this superficial level, the PLCs do not necessarily lead to their intended outcomes, such as improved instructional practice and student academic performance. Dufour (2007) has observed that sometimes schools claim they are PLCs even when they do not engage in the work. Pirtle and Tobia (2014) state the name PLC is often overused to the point that the term's meaning is often lost. Professional development should be considered a PLC when teachers reflect on their instructional practice, consider the effect instruction has on students, and implement insights gained from collaboration to improve their teaching performance.

Collaboration and Benefits

Collaboration has become a movement in the twenty-first- century that has become an encouraging way for educators to interact (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). Johnston and TSAI (2018) acknowledge that teacher collaboration focuses on different aspects of professional interaction. Teachers who collaborate can refine and enhance the instruction, curriculum, and support they provide the students in the classroom. Also, within the collaboration, there is an educational approach to the teaching and learning of educators. Laal and Ghodsi (2012) see collaboration as a group of teachers working together for the common goal of educating their students. There is a

lack of competition between group members but rather cooperation and consensus building. Not only are the teachers responsible for their own learning, but they are also responsible for the learning of their colleagues. Without this mindset shift, student engagement and student achievement will not improve.

A PLC is a pathway for schools to approach reform and meet school improvement goals. Schools that operate as PLCs incorporate focused learning for students and teachers. The focus on teaching students is removed and replaced with a focus on continuous collaborative learning among teachers (DuFour, 2007). Collaboration is a crucial component of effective PLCs. Collaboration plays an essential role in reflective practice, which is a crucial pathway to developing knowledge of educational strategies (Marzano et al., 2016). If collaboration is to be successful, it needs to be a process that is deliberate about stimulating participation, which involves sharing, reflecting, and being comfortable with taking risks to enact changes (Vescio et al., 2008). The substantial collaboration in PLCs is a structured process where teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice (Dufour, 2004).

Thessin and Staar (2011) suggest that schools that teach their staff how to collaborate are the most effective. They indicate that districts interested in implementing successful PLCs must involve teachers and administrators in developing and facilitating the PLC process. They must teach administrators and teachers how to work collaboratively and effectively in PLCs (Thessin & Staar, 2011). If teachers do not participate in PLCs, they lose the opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise with others, and others lose the opportunity to learn from them. Ineffective participation in PLCs leads to decreased student engagement and decreased student achievement.

Instructional Climate

According to previous research, the climate in a school can best be defined as "the totality of factors that affect a learning environment" (Cardichon & Roc, 2015, p.1). One important aspect of school climate is instruction. A positive school environment leads to improved student achievement in regard to test scores, grades, and engagement. It also helps to reduce the negative impacts due to environmental factors like poverty. PLCs contribute to the instructional climate of a school as to how instruction is carried out within a classroom. The instructional climate of a school changes through the implementation of PLCs. As schools focus on developing PLCs among their faculty and administrators, a shared vision of student learning and professional appreciation for collaboration will give the change efforts the stamina they need to sustain the change (Dufour et al., 2008).

The instructional climate of a school is strengthened through PLCs that advocate friendliness among co-workers and conflict resolution (Sterr, 2011). Effective teaching of conflict resolution skills for teachers leads to effective teaching of conflict resolution skills for students, thus improving their overall social-emotional well-being, along with improving their engagement levels. PLCs impact the instructional climate of a school in multiple ways that include: shared vision, goals, and commitment from all stakeholders, professional appreciation, focus on student learning, the action research approach, continual improvement by all stakeholders, and a focus on the end results needed for school success (Dufour et al., 2008). The PLC process impacts various aspects of a school, which leads to an improved instructional climate for teachers and students. The PLCs have fundamental characteristics that nurture changes in the instructional climate within the classroom.

PLCs can lead to positive changes within a school. Lopez-Flores (2014) states four changes that PLCs make on the instructional climate of a school: (1) professional learning, (2)

improved teaching strategies/methods, (3) higher level of student achievement, and (4) enhanced interventions for students. Elements of instructional climate that are affected positively through the implementation of PLCs include daily instruction, planning, and professional development (Finley, 2013). PLCs allow teachers to express, explore, analyze, and reflect on their professional practices (Mohammad, 2017).

Student Engagement

Abla and Fraumeni (2019) recognize that over the years, the definitions of engagement have become varied and lengthy as researchers try to capture multiple aspects of the classroom experience. When engagement is considered in the classroom, one must think beyond the simplicity of memorization and repetition. Engagement involves connections of all sorts more than ever in the educational world, including social and emotional connections (Abla & Fraumeni, 2019). They see engagement as "a condition of emotional, social, and intellectual readiness to learn characterized by curiosity, participation, and the drive to learn more" (Abla & Fraumeni, 2019, p. 2).

Fostering student engagement within the classroom is crucial to students' success now and in the future (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020). Teachers are obligated to their students to support their students with strategies they themselves understand and can apply in the classroom. Strategies should be specific, well thought out, and collaborated on for student engagement (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). It is not enough to simply know strategies for engagement; teachers must know how to differentiate between engaged and disengaged students. They must recognize what appears as student engagement can really be a manifestation of students being compliant to their being busy (Schnitzler, et al., 2020). Teachers who are enthusiastic about their lessons and activate their students' learning tend to have higher levels of engagement. Classrooms, where students exhibit low engagement tend to have teachers demonstrating disorganized and

unplanned teaching strategies. These teachers tend to engage in strategies that do not motivate students from the start of the lesson (Cents-Boonstraet al., 2020). Motivation of student learning is a critical aspect of student engagement. When students are motivated, they build relationships with their teachers, and they can see the value in the content that is being taught.

Based on my review of the literature, there was little research found on how PLCs affect teaching practices and student engagement within the classroom. I selected to study these outcomes because of the need for increased student engagement within classrooms at ABC Primary School. Another reason for choosing this study was the lack of research on how PLCs affect student engagement within the classroom and the use of student engagement strategies. Without student engagement, student learning and achievement decrease. Due to this, students academically fall behind. This, in turn, sets them up for failure later in life.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-methods design to answer the research questions. The design entails collecting data from qualitative and quantitative sources in a single study and combining the data to understand a research problem more completely (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study examined the effects of a semester-long professional development within a PLC on student engagement within the classroom and the utilization of strategies for student engagement.

This study utilized observations as the primary data collection tool. Scheduled classroom observations were based on the Social-Emotional Engagement-Knowledge & Skills (SEE-KS) engagement ladder created by Rubin et al. (n.d.). The tool focused on the *investment*, *independence*, and *initiation* of students observed in the learning environment to enhance student engagement. When all three "I's" of engagement are observed and can be described in a classroom, student engagement is observed at a higher level. "Learners are invested in their learning with purpose and motivation across academic, social, and emotional experiences" (Rubin et al., n.d.); these authors see *investment* as stimulating a student's motivation for learning and interacting. Students have the support they need to stay actively engaged. Students demonstrate *independence* when they know what to do and understand what is being taught; that is, "Learners are noticed to be independent in their access to instruction and routines that support their knowledge and resourcefulness" (Rubin, et al., n.d.). *Initiation* is demonstrated when students have different options for showing what they know and what to say; "Learners are noticed to have initiation in their learning through action and expression by being strategic and goal-directed with their engagement" (Rubin et al., n.d.). Students are given frequent opportunities to initiate in everyday activities.

In the first stage of this study, participants were observed in the classroom for 30 minutes to gauge the current level of student engagement and the strategies they used before participating

in the professional development. In the second stage of the study, the 19 teachers participated in professional development within a PLC, with a focus on student engagement. In the final stage, participants were observed again in the classroom to gauge the level of student engagement and strategies after the professional development.

Participants

The research study incorporated a purposeful sampling strategy. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 148) define purposeful sampling as a "sample that will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination." The purposeful sampling method was chosen because the individuals met specific criteria for the study. The invited participants in this study consisted of primary school-certified staff members. The participants of this study were selected because they meet the following criteria. First, they are certified primary grade teachers in which the study will be conducted. Second, all have participated in PLCs involving student engagement and strategies to enhance student engagement and learning. Third, all have been observed as having a need in the classroom for higher levels of student engagement through previous classroom observations.

Table 1 represents the summary of demographic information collected from the observation participants. This includes grade level taught, level of education obtained, and years of teaching experience. The data collected represented a diverse group of participants in regard to grade level being taught and years of teaching experience. The majority of participants hold a bachelor’s degree (52.63%).

Table 1

Demographic Description of Study Participants

Area	Frequency (N=19)	Total (100%)
Grade Level Taught		
Kindergarten	6	31.58%
First Grade	6	31.58%
Second Grade	7	36.84%
Level of Education		
Bachelor's Degree	10	52.63%
Master's Degree	6	31.58%
Specialist Degree	3	15.79%
Teaching Experience		
0-5	5	26.31%
6-10	2	10.53%
11-15	2	10.53%
16-20	1	5.26%
21-25	5	26.31%
26-30	2	10.53%
30+	2	10.53%

Context of the Study

The research took place in the natural setting of a rural primary school. The primary school district resides in a Title 1 district, with 100% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The research school has a student population of 599. There are 43 certified teachers, two administrators, one counselor, and various non-certified personnel.

Professional Learning Activities

Participation in PLCs is mandatory within the school district. Teachers participate in PLCs two to three times a week. The first session is for group planning for units and lessons. The second session is for the analysis of student progress. The third session is for professional development that concentrates on research-based learning strategies and enhancing student

engagement within the classroom. All 19 participants were required to take part in the professional development workshops due to their need to increase student engagement.

Due to students being below grade level and student engagement levels were low at ABC Primary School professional development goals were developed. The professional development goals revolved around providing teachers with strategies to increase student achievement and the level of engagement among the students in the classroom (see Table 2). Professional development was conducted by the administration, instructional coach, and/or outside consultants knowledgeable in student engagement and learning. The professional development cycle will consist of the following:

Table 2

Engaging for Success Framework Professional Development

Session	Timeline	Focus	Objectives
1	July 2023-45-minute session	Relationships: With Admin, With Peers, With Students	What do relationships look like to you? What does it mean to have rituals and routines? How do we set expectations for our students? What can we do to be intentional about building engagement from the moment learners walk in the door? How do we support learner independence? How do we prepare to show up for our students and colleagues?
2	August 2023-45-minute session	Engagement and Environment: Relationships, Rituals, Routines	Safety in the classroom: Are our students able to enter "ready to learn" when they come to our learning environment? Why is this important? Physical Emotional Social Relationship Building What does it mean to be an engagement ally for our learners? What do we see, what do we hear, what do we notice that is evidence of the

Session	Timeline	Focus	Objectives
			establishment and quality of our relationships with and between students? How can we make small steps towards building deeper relationships? How do de-escalation strategies promote or undermine relationships with students?
3	August 2023- 45-minute session	Engagement and Instruction: Consistency, Expectations, Meaning	Consistency and Meaning: Keeping learners engaged and maintaining high expectations Continuing rituals and routines Maintaining engagement Managing expectations Defining success Making learning targets meaningful Examining student engagement as an antecedent in discipline review
4	September - 45-minute session	Engagement and Rigor: Enhancing Engagement to Promote Rigor	Rigor: Safe learning environments foster courageous learners Students take risks when they feel emotionally safe in the classroom Promote what our learner achievement in order to reduce deficits Re-define perspective to support high expectations Engagement: Consistency and trust are key to sustaining investment and promoting independent learners Review tools and resources to encourage independence and persistence Add and adjust supports as needed to meet changing needs of learners Review and reflect on expectations and goals for success Outcomes: How engaged learners move from dependence to independence and demonstrate measurable success Independent learners are courageous and curious Making standards meaningful through personal connection Embracing assessment as an indicator of independence

Engaging for Success Framework Professional Development

Utilizing the SEE-KS framework of appreciative inquiry, trauma aware principles, restorative discipline insights and research, and classroom-as-community objectives, our goal was to notice, monitor, and enhance the engagement of our students while reducing behavioral and social barriers to educational achievement.

Our guiding principles were based on raising awareness, leveraging learning partnerships, supporting independent learners, and promoting a community of learners by focusing on engagement. We examined what readiness to learn looks like, defined what it means to be an engaged learner, provided support to enhance the engagement of our students by becoming their "learning ally," explored how behavior is predicated on relationships and engagement, and aligned engagement coaching goals with discipline outcomes, progress monitoring, and testing growth and achievement. An important opportunity to not only focus on how we support our learners but also to recognize that the climate within the school begins with our adult engagement. The time also included self-reflection, role play, small group discussion, and participant-led discussion.

Instrument

The Social-Emotional Engagement-Knowledge & Skills (SEE-KS) engagement ladder for classroom observations was utilized (See Appendix C). The observation scale was developed by Rubin et al. (n.d.). The ladder allows SEE-KS coaches to measure the degree of engagement of students in the classroom. The data assisted in identifying the number of students who demonstrated each level of engagement which in turn resulted in a scale score for student engagement. The levels of engagement range from fully engaged (4), mostly engaged (3), partially engaged (2), emerging/fleeting (1), and no focus (0). Rubin et al. (n.d.) define fully engaged students as ones who initiate at high levels of initiation, show consistent independent

engagement with materials, and have a constant positive emotional investment. Mostly engaged students display spontaneous initiation, occasional independence with materials, and occasional positive emotional investment. Students identified as partially engaged have responsive initiation, show compliance, and seldom display positive emotional investment. Emerging/Fleeting students show minimal initiative, are highly dependent on direction, and have no positive emotional investment. Students with no focus are non-responsive, do not engage with materials, and display no emotion.

According to Rubin et al. (n.d.) in terms of predictive validity, when educator engagement is measured, assessing whether the teacher has provided the essential components that support student engagement, there is on average, a 0.2-point difference between the educator engagement score and the student engagement average. For example, a class with a student average of 2.2 will likely have an educator engagement score of 2.4; it is the same with low engagement scores. Additionally, higher student and educator engagement scores correlate with greater growth scores on Math and ELA measurements - such as iReady and Map. We know that when engagement wanes a bit as the year goes on, we see lower growth rates on those test scores. However, when teachers consistently promote student engagement, the test scores correlate with the engagement ladder scores. For the purpose of this study, the observer only gave student engagement scores and not educator engagement scores.

Finally, the quantitative data is validated by qualitative observations, which is why they go hand in hand. When all three “I’s” of engagement investment, independence, and initiation are observed and can be described in a classroom, using anecdotal notes and the strategies checklist, the engagement score will fall in the mostly engaged range. However, when we see no opportunities for initiation noted through the anecdotal notes, we have the numeric score to correlate with that observation.

Data obtained through these observations were used to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of the teacher and professional learning activities to enhance engagement. The observer noted what works well regarding investment, independence, initiation, and opportunities to enhance those areas within the classroom. The data from the engagement ladder assisted in identifying how frequently and consistently strategies for student engagement were utilized during the observations. Each of the strategies is rated according to the amount of time they were observed during the observation. Table 3 defines the rating scale and the explanation for each rating.

Table 3

Opportunities for Engagement Checklist Observation Rating Scale

	Ratings	Explanation
5	Continuously	observed *more than 90% of the time*; opportunities rarely missed or ineffective
4	Frequently	observed *up to 75% of the time*; opportunities occasionally missed or ineffective
3	Consistently	observed *up to 50% of the time*; opportunities sometimes missed or ineffective
2	Seldom	observed *less than 25% of the time*; opportunities frequently missed or ineffective
1	Rarely	observed *less than 10% of the time*; opportunities continuously missed, ineffective, or not present

The following checklist of strategies taught during the professional development was completed by the observer to see if teachers implemented them in the classroom. Table 4 below lists the engagement strategies that were scored during the observation with an explanation of each.

Table 4

Strategies for Student Engagement Checklist Items to be Scored

Strategy	Explanation
1. Evidence of trust between educator and learners	Interactions are authentic, student appears willing to respond to teacher bids for interaction with positive affect and openness.
2. Evidence of rapport	Harmonious, warm interactions with positive, open communication that is both teacher and student initiated.
3. Evidence of learner being acknowledged	Student bids for participation are recognized and affirmed.
4. Evidence of respect between educator and learners	Students and educators engage with verbal and physical politeness and mutual positive regard for one another; evidence of boundaries.
5. Open body language between educator and learners	Students and teachers are demonstrating an open body position with one another and engaging in frequent mutual facial contact.
6. Clear meaningful routines accessible to learners	Routines are purposeful, timely, clearly posted, with expectations accessible to learners through a variety of modalities including but not limited to visual and verbal support.
7. Hands on materials	Students have access to manipulatives, individual materials, etc.
8. Personal/Social connections with peers	Students have supported access to peers for interaction, social learning, and peer modeling.
9. Environmental adjustments to meet learner needs	Modifications are made in a timely, as-needed basis to meet the needs of individual learners including response type requested, duration of lesson, inclusion of movement opportunity, opportunity to self-reflect, etc.
10. Teacher Modeling	Teacher models expectations for how to participate, how to engage with peers, how to complete work, etc.

Strategy	Explanation
11. Organized room with access to materials	Classroom is free of clutter; student areas are clearly delineated and organized with easy access to materials to be used.
12. Developmentally appropriate language used	Language-rich environment that is developmentally appropriate and accessible to all learners.
13. Information presented in multiple ways	Information is provided to learners in a variety of ways including visual supports (pictures and words), gestures, action, etc.
14. Schedule posted and followed	Schedule is posted and visible throughout the room for student use to support self-regulation.
15. Learner facial expression and body language display positive emotions	Learners display positive emotion about the environment, work task, interactions within the classroom, etc.
16. Opportunities to self-assess	Students are given opportunities to review their work, responses, participation, etc. to build self-regulation and self-efficacy.
17. Learner responsiveness	Learners have the tools to and appear to respond in a manner that is timely to the question, prompt, or activity provided.
18. Cognitive risks encouraged	Students are positively encouraged to take risks with their thought processes, answers, interactions, etc.
19. Student led discussions/learners ideas validated	Learner contributions are acknowledged even if they are incorrect.
20. Differentiated materials/work items provided	Items are modified as needed to meet the needs of each and every learner including work completion type, quantity of work to complete, response style accepted, etc.

The classroom observation scale assisted with answering RQ 1 and RQ 2 to determine the effect the professional development workshops have on teaching practices and student engagement in the classroom.

Data Collection

The observations were conducted by an outside SEE-KS consultant. The consultant has a Master of Science in Conflict Management and has supported dispute resolution and relationship enhancement through engagement observations in school districts for over 18 years. The consultant is a co-contributor to the SEE-KS Framework, the lead specialist in Georgia for SEE-KS, and has been delivering professional learning and coaching to support the implementation of SEE-KS in schools and districts around the state since the Fall of 2019. The observations were 30 minutes each for the 19 participants. Each participant had a total of two observations. The observations were conducted over one semester of the school year. One observation was before the professional development was implemented, and the second was after teachers participated in the professional development. A checklist of strategies taught during the professional development was completed by the observer to see if teachers implemented them in the classroom. Anecdotal notes were taken during the observation pertaining to students' investment, independence, and initiation A scaled score for student engagement was obtained using this tool. To obtain the scale score for student engagement, the number of students who displayed the levels of engagement were multiplied by the engagement range number for each level. For example, if two students showed an engagement level of four, then two would be multiplied by four and so on. Then the sum of those answers was obtained. The sum was then divided by the total number of students in the classroom to obtain the student engagement score.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from SEE-KS was analyzed by transcribing what was seen in the areas of investment, independence, and initiation of students. The quantitative data was compiled in a spreadsheet according to pre-observation and post-observation. The scale score for each observation will be analyzed to determine if the level of students' engagement increased from the

pre-observation to the post-observation. The checklist was analyzed to determine if teachers implemented the strategies they learned through professional development.

Quantitative data from the SEE-KS was analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired sample *t*-tests. Frequency distributions provided percentages and frequencies for the engagement strategies checklist. Paired *t*-tests (Ross & Wilson, 2017) were utilized to analyze the student engagement scale score before and after the completion of the professional development. They also were used to compare teachers' implementation of strategies offered in professional development. A paired *t*-test was chosen because it supports comparing data at two different points in time. A paired *t*-test helped to test the hypothesis and determine whether or not professional development had an impact on the implementation of strategies and student engagement in the classroom.

The Role of the Researcher

I am employed at ABC primary school as the principal, in the district where the data collection was conducted. I am the primary evaluator and observer of teachers. I also work alongside the assistant principal and instructional coach to provide professional development opportunities for teachers. Observational data could be deemed biased if the researcher, assistant principal, or instructional coach were involved with the ratings. The bias could be due to knowledge of the participant's strengths and weaknesses in other areas that could come into play during the engagement observation. In order to collect honest and unbiased data, the researcher utilized an outside consultant to assist in the collection of data. Throughout the research, my role as the researcher was independent of the actions of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in an established educational setting involving normal educational practices. The participants were provided with a letter detailing the purpose of the

study as well as the methods that were used to collect the necessary data. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were asked to sign that they understood their rights as research participants and what they would be asked to do during their participation in the observations. All information was kept confidential. The observations took place in a supportive school environment with a person who already had a professional relationship with the participants. Participants were reminded that their participation was part of normal educational practices that would not impact their overall evaluations. The information and data gathered would not be shared with anyone except the researcher. All participants were given pseudonyms for use in written publications or professional presentations following the study. Data was stored on a password-protected computer. This study was approved by the school district as well as the Georgia College & State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This mixed-method study considered how a semester-long PLC, with professional development focused on student engagement, affected teaching practices and student engagement within the classroom. As a result, the researcher explored whether involvement in the PLC and professional development was associated with (a) improved use of strategies to engage students and (b) improved levels of student engagement. The purpose of the study was to raise awareness among schools and educational systems about the necessity of increasing the level of engagement from students within the classroom.

This study was designed to investigate and assess the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference in student engagement in the classroom before and after their teachers participated in professional development workshops with a focus on student engagement.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference in the utilization of strategies for student engagement before and after teachers participated in professional development workshops with a focus on student engagement.

This chapter provides quantitative and qualitative findings from the study that include (a) statistical analysis of the engagement tool scores, and (b) analysis of observation notes pertaining to investment, independence, and initiation. All data for the mixed-methods research was collected from one instrument, a classroom observation tool entitled The Social-Emotional Engagement-Knowledge & Skills (SEE-KS) engagement ladder. The quantitative data identified the level of engagement in the form of a scale score ranging from one to four during the observation. The quantitative data also identified the percentage of time engagement strategies that were utilized in the classroom. The data was entered into a spreadsheet that offered a data

analysis toolkit. Data was analyzed to determine if (a) engagement scores increased and (b) the usage of engagement strategies increased after the professional development. Qualitative data gathered through anecdotal notes from observations, was used to gain an understanding of the evidence that supported investment, independence, and initiation within the classroom observation.

Quantitative Results and Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to determine if there was an increase in engagement scores after participating in professional development that focused on student engagement. A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to determine the effect of participating in professional development. The results from the pre-observation (M = 2.911; SD = .213) and post-observation (M = 3.133; SD = 0.408) indicate that there was a significant difference in the improvement of student engagement scores, $t(18) = -2.5$, $p = 0.022$. The results from the pre-observation and post-observation indicate that the majority of participants who participated in the professional development increased the level of student engagement. Analysis of the pre-observation and post-observation was also conducted through the use of descriptive statistics in order to get a better understanding of the data. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the observations which include the range of scores, the mean, and standard deviation.

Table 5

Descriptive Analysis of Pre-Observations and Post-Observations

SEE-KS Observation Tool					
	n	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
Pre	19	2.6	3.5	2.911	0.213
Post	19	1.95	3.92	3.133	0.408

When comparing the data in Table 5, it is evident that although the mean improved from pre-observation to post-observation, the post-observation had a wider range of scores for student engagement. The minimum and maximum represent the scores that fall into those categories from the pre-observations and post-observations. The mean represents the average score for the observations. The standard deviation represents the measure of variation in the data through the averaged difference of scores from the mean of each observation. A higher deviation notates a wider range of scores, and a lower deviation notes a smaller range of scores.

Table 6

Pre/Post Observation Scores with Change, Degree, Experience, and Grade Level

Teacher	Pre-Engagement Score	Post-Engagement Score	Change	Degree	Years of Experience	Grade Level
A	3.2	3.92	0.72	Bachelor's	22	1
B	2.8	2.96	0.16	Master's	32	2
C	2.8	3.44	0.64	Bachelor's	13	1
D	2.8	1.95	-0.85	Master's	6	K
E	3	3.2	0.2	Master's	25	1
F	2.9	2.92	0.02	Bachelor's	9	2
G	3.1	3.35	0.25	Specialist	17	K
H	2.7	3.28	0.58	Bachelor's	2	2
I	3.5	3.4	-0.1	Master's	4	K
J	3	3.36	0.36	Specialist	27	1
K	2.76	2.84	0.08	Master's	23	2
L	3	3.24	0.24	Bachelor's	13	2
M	2.9	2.55	-0.35	Bachelor's	24	2
N	3.14	3.1	-0.04	Master's	26	K
O	2.76	3.4	0.64	Specialist	25	2
P	2.75	3.16	0.41	Bachelor's	33	1
Q	2.8	3.4	0.6	Bachelor's	4	1
R	2.6	3.05	0.45	Bachelor's	0	K
S	2.8	3	0.2	Bachelor's	2	K

Table 6 depicts the pre-observation and post-observation scale scores along with the change that was seen in regard to student engagement for each participant. It also shows the (a) degree held, (b) years of teaching experience, and (c) grade level of each participant. Seventy-nine percent of the participants improved their level of student engagement after participating in professional development; however, it is noted that only 36% of the participants met the goal for the engagement score, which is at or above 3.4. An engagement score at or above 3.4 indicates a positive engagement is observed more than half the time. Forty-seven percent of the participants showed more of a compliant classroom rather than an engaged classroom. A score of 3.0 indicates a compliant classroom where approximately half of the students are engaged, or students are engaged approximately half of the time.

The levels of education for the participants ranged from bachelor's degree to specialist degree: 52% of the participants hold a bachelor's degree. Ninety percent of those participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.2 to 0.72. Thirty-two percent of the participants hold a master's degree. Fifty percent of those participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.16 to 0.20. Sixteen percent of the participants hold a specialist degree. One hundred percent of those participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.25 to 0.64. When looking at the participants who met the goal score of 3.4 for student engagement, 16% held a specialist's degree, 16% held a bachelor's degree, and 10% held a specialist degree.

The levels of experience for the participants ranged from 0 to 33 years. Thirty-seven percent of the participants had at least 0-10 years of teaching experience. Overall, 71% of the participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.02 to 0.6. Another 15% of the participants had at least 11 to 20 years of experience. One hundred percent of those participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.25 to 0.64. Forty-eight percent of the

participants had at least 21 to 32 years of experience. Seventy-eight percent of those participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.16 to 0.72. When looking at the participants that met the goal score of 3.4 for student engagement, 16% were participants with 20 to 32 years of experience, 11% were participants with 11 to 20 years of experience, and 11% were participants with 0 to 10 years' experience.

The grade level of participants ranged from Kindergarten to second grade. Thirty-two percent of the participants taught in kindergarten. Fifty percent of those participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.2 to 0.45. Thirty-two percent of the participants taught in the first grade. One hundred percent of those participants showed an increase in their score anywhere from 0.2 to 0.64. Thirty-six percent of the participants taught in the second grade. Ninety percent of the participants increased their score anywhere from 0.02 to 0.58. When looking at participants who met the goal score of 3.4 for student engagement, 21% were first-grade teachers, 11% were kindergarten teachers, and 10% were second-grade teachers.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored the difference in the usage of engagement strategies before and after participating in professional development that focused on student engagement. A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to determine the effect of participating in professional development. The results indicated a significant difference between the student engagement strategies utilized before professional development and the student engagement strategies utilized after professional development. The mean represents the average score of the utilization of the specific strategy. The standard deviation represents the measure of variation in the data through the averaged difference of scores from the mean of each strategy utilization score. A higher deviation notates a wider range of scores, and a lower deviation notes a smaller

range of scores. Table 7 (below) summarizes the mean results of the pre-observation and post-observation ratings for the utilization of engagement strategies.

Table 7

Paired t-test Results of the Pre and Post Utilization of Engagement Strategies

SEE-KS Observation Tool	Pre		Post			
Strategies Checklist	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T (18)*	*P*
Investment						
1. Evidence of trust between educator and learners	0.416	0.168	0.732	0.089	-8.216	<.001
2. Evidence of rapport	0.458	0.126	0.684	0.140	-5.660	<.001
3. Evidence of learner being acknowledged	0.395	0.181	0.645	0.152	-7.092	<.001
4. Evidence of respect between educator and learners	0.395	0.181	0.705	0.164	-6.218	<.001
5. Open body language between educator and learners	0.353	0.198	0.684	0.140	-6.726	<.001
6. Clear Routines	0.437	0.150	0.461	0.172	-0.480	0.637
7. Hands on materials	0.205	0.181	0.405	0.224	-3.010	0.008
8. Personal/social connections with peers	0.247	0.198	0.361	0.183	-1.815	0.086
9. Environmental adjustments to meet learner needs	0.142	0.126	0.492	0.232	-5.801	<.001
Independence						
10. Teacher Modeling	0.268	0.203	0.579	0.230	-5.531	<.001
11. Organized room with access to materials	0.479	0.092	0.703	0.157	-12.369	<.001
12. Developmentally appropriate language used	0.437	0.150	0.697	0.105	-8.414	<.001
13. Information presented in multiple ways	0.184	0.168	0.447	0.214	-4.969	<.001
14. Schedule posted and followed	0.416	0.168	0.529	0.266	-2.126	0.048
Initiation						
15. Learner facial expression/ body language display positive emotions	0.395	0.181	0.684	0.163	-6.253	<.001
16. Opportunities to self-assess	0.226	0.191	0.463	0.230	-4.307	<.001
17. Learner Responsiveness	0.374	0.191	0.458	0.192	-1.660	0.114
18. Cognitive risks encouraged	0.226	0.191	0.392	0.209	-2.890	<.001

SEE-KS Observation Tool	Pre		Post			
Strategies Checklist	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T (18)*	*P*
19. Student led discussions/Learners ideas validated	0.268	0.203	0.437	0.224	-2.891	0.010
20. Differentiated materials/work items provided	0.289	0.205	0.316	0.224	-0.503	0.621

The pre-observation means scores ranged from 0.142 to 0.479. The post-observation means scores ranged from 0.361 to 0.732. During analysis of the pre-observation strategies that were utilized, it was found none of the strategy's utilization mean was at or above 0.50; which would have indicated that those strategies were effective for student engagement. However, evidence of rapport (0.458), an organized room with access to materials (0.479), and display of learner facial expressions and positive emotions (0.395) means revealed that these strategies were utilized more frequently by the participants. The post-observation analysis found a significant increase in the strategy's utilization mean that was at or above 0.50; 10 strategies out of the 20 strategies compared to none during pre-observation. The mean range for those ten strategies was 0.529 to 0.732.

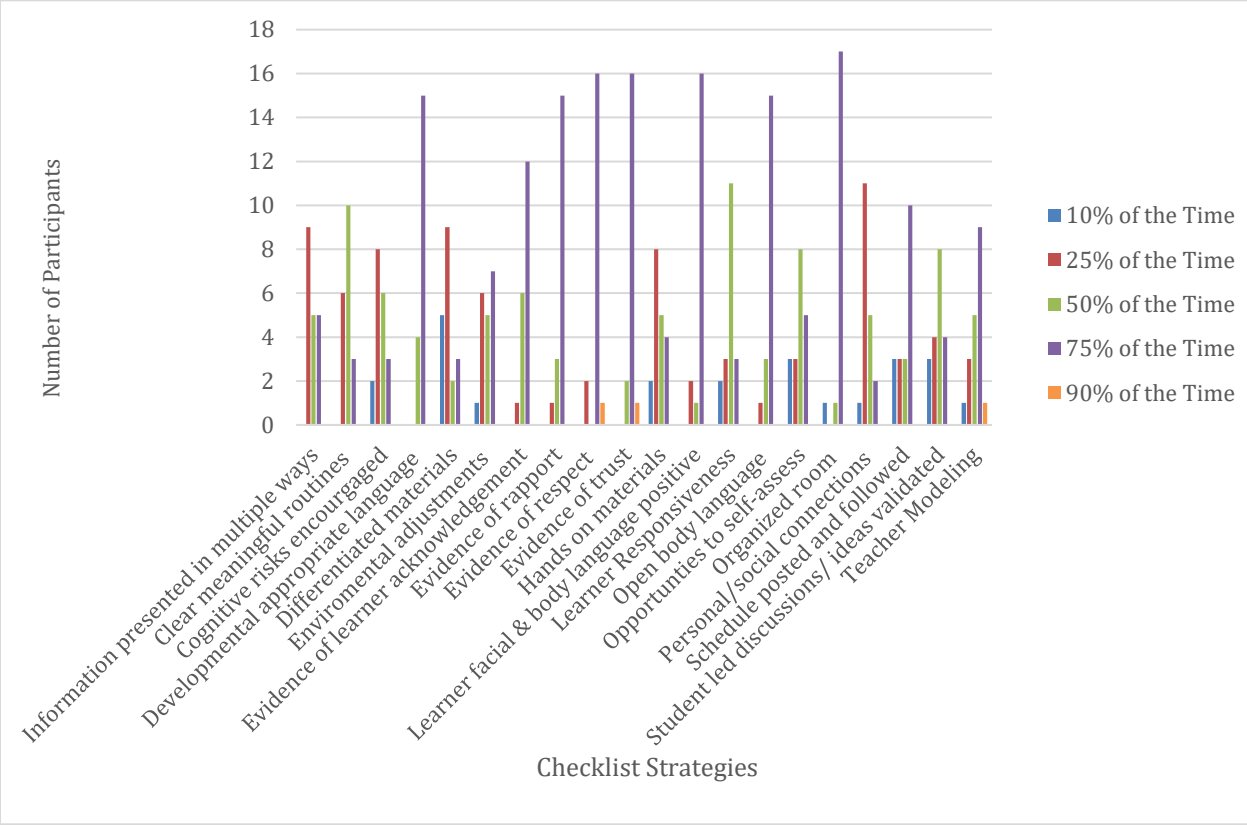
Analysis of the mean of each strategy was utilized and found that several strategies were used more from the pre-observation to the post-observation. The rate of increase of the means was found to be from 0.02-0.316. The strategies that exhibited the highest rate of increase in the utilization mean were: environmental adjustments to meet learner needs (0.350) open body language between educator and learners (0.331), evidence of trust (0.316), teacher modeling (0.311), and evidence of respect between educators and learners (0.310). The strategies that exhibited the lowest rate of increase in utilization mean were: clear, meaningful routines accessible to learners (0.024), differentiated materials (0.027), and learner responsiveness (0.084).

The mean post-observation data was also analyzed to see which of the three aspects of SEE-KS yielded the best utilization of strategies. In regard to investment, there were nine strategies to be observed. Five of the strategies were observed as having a utilization mean at or above 0.50. Those included: evidence of trust (0.732), evidence of respect (0.705), evidence of rapport (0.684), open body language (0.684), and evidence of learner acknowledgment (0.645). Evidence of trust (0.316) showed the highest amount of increase in utilization mean, and clear meaningful routines (0.024) showed the least amount of increase. In regards to independence, there were five strategies to be observed. Four of the strategies were observed as having a utilization mean at or above 0.50. Those included organized room (0.703), developmentally appropriate language (0.697), teacher modeling (0.579), and schedule posted (0.529). Teacher modeling (0.311) showed the highest increase in utilization mean and schedule posted (0.113) showed the least increase in utilization mean. In regards to initiation, there were six strategies to be observed. One strategy, the display of learner facial expressions and positive emotions (0.684) was above the expected mean of 0.50. In that strategy, learner facial expressions and positive emotions (0.289) also had the highest increase in utilization mean, and differentiated materials (0.030) showed the least amount of increase in utilization mean.

Figure 1 below displays the participants' SEE-KS Observation Tool Strategies utilization. In the figure, it shows the strategies and the number of participants who utilized the strategies for the specific amount of time during the observation after professional development. In analyzing the pre-observation scores, the participants utilized the strategies either 10% or 50% of the time. However, after professional development, there was an increase in the amount of time the strategies were each utilized by the participants.

Figure 1

SEE-KS Observation Tool Strategies Participant and Time Utilization



Overall, the participants showed an increased usage of the specific student engagement strategies. In the post-observation data, three strategies were noted to be seen 90% of observation. Those strategies include evidence of respect, evidence of trust, and teacher modeling. Only one participant was seen to have utilized those strategies in 90% of the observation. Twenty of the strategies were noted to be seen in 75% of the observation. The range of those participants who utilized those strategies 75% of the time was two to seventeen. Nineteen of the strategies were noted to be seen 50% of observation. The range of those participants who utilized strategies 50% of the time was one to eleven. Seventeen of the strategies were noted to be seen in 25% of the observation. The range of those participants who utilized the strategies 25% of the time was one to eleven. Eleven of the strategies were noted to

be seen 10% of the observation. The range of those participants who utilized strategies 10% of the time was one to five.

Out of the strategies, 10% of the strategies were seen 50%-90% of the time after professional development. Those strategies include evidence of trust between educator and learner and the usage of developmentally appropriate language. Additionally, 35% of the strategies were seen 25%-90% of the time after professional development. Those strategies include evidence of rapport, the learner being acknowledged, respect between educator and learners, open body language between educator and learners, clear, meaningful routines, the information presented in multiple ways, and learner facial expressions and body language displaying positive emotions. Fifty-five percent of the strategies were seen 10%-90% of the time after professional development. Those strategies include hands-on materials, personal connections, environmental adjustments, teacher modeling, organized room, schedule posted, opportunities to self-assess, learner responsiveness, cognitive risks, student-led discussions, and differentiated materials.

Summary of Quantitative Results

I investigated whether participation in professional development, with a focus on student engagement, improved student engagement levels, and utilization of student engagement strategies. Several significant results were found. Those included the fact that the paired *t*-test analysis showed that most of the participants improved their level of student engagement from pre-observation to post-observation. However, using descriptive analysis, it was determined that the post-observation had a wider range of scores for student engagement than the pre-observation due to the drop in some classroom engagement scores. Despite the increase in overall scores, only 36% of participants met the goal for the engagement score at or above 3.4. The pattern of the data indicated that in relation to meeting the goal of engagement and the degree that a

participant holds, it was found that there was no significant difference between the degrees. This also holds true when looking at the levels of experience of the participants. However, when looking at the data in relation to grade levels, first-grade teachers met the goal for engagement at a higher rate than the other grade levels.

In reference to the utilization of student engagement strategies, several significant results were also found. Those included the fact that the paired t-test analysis showed the utilization mean of strategies increased from pre-observation to post-observation. However, only ten strategies out of the 20 met the expected mean of 0.50. When looking at the three aspects of SEE-Ks, strategies that supported the independence of students were utilized more often at the utilization mean of 0.50 or above.

When looking at the frequency and percentage data, several significant results were found as well. Overall, the participants showed increased usage of the student engagement strategies. Nineteen of the strategies were noted to be seen at least 50% of the time during the post-observation. However, fifty-five percent of the strategies had a range of 10%-90% of being seen during the post-observation.

Qualitative Results and Findings

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to examine whether professional development with a focus on student engagement would affect the level of engagement within the classroom. In the qualitative component of the study, I sought to gain an understanding of evidence that supported (a) student engagement levels and (b) utilization of strategies during classroom observations. The observer took anecdotal notes during the post-observations in order to provide evidence pertaining to the three aspects of SEE-KS.

To provide answers to the research questions, the themes were categorized into the three aspects of the SEE-KS engagement ladder: (a) investment, (b) independence, and (c) initiation.

The number of comments extracted to support each of the themes is noted in Table 8. Independence was the most cited observation comment from the consultant.

Table 8

Qualitative Findings- Quantity of Comments for Each Theme

Theme	# of Comments
Investment	13
Peer Interactions	5
Real- Life Experiences	5
Positive Reinforcement	3
Independence	36
Modeling	5
Transitions/Procedures	13
Visuals	8
Respect	4
Groupings	3
Initiation	20
Cognitive Risks	8
Personal Connections	7
Opportunities to Self-Assess	5

Investment

In this category, three themes emerged from the comments made by the consultant. The three themes were (a) peer interactions, (b) real-life experiences, and (c) positive reinforcement.

Peer Interactions: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies associated with peer interactions. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to peer interaction during observations: students were paired with peers, access to peers in independent small groups, peers wanting to help other peers, and looking for peers for assistance.

Real-Life Experiences: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that encouraged connections to real-life experiences. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to providing students with real-life experiences: utilization of Spanish and English numbers for English Language Learners, questioning about personal knowledge and prior knowledge, knowledge of what to expect next, use of a spider web in the classroom as a reference, and activity was tied to real-life.

Positive Reinforcement: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that encouraged positive reinforcement to students. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to providing positive reinforcement to students: calming music and environment in the classroom, modeling excitement for material, pacing to support sustained interest, positive reinforcement for meeting expectations, and students given talking sticks to support those who had the floor at the time. Feedback from the consultant also noted opportunities that were lost during the observation because of the lack of positive reinforcements, for example, Participant K: "Learner working with teacher appeared resistant to teacher bid for eye contact and direct engagement. No positive expression was observed from the teacher."

Independence

In this category, five themes emerged from the comments made by the consultant. The five themes were: (a) modeling, (b) procedures, (c) visuals, (d) respect, and (f) groupings.

Modeling: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that encouraged teachers to model for their students. The

consultant noted the following comments pertaining to teacher modeling: modeling with groups to show how to engage in discussions, using gestures associated with words, and use of a document camera for modeling.

Procedures: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that encouraged teachers to make sure students understood the procedures in the classroom. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to procedures: students had roles within groups, transition routines with countdown, learners knew what to do during transitions, independent learners knew what was expected, clear rituals and routines, verbal reminders, and use of vocal volume meter. Feedback from the consultant also noted opportunities that were lost during the observation because of the lack of procedures, for examples Participant D: "Students frequently interrupt the teacher while working with learners. A chaotic environment- even if not threatening, can be unwelcoming and not conducive to learner engagement," and Participant R: "Need to know what they need to do when done. Visuals are needed to know what to do and what's expected in each group. What can be done to support each and every learner being engaged with the activity?"

Visuals: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that provided students with visuals throughout the lesson. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to visuals utilized in the classroom: visuals posted with group assignments, visual timer posted on the board, and schedule posted. Feedback from the consultant also noted opportunities that were lost during the observation because of the lack of visuals. For example, Participant Q: "Could teachers use a document camera to display the picture of the book on the smart board while they read so they can easily see pictures and text?

Respect: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that encouraged respect among teachers, students, and student peers. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to respect: peers eager to help each other, flexibility in seating, respect between teacher and learners, moved learners closer to the board who needed support, and discrete redirection.

Groupings: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies for grouping students. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to student groupings: roles emerged within groups, flexibility in seating within groups, and talking sticks provided during groups. Feedback from the consultant also noted opportunities that were lost during the observation for students to be grouped appropriately for increased engagement. For example, Participant M: "Small groups- should be differentiated; rotations are not really happening."

Initiation

In this category, three themes emerged from the comments made by the consultant. The three themes were (a) cognitive risks, (b) personal connections, and (c) opportunities to self-assess.

Cognitive Risks: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that provided opportunities for students to take cognitive risks. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to cognitive risks: use of open-ended questions, why and why not questions used, opportunities for students to share responses and contribute to the discussion, turn, talk, and share utilized, and teacher prompts.

Feedback from the consultant also noted opportunities that were lost during the observation for students to take cognitive risks. For example, Participant C: “The lesson wasn’t inherently engaging, but the way the teacher paced the lesson, provided validation, and built on relationships kept learners actively engaged on the carpet with her. There is not much opportunity for spontaneous initiation due to the scripted nature of the lesson,” Participant H: “Students may need support to know how to turn and talk before having them turn and talk,” and Participant P: “Incorporate turn and talk so learners have the opportunity to share.”

Personal Connections: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies that helped students make personal connections. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to those connections: discussion of when a student read the same book in kindergarten, students making connections to anchor charts and visuals, learners eager to participate and connect in small groups, and access to peers.

Opportunities to Self-Assess: According to the comments made by the consultant, from the observations that were conducted, participating in the student engagement professional development supported the use of strategies to provide opportunities for students to self-assess. The consultant noted the following comments pertaining to self-assessment: opportunities to self-assess in small groups, a student relocated themselves to a better working environment for them, and a student used visuals to help with checking their understanding.

Summary of Qualitative Results

The purpose of the qualitative component of this mixed methods study was to gain an understanding of evidence that supported research questions one and two concerning (a) student engagement levels and (b) utilization of strategies during classroom observations. Qualitative data were collected from anecdotal notes taken during classroom observations by the consultant.

Thematic analysis of the data regarding feedback was provided from classroom observations. The results of the analysis were categorized into the three aspects of the SEE-KS Engagement Ladder: investment, independence, and initiation. From the analysis, several themes were identified from each component of the SEE-KS. Regarding investment, it emerged that participants who were involved in the professional development showed utilization of strategies that improved peer interactions, provided students with real-life experiences and connections, and provided positive reinforcement for students.

Regarding independence, several themes emerged. It was evident that participants showed more utilization of strategies that showed independence after participating in professional development. Strategies involving procedures were noted more frequently among the themes that arose. It also emerged that participants showed utilization of strategies that enhanced the use of teacher modeling, visuals, and respect among teachers and students. Regarding initiation, it emerged that students were given more opportunities for cognitive risks, personal connections, and opportunities to self-assess.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis are promising in the fact that the educators who participated in the student engagement professional development showed statistically significant improvement in the levels of student engagement and also showed an increase in the utilization of student engagement strategies within their classrooms. It is also worth noting that the quantitative and qualitative data used to determine the utilization of strategies, both yielded the result that independence strategies were seen the most. However, it is worth noting that despite the observed increase in the levels of student engagement overall, some participants actually dropped in their levels or did not meet the goal of student engagement. This suggests that while professional development may have played a part in effectively raising student engagement scores and utilization of engagement strategies, additional explanations may have to be considered as possible reasons that the student engagement was impacted in the classroom. The time when the observations were conducted could have played a role in the increase. The first observation was early on in the school year when teachers are still getting to know their students and setting the classroom environment. It is natural, as the year progresses, that teachers know what works for their students as well as the students know the expectations. Students tend to be more independent as the year progresses. The fact that some strategies are controlled by the teacher than other strategies could also have played a role in the increase of utilization. Strategies that fall under independence are teacher controlled rather than student controlled.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section will provide more detailed discussions on the findings of the study. The interpretation of findings is organized by research questions. Each section will provide information on how the research questions were answered and how the findings relate back to the literature that was reviewed in an earlier chapter.

Research Question 1

The first research question aimed to investigate whether professional development workshops improved students' level of engagement. The study's results revealed a significant difference between the student engagement level before professional development and the student engagement level after professional development. While existing literature did not specifically focus on how professional development affects student engagement in the classroom, it supported the positive benefits of PLCs that include professional development. PLCs have been widely implemented in educational environments to characterize various groups assembled to work collaboratively for various purposes (Teague & Anafara, 2012). Teachers work in teams, engaging in a cycle of questions that nurtures profound team learning. In a PLC, the focus shifts from teaching to learning as a fundamental purpose. Teachers are continuously learning to support their students' learning (DuFour, et al., 2008). The educators in this current study have varying degrees of experience, which may have also positively impacted their level of student engagement in the classroom. Abla and Fraumeni (2019) recognize that over the years, the definitions of engagement have become varied and lengthy as researchers try to capture multiple aspects of the classroom experience. When engagement is considered in the classroom, one must think beyond the simplicity of memorization and repetition. Fostering student engagement within the classroom is crucial to students' success now and in the future (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020).

From the findings of this study, it can be inferred that the positive increase in the level of student engagement after participating in professional development indicates the professional development's efficacy in fostering educators' learning to support their students' learning. By providing educators with the tools needed, professional development contributes to their overall knowledge and enhances their abilities to engage students at higher levels. Expanding on the implications of these findings, it is evident that while the specific study yielded statistically

significant results overall, the majority of the educators' levels of student engagement did not meet the goal of observing positive engagement more than half of the time, which suggest, that student engagement was more compliant rather than engaging.

The pattern of data indicated that in looking at the goal of engagement in relation to the degree of the participant holds and level of experience, it appeared that there was not significant difference. Further study is needed to determine if there is a correlation between the two. It is noted that first-grade teachers met the goal for engagement at a higher rate than the other grade levels. The pattern of data for first-grade teachers would indicate they participate more in the professional development and collaborative conversations their PLCs and professional development. This has also been seen through observations of their PLCs and professional development. This group of first-grade teachers tend to participate and collaborate more than the other grade levels as observed by the researcher.

Research Question 2

The second research question aimed to investigate whether professional development workshops improve teachers' use of strategies to engage students. The study's results indicated a significant difference between the student engagement strategies utilized before professional development and the student engagement strategies utilized after professional development. While existing literature did not specifically focus on how professional development affects the use of student engagement strategies in the classroom, it supported the fostering of student engagement in the classroom. Fostering student engagement within the classroom is crucial to students' success now and in the future (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020). Teachers are obligated to their students to support them with strategies they themselves understand and can apply in the classroom. Strategies should be specific, well thought out, and collaborated on for student engagement (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). It is not enough to simply know strategies for

engagement. Teachers must know how to differentiate between engaged and disengaged students. They must recognize that being engaged can manifest in students being compliant to being busy (Schnitzler et al., 2020). Teachers who are enthusiastic about their lessons and activate their students' learning tend to have high levels of engagement. Classrooms, where students exhibit low engagement, tend to have teachers demonstrating disorganized and unplanned teaching strategies. These teachers tend to engage in strategies that do not motivate students from the start of the lesson (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2020). Further study is needed to determine if teacher enthusiasm has any relation to student engagement.

From the findings of qualitative component of this study, it can be inferred that the positive increase in the utilization of student engagement strategies after participating in professional development indicates professional development's effectiveness in fostering the educators' knowledge of effective strategies to support their students' learning. From the findings of the qualitative component of the study, it can be inferred that the participants were able to utilize the strategies that focused on independence more effectively after participating in professional development. This could indicate that the professional development was more effective in assisting teachers in understanding these strategies to support their students' learning. By providing educators with the strategies needed, professional development contributes to their overall knowledge and implementation of the strategies to enhance student engagement.

Finally, the quantitative data was validated by qualitative observations, which is why they go hand in hand. When all three "I's" of engagement investment, independence, and initiation are observed and can be described in a classroom, using anecdotal notes and the strategies checklist, the engagement score will fall in the mostly engaged range. However, when we see no

opportunities for initiation noted through the anecdotal notes, we have the numeric score to correlate with that observation.

Overall Conclusion of Findings

The study's findings align with the goals and principles of PLCs that incorporate professional development. Schmoker (2004) aligned collaborative problem-solving with the self-directed, job-embedded characteristics of PLCs. Collaborative problem-solving allows teachers to focus on strategies that benefit them within the classroom. When you enlist the problem-solving nature of PLCs, teachers are given the opportunity to work together to help improve the aspect of teaching that enhances student engagement.

Limitations of the Study

The study encountered limitations, particularly within the sample. The focus of the study was one primary school, which made it unrealistic to compare the findings with other schools within or outside of the district. The limited sample size posed challenges in generalizing of outcomes, as the small sample utilized may not accurately depict the outcomes of a large population. The primary school for this study was a rural Title 1 school where 100% of the students received free or reduced lunch. The limitation of using only one school further hindered the generalizing outcomes, as they could not be compared to other schools located in areas beyond the district. The study was limited to the observations and use of strategies. The data corpse of this mixed-method study was limited to observations to gain a more in-depth understanding of the engagement in the classroom. I recommend that future researchers use other methods, such as interviews, to gain more insight into student engagement in the classroom through the teacher's perspective. The study was not intended to compare the effects of this PLC's professional development with other PLCs.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

Numerous recommendations could be made as a result of the findings of this study and the study's limitations. Conducting the same study with a more widespread sample of educators in any school setting would increase the generalizability of the findings. Including educators from different schools would provide a broader understanding of the effectiveness of professional development. The length of the professional development could be increased to span the duration of the school year. Another recommendation would be that each participant has a personalized, reflective, collaborative session with the consultant and administrator. During this time, the consultant could give the participants feedback on what was noticed, and participants could be given the opportunity to reflect on their practice and what their needs are for improving student engagement. The researchers could also incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews to gather insights from the educators on what their perceptions are of the professional development they are involved in. Also, conducting more than two observations would provide a better indication of student engagement over time.

Conclusions

Educators today face many challenges in educating students. The post-COVID-19 era has brought about new challenges that may not have been pertinent before. Students are more apt to be disengaged during a classroom lesson than ever before. They are distracted by technology and present more mental health issues than ever noted before. Isolation during COVID has hindered the development of milestones in our students. This alone makes it more crucial than ever to equip educators with the knowledge and strategies they need to engage students beyond compliance. Compliance is not student engagement. Compliance does not lead to increased student engagement. By integrating professional development that focuses on student engagement and strategies, educators can be provided with the tools and skills to engage students

at higher levels. Engagement is seen as “a condition of emotional, social, and intellectual readiness to learn characterized by curiosity, participation, and the drive to learn more” (Abla & Fraumeni, 2019, p. 2). For students to have future success, they must want to learn more and be challenged. In order to accomplish this, educators must prioritize engagement among their students. Student engagement leads to student achievement. Without student engagement, student achievement suffers.

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APPENDIX A. Site Permission Form

Baldwin County Board of Education

A Charter System of Georgia

Dr. Gloria Wicker
Board Chair

Dr. Noris Price
Superintendent of Schools

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Milledgeville, GA 31059
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Board of Education
Ms. Shannon D. Hill, Vice Chair
Mr. Lyn Chandler
Mr. Wes Cummings
Mr. John Jackson

July 5, 2023

Dear GC IRB,

Based on my review of the proposed research by Tracy Clark, I give permission for her to conduct the study entitled "Impact of Professional Development on Primary Teachers' Practices and Student Engagement" within Lakeview Primary School. As part of this study, I authorize the researcher to administer a survey to teachers who work at Lakeview Primary School using the Professional Learning Community Assessment- Revised (PLCA-R). The survey will be administered on a voluntary basis to teachers. Data from the survey will be used to analyze teachers' perceptions of PLCs with a focus on student engagement. I also authorize the researcher to use data obtained from the Social Emotional Engagement Knowledge and Skills Ladder (SEE-Ks) classroom observations as part of this study. Data from the observations will be analyzed to determine if professional development workshops improve teachers' use of strategies and increase students' level of engagement. We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Tracy Clark providing a voluntary survey to teachers at Lakeview Primary School and the use of classroom observation data obtained from SEE-Ks. Mrs. Clark will provide the survey to teachers who volunteer to take part in the research. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

We understand that the research will include Mrs. Clark providing a voluntary survey to teachers, to complete individually, as well as observing teachers in a classroom setting with the SEE-Ks.

This authorization covers the time period of July 2023-December 2023.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Georgia College IRB.

Sincerely,

Noris Price

Dr. Noris Price, Superintendent
Superintendent of Schools

APPENDIX B. Site Permission Form

Institutional Review Board

Office of Academic Affairs

irb@gcsu.edu

http://www.gcsu.edu/irb

DATE: 2023-07-25

TO: Tracy Clark

FROM: Sallie Coke, Ph.D., Chair of Georgia College Institutional Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: #19162 Impact of Professional Development on Primary School Teachers' Practices and Student Engagement

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS DECISION DATE:

2023-07-25

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exempt

Thank you for submitting an application to the Georgia College IRB for the above-referenced project. Based on the information you provided in your submission, IRB has determined that your project involving human subjects qualifies for EXEMPT status under 45CFR part 46 commonly known as the Revised Common Rule 2018.

Assignment of exempt status to this project means that this project is exempt from further IRB review. This exempt status is valid unless substantive revisions to the study design occur which would alter the risk to participants. If a substantive change is anticipated, you may submit an extension/modification form detailing these changes. Please consult the GC IRB if you have a question about a potential change to your exempt study.

Please note that all responsibilities required of conducting human subject research still apply to this project. Specifically, the Belmont Report principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice apply, and all investigators involved in this project must have and maintain current/valid certification of training with conducting research with human subjects

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact irb@gcsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Georgia College IRB's records.

Sincerely,

Sallie Coke, Ph.D

APPENDIX C. SEE-KS Engagement Ladder Observation

① Site: **Educator:** **Date:**

② Activity Observed:		
③ Observation and Appreciation of What is Working to Support Learner Engagement		
A. Investment: Relationships are mutually established and evident in the classroom environment. Learner interests have been considered to stimulate motivation for learning and interacting.		
Not observed (X)), Meets (✓), Exceeds (+)		
Positive relationships between the educator and learners are **evident and consistent**.		***Please describe the evidence of educator / learner relationship.***
Evidence of trust		
Evidence of rapport / support		
Evidence of acknowledgement		
Evidence of respect		
Evidence of boundaries		
Open body language / eye contact		
Consideration of learner interests that stimulate **motivation for learning and interactin**g are evident and observable.		***Please describe the evidence of consideration for learner interests***
Meaningful routines		
Hands on materials		
Personal / Social connections		
Environmental adjustments		
B. Independence: Learners know expectations for participation and what to do within the classroom and understand the information that is being taught.		
Not observed (X)), Meets (✓), Exceeds (+)		***Please describe the evidence of learner independence.***
Learner(s) **know what to do** and **understand what is being taught.**		-
Modeling		
Access to materials & organization		
Visual supports		
Developmentally appropriate language		
Visual supports (pictures and words)		
Information presented multiple ways		
Clear routines & expectations		
C. Initiation: Learners have different options for showing what they know and what to say. Learners have frequent opportunities to initiate in everyday activities.		
Not observed (X)), Meets (✓), Exceeds (+)		***Please describe the evidence of learner initiation.***
Learner(s) have **frequent child-led opportunities to show what they know in a variety of ways.**		- -
Learner expression & body language		
Opportunities to self-assess		
Learner responsiveness		
Cognitive risks encouraged		
Acknowledgement of contribution		

Validation of ideas		
④ **Educator Input**		
⑤ **Possible Next Steps**		
⑥ **Identified Next Step(s)**		

Social Engagement Ladder

A # of Students in Classroom:		
Fully Engaged Frequent spontaneous initiation, consistent independent engagement with materials, frequent expression of positive emotional investment	**4 x**	
Mostly Engaged Occasional spontaneous initiation, occasional independent engagement with materials, occasional expression of positive emotional investment	**3 x**	
Partially Engaged Responsive or non-spontaneous initiation, compliant with directions, seldom shares expression of positive emotional investment	**2 x**	
Emerging/Fleeting Intermittently responsive without initiation, dependent on direction, no expression of positive emotional investment	**1 x**	
No Focus Non-responsive, not engaging with targeted materials, and not sharing any emotion or expression (asleep or out of the room)	**0 x**	
	Sum of B =	
	Sum of B divided by A = _____	

Engagement Score: _____	