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SEAL Teachers' Perceived Knowledge and Skills

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Teacher Development and Implementation: Study #3 SEAL Teachers' Perceived Knowledge and Skills



Introduction to the SEAL Model and the 4-Year Research and Evaluation Effort

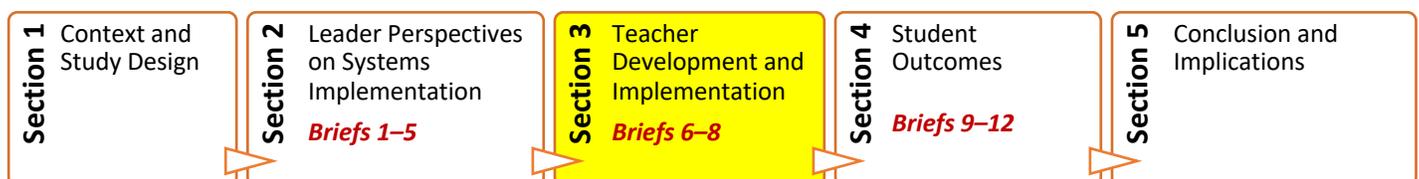
The [Sobrato Early Academic Language Model \(SEAL\)](#) is a preschool through third grade model that powerfully develops students' language, literacy and academic skills within the context of a whole-school initiative. This intensive approach to language and literacy education is woven into all aspects of the school day where English Learners and native English students learn together. The Model was first piloted in three schools in the Silicon Valley and an initial evaluation of the Model showed significant impact on student achievement, teacher practice, and parent literacy activities. As a result of these pilot findings, SEAL developed a Replication Model, a comprehensive whole-school reform that is implemented systematically and includes teachers, coaches, principals, district leaders, and families.

Loyola Marymount University's [Center for Equity for English Learners](#) and the [Wexford Institute](#) conducted an external evaluation of the SEAL preschool through third grade Replication Model from fall 2015–fall 2019. This comprehensive research and evaluation study addressed three broad areas: (1) Leader Perspectives and Depth of Implementation, (2) Teacher Development, and (3) Student Outcomes. Twelve districts and 67 schools across California participated. This Research and Evaluation Final Report presents findings that will allow the SEAL team to institute its short- and long-term evaluation and research agenda based on the SEAL Logic Model and desired results for project management, decision-making, refinement, and expansion.

The SEAL Research and Evaluation Final Report is comprised of five sections presented in a series of briefs (see Figure 1) to maximize usability for multiple stakeholders. This brief is part of Section 3.

Figure 1

SEAL Research and Evaluation Final Report Overview



Section 3, Brief 8 - Research Focus and Purpose

This research and evaluation brief reports on SEAL teachers' perceived changes in knowledge and skills to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students after participation in the SEAL model professional learning cycle. Brief 8 presents aggregate findings from the SEAL Teacher Retrospective Pre-post Survey administered in spring 2016, 2017, and 2018. Part one provides an overview of the methods, participants, and instrument. Part two presents findings on teachers' participation in the SEAL program. Part three provides results on SEAL teachers'

perceptions of pre- and post-program implementation. Part four highlights findings that emerged from responses to open-ended teacher survey questions, and the final section provides a summary of findings and implications.

Teacher Development and Implementation Research and Evaluation Question

What are teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and skills in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students?

Part One: Study Methods and Participants

Participants

SEAL PreK–3rd teachers who had completed their second year of SEAL professional development were asked to participate in a survey. A total of 490 surveys were collected over the three survey administration periods (spring 2016, 2017, and 2018) across twelve SEAL districts and 67 schools.

Instrument - Teacher Survey

The LMU CEEL research team developed the SEAL Teacher Retrospective Pre-Post Survey (Section 3 - Appendix E). It consists of three sections designed to collect information on: (1) demographics (14 items), (2) teachers' perceived knowledge and skills in implementing the SEAL Model's research-based practices (13 items) and teachers' perceived use of instructional practices aligned to OPAL© domains (32 items), and (3) reflections on instructional approaches and coaching (10 items). Additionally, several open response items invite teachers to share specific practices and techniques they use to maximize learning for ELs. However, not all participants responded to all survey items.

Research Design and Data Analysis

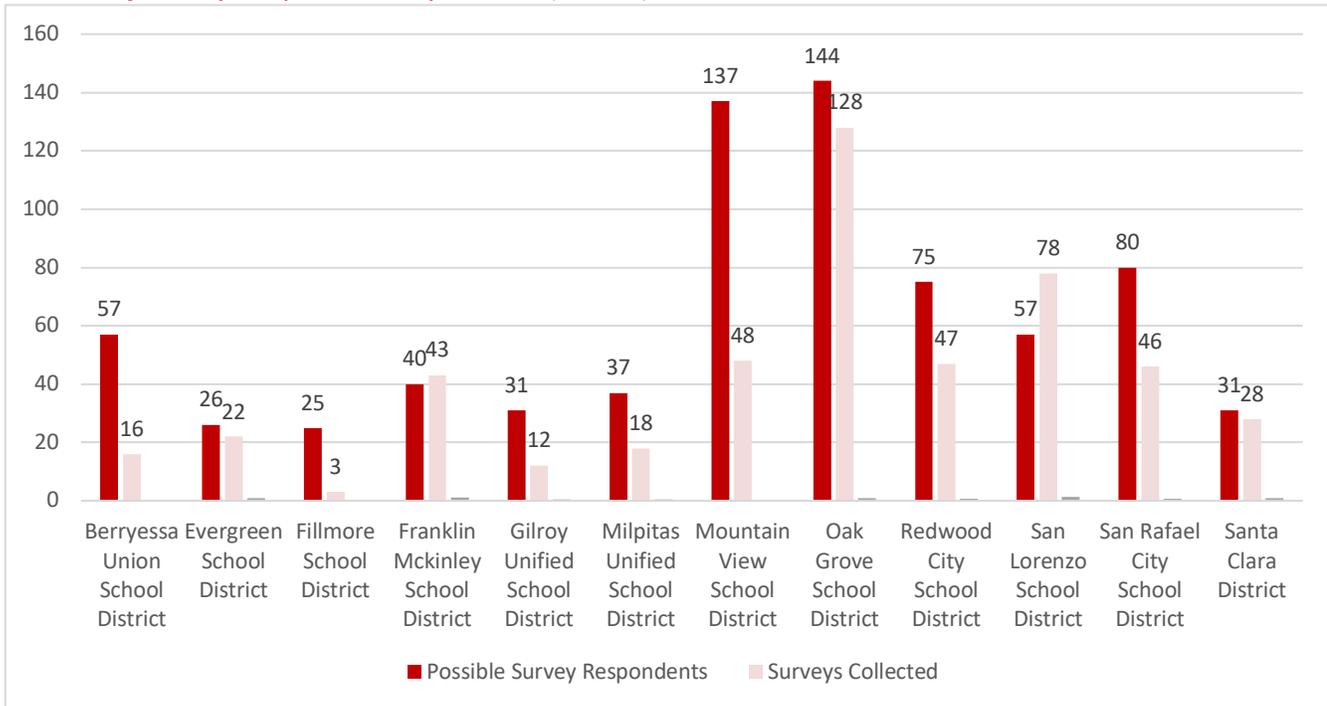
Use of the SEAL Teacher Retrospective Pre-Post Survey allowed for a mixed-methods approach to address the research question above. Descriptive statistics were calculated for teacher demographic information and for Likert-scale items related to SEAL teachers' perceived levels of knowledge and skills. The research team used content analytic procedures¹ to analyze open-ended responses. This approach provided insights on levels of implementation of research-based practices and classroom interactions for ELs.

Who are the SEAL teacher survey respondents?

The SEAL teachers who responded to the survey represented all twelve SEAL districts, and the majority were female and self-identified as White. One quarter of them have been teaching between 16–10 years and more than one-third had been teaching at their school site for less than five years at the time they completed the survey. Almost 25% of teacher respondents indicated they hold a Bilingual Authorization (BCLAD/BCC) while 67% hold English Learner Authorization (CLAD or other). Figure 2 displays the number of surveys collected by District. Figures 3–5 provide pertinent information about teacher demographics. For additional demographics of SEAL Teacher survey respondents including additional authorization held and highest degree obtained, see Section 3 - Appendix F.

¹ Hutchinson, S. (2001). Education and grounded theory. In R. Sherman, & R.B. Webb. (Eds.). *Qualitative research in education. Focus and methods*. Routledge Falmer.

Figure 2
Number of Survey Respondents by District (N=490)



Note. SEAL records for number of classrooms by cohort, by district were used to calculate total possible respondents. Two respondents didn't indicate district affiliation.

Figure 3
Gender (N=490)

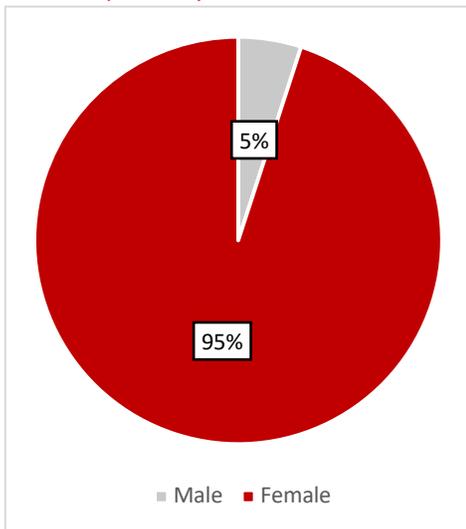


Figure 4
Race/Ethnicity (N=490)

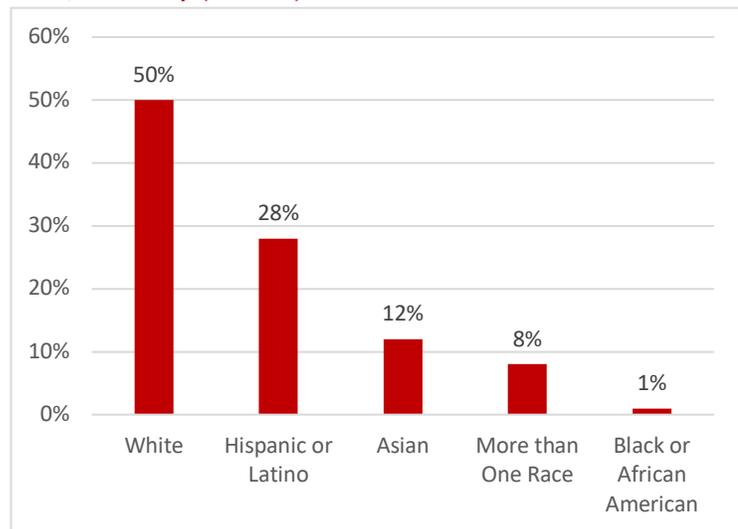
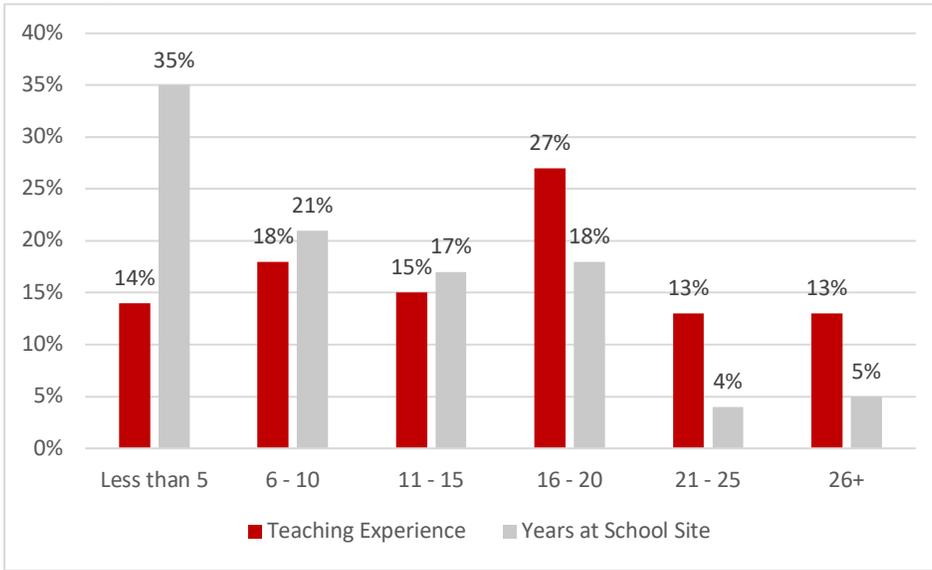


Figure 5
Teaching Experience and Years at School Site (N=490)



One-quarter of SEAL teachers have been teaching between 16–20 years.

More than one-third of SEAL teachers have been at their school site for less than 5 years.

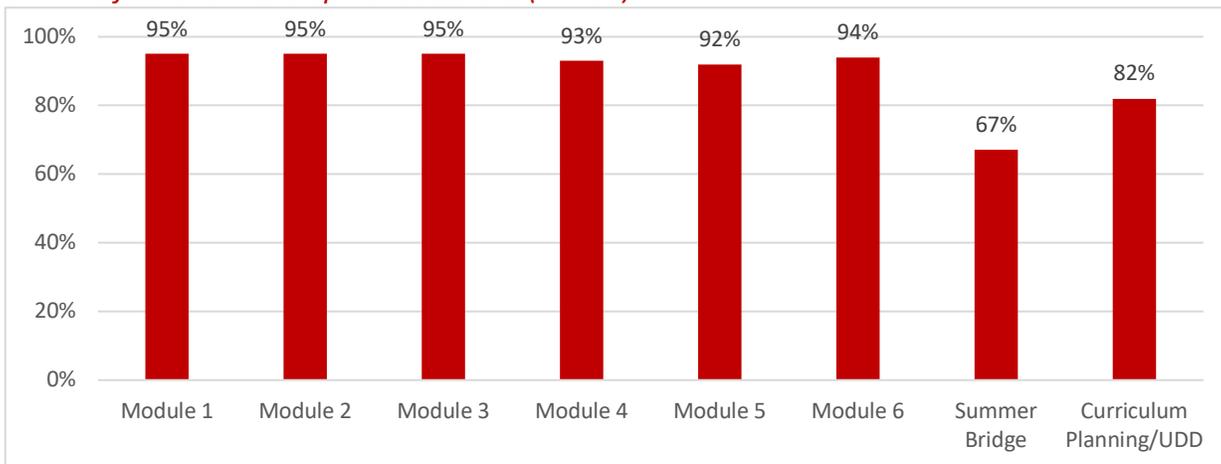
Part Two: Participation in SEAL Professional Learning

This section presents findings on teacher self-reported levels of participation in SEAL professional learning sessions, including (1) module trainings (six total), (2) summer bridge, and (3) curriculum planning/unit development days (UDDs).

What was the level of participation of SEAL teachers?

Figure 6 indicates teachers’ attendance at SEAL professional development sessions. Figure 7 shows the number of curriculum planning/UDDs per year.

Figure 6
SEAL Professional Development Sessions (N=490)

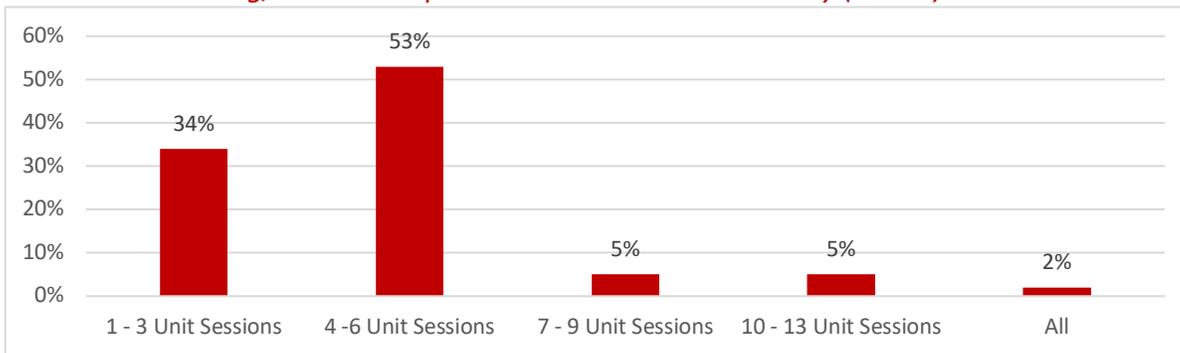


Over 90% of respondents attended all modules.

Of participants who provided information on their participation in curriculum planning/UDDs, over half participated in 4–6 UDD sessions per year.

Figure 7

Curriculum Planning/Unit Development Sessions Attended Yearly (n=316)



Part Three: Teacher Perceptions Before and After Program Participation

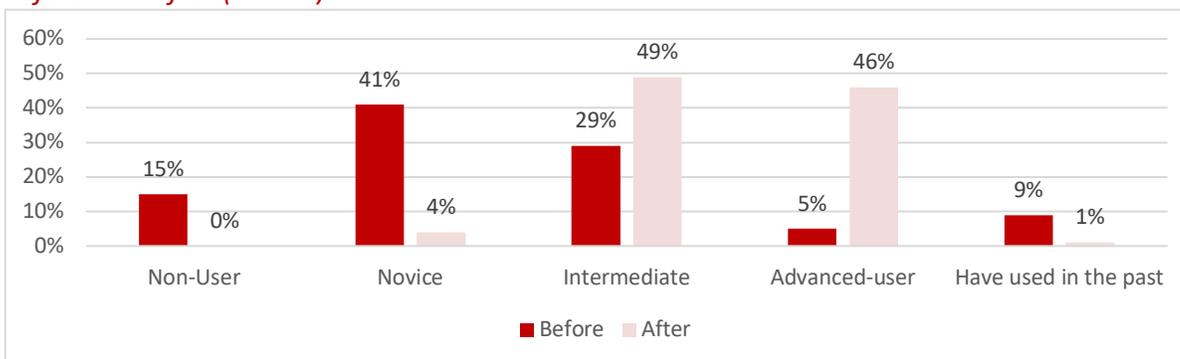
This section presents findings on teacher perceptions of their knowledge and level of SEAL model implementation before and after participating in the SEAL professional learning community.

What are teachers' perceived growth after participating in the SEAL program?

Figure 8 displays teachers' self-rating of their overall level of implementation of SEAL strategies and approaches before and after participating in the SEAL professional learning community. Fewer teachers self-identified as "non-users" or "novice" and more teachers identified as "intermediate" or "advanced-users" after participating in the SEAL professional learning community.

Figure 8

Teachers' Self-rating of Overall Level of Implementation of SEAL Strategies and Approaches Before and After (N=448)

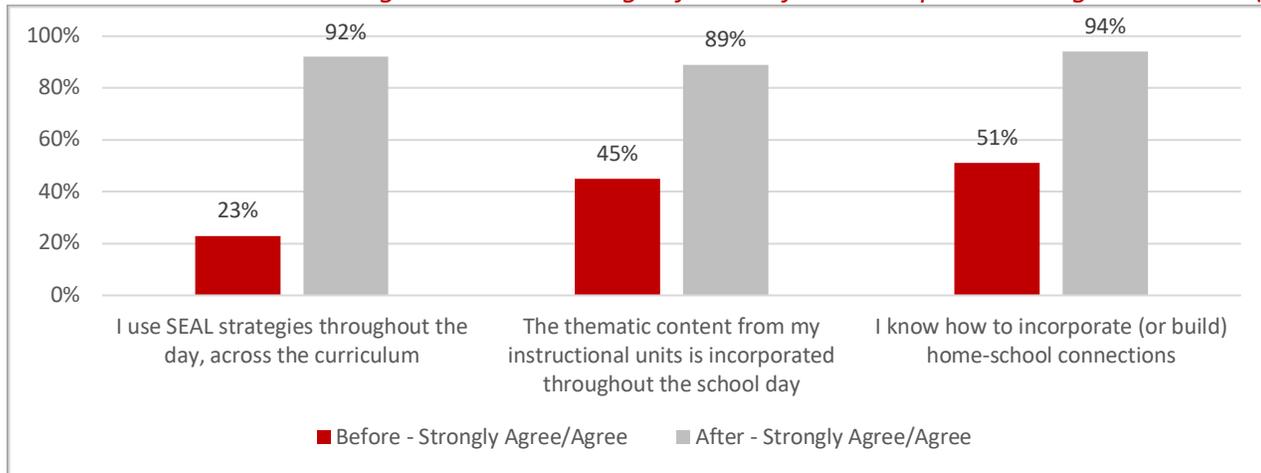


Post-program results were statistically significant for all items related to teachers' perceived knowledge (13 items) and perceived use of practices aligned with OPAL© domains (32 items) (significance level = $p < .001$; See Section 3 – Appendix F, Tables F4–F9).

Figure 9 presents the survey items with the highest growth out of 13 items (43–69 percentage points) in teachers' perceived knowledge before and after participating in the SEAL program.

Figure 9

Teachers' Perceived Knowledge & Understanding Before & After Participation – Highest Growth (N=448)*

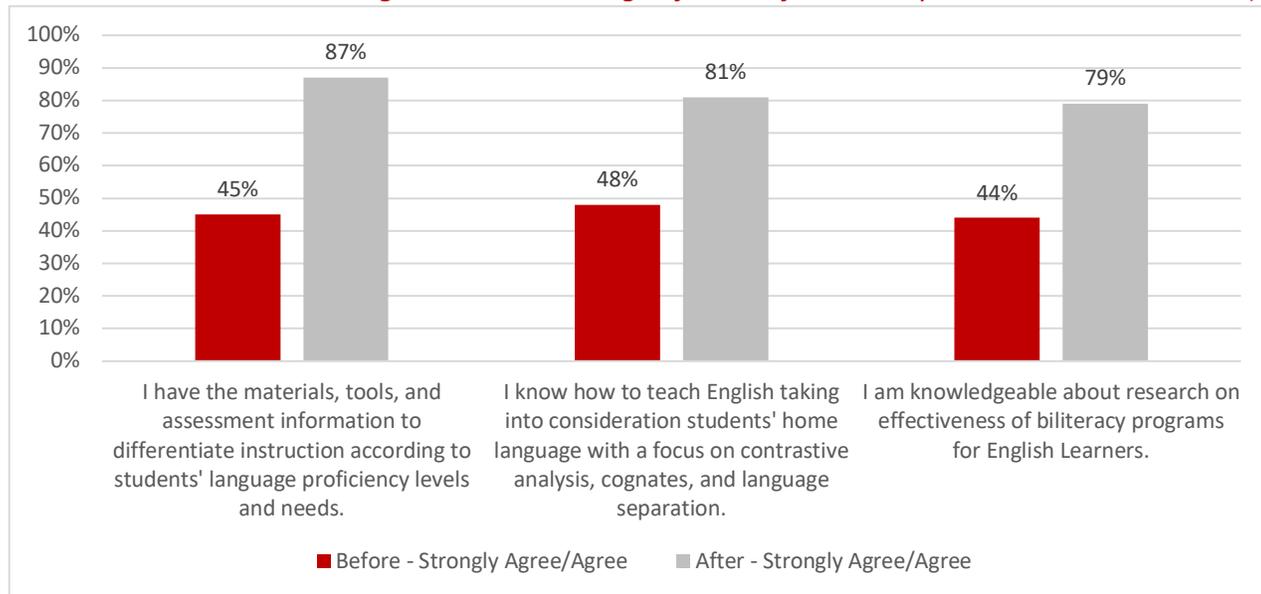


*p < .001.

Figure 10 presents the survey items with the lowest growth out of 13 items (33–42 percentage points) in teachers' perceived knowledge before and after participating in the SEAL program.

Figure 10

Teachers' Perceived Knowledge & Understanding Before & After Participation – Lowest Growth (N=448)*



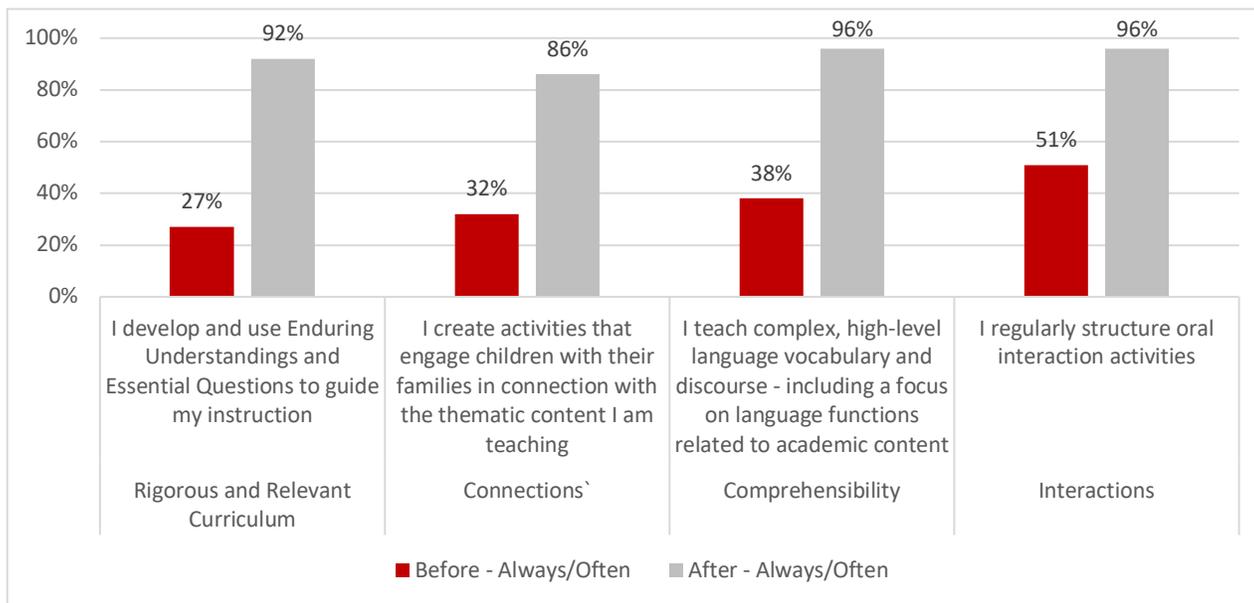
*p < .001.

Figure 11 presents the survey items with highest levels of implementation out of 32 items aligned with the Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies (OPAL[®]) domains² before and after participating in the SEAL program.

² Lavadenz, M. & Armas, E. G. (2010, 2012). *The observation protocol for academic literacies: Conceptual framework and validation report*. Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University. The OPAL[®] is a validated classroom observation measure that consists of a standard framework based on four EL research-based domains: (1) Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, (2) Connections, (3) Comprehensibility; and (4) Interactions. See SEAL Classroom Observation Research & Evaluation Brief 6 for more information.

Figure 11

Levels of Implementation Aligned with OPAL® Domains¹ Before and After (N=403)



For a full list of teachers’ perceived knowledge and implementation of instructional practices before and after participation in the SEAL professional learning communities, see Section 3 - Appendix F, Tables F4–F9.

Part Four: Teacher Efficacy & Impact of Professional Development

As part of the SEAL Teacher Survey, teachers were asked to respond to eight open-ended questions focused on three major areas: (1) EL instructional practices/strategies used for differentiation, interactions/grouping, connections, and comprehensibility; (2) impact of SEAL professional learning experience; and (3) perspectives on SEAL coaching support. Key findings from the analysis of teachers’ responses elucidated multiple facets of teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy, a belief or perception of how ones’ resources and strategies can influence student behavioral and instructional outcomes, can be an important variable in predicting the success and degree to which teachers (individually and collectively) implement instructional innovation. When teachers have a high sense of teacher efficacy, they are more positive about teaching and more confident about their capacity as educators³.

Finding 1 highlights how participating in the SEAL program helped teachers utilize a variety of grouping practices and differentiated instruction to improve learning.

³ Derrington, M.L., & Angelle, P.S. (2013). Teacher leadership and collective efficacy: Connections and links. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*, 4(1), 1-13.

Finding 1. SEAL Teachers Increased Use of Grouping Practices and Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated grouping informed by student needs

“Students’ table groups are structured so that there are students with high, medium, and low achievement levels. Then I flexibly group students homogeneously or heterogeneously depending on the purpose of the lesson, and the need of the students.”

“It depends on the task. Sometimes the groups are heterogeneous and sometimes they are homogeneous. I think about what I’m looking for the kids to do and decide which is more appropriate.”

Differentiated strategies and assessments to support student learning

“I differentiate instruction for ELs using different strategies that the students will understand. I also change the activity level for students.”

“I either change the product, process, learning tools, or thinking skills to differentiate instruction. This might mean having students choose their final product, such as writing, art, or a diorama. It might mean some students using computers, while others use books for research. I make cloze writing assignments for my newcomers to practice high academic language successfully.”

Finding 2 illuminates examples of how teachers have utilized SEAL Model research-based/high leverage practices and strategies to make connections for learners, increase comprehensibility, and enrich the classroom environment.

Finding 2. SEAL Strategies Help Students Make Connections and Improve Lesson Comprehension

Student-centered curriculum/Awareness of student progress

“Hand motions, partner shares, defining challenging words in context with synonyms. I also walk around the room, have students indicate with thumbs up/down how they are feeling about the information. If I can't prove that the students are getting it, I try another way of teaching.”

“Five-exchange conversations with ELs help me learn more about the students' daily lives, which in turn give me ideas on what to include in lessons so that my EL students can make connections.”

“I get to know about my students' lives through student interviews and five question exchanges. I connect content to things that I know they've experienced and enjoy. I also clarify or show examples of experiences that they haven't had through realia and videos.”

Family/Community connections

“Helping them bridge the connections to events they might be familiar with. For example, when teaching the word event as part of a language function, we discussed that an event is something that happens, like a Quinceañera or a wedding. My ELs immediately started talking about other events.”

“Inviting students' culture into the classroom and activating their background knowledge are the two most important factors...We often invite students' family members for presentations, show-and-tell, story-telling, food tasting, etc.”

Engaging activities and artifacts

“Since going through SEAL training, I have set up a dedicated area in my classroom that is known as the “research center.” Here students can use materials for dramatic play to help make connections to content. There are many engaging materials there that allow for lots of low-pressure oral exchanges between students, while still promoting the use of target vocabulary both orally and in writing. My students look forward to going to this area every day.”

“Provide real life pictures and realia to help connect to the content. Reflect on prior knowledge at the start of each unit. Read books that go along with content in real world situations.”

Finding 3 presents examples of how participating in SEAL professional learning impacted teachers and their approach to teaching and learning for ELs.

Finding 3. SEAL Professional Development Enhances Individual Teacher Efficacy

Enthusiasm/Joy for teaching

“SEAL has given me license to allow exploration, artistic expression, noise, and embrace the style of teaching that came naturally to me.”

“Since being involved in the SEAL program, I have found new joy in teaching. I have been challenged and felt success at the same time. Developing units with grade level colleagues from around my school district has been a great way to collaborate with teachers from different backgrounds and perspectives that add new light to areas that I wouldn't have been as excited about otherwise. I love teaching the integrated units in class. I have had multiple students and parents comment about the energy and engagement they see in me that reflects in the other students in class. My students are excited about our units and I have seen significant growth in academic ability throughout all areas.”

Student engagement

“I love that we are teaching English Language Arts through science and social studies, which used to be an afterthought that we kind of threw in when we could. I see the importance of listening to my ELD students and creating lessons based on what they need at the moment for what we are working on in SEAL. I enjoy the parent involvement through family homework and Gallery Walks. I also enjoy the increased group work.”

“My teaching used to be very worksheet based but the SEAL planner and planning days have helped me teach towards the standards using more engaging activities. By presenting much of the same topics in various ways it helps support learners in their most favored modalities of learning.”

“I enjoy teaching the SEAL strategies and I feel that the students are more engaged with their learning. They are excited about learning new things.”

Finding 4 includes examples of responsive coaching activities and teachers' expressed long-term needs to incorporate and refine SEAL strategies in their teaching practice.

Finding 4. SEAL Coaching Support Increases Collective Teacher Efficacy

Demonstrations, observations, and feedback

"[The] coach 2 years ago would model lessons, also watch me teach and then debrief; what was really helpful was that we would meet after school every couple of weeks and she would ask what I needed help with, then we'd go from there. It was fluid and the support would look different as my skills and needs changed. She had set times per week to be in the room with me, but her role would change according to my needs as a teacher."

"All of the coaching activities were a huge help. Having lessons demonstrated also getting feedback on my lessons. I was walking into a new grade level and with no materials being handed down to me. Having the help prepping materials made it possible time-wise to be prepared for SEAL & made me want to plan more lessons."

"One of the benefits of this whole SEAL experience is the many opportunities we've had to talk with our peers at others schools and share ideas-what worked, what didn't and ideas for improvement."

Unit development and material preparation

"I would like to continue our unit development days with other teachers in our district. It would be helpful if the seasoned SEAL educators can guide us and help us deepen our knowledge of SEAL strategies for English Learners."

"Having someone prep and acquire materials is a huge plus, but having someone so readily available to ask questions, and demonstrate a new strategy has been so welcomed."

Part Five: Summary of Findings and Implications

The findings provided in this research and evaluation brief highlight teachers' participation in the SEAL Model and their professional growth. The following presents general findings from the SEAL Teacher Retrospective Pre-Post Survey.

Teacher Knowledge and Growth

- Most teachers feel they are at an intermediate or advanced level in implementing the SEAL Model and practices.
- There was statistically significant growth in teachers' perceived knowledge and levels of implementation on all indicators. The areas of highest growth aligned to the OPAL[®] classroom observation measure included:

- Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum: Developing and using Enduring Understanding and Essential Questions to guide instruction;
- Connections: Creating activities that engage children with their families in connection with the thematic content; and
- Comprehensibility: Teaching complex, high-level language vocabulary and discourse—including a focus on language functions related to academic content.

Improved Teacher Efficacy

- Teachers report increased levels of confidence in using flexible grouping and differentiating instruction to improve student learning.
- Teachers feel they are better prepared to make home-school connections.
- Teachers are more enthusiastic in their teaching and report an increase in student engagement.

Implications

The following are recommendations to support teacher knowledge and skills:

- Expand opportunities for teachers to participate in collaborative observation sessions where instruction is modeled,
- Provide more time and support for unit planning, including opportunities for on-going review and refinement of thematic, integrated units,
- Continue providing opportunities and support for coaches to demonstrate/model SEAL practices,
- Provide consistent and intentional opportunities for focused observation by coaches and instructional leaders, inclusive of feedback sessions to support teachers in the implementation of SEAL practices, and
- Identify school-wide and SEAL-wide practices and areas of support to move teachers from an intermediate level to advanced/expert level of implementation.

This Brief is based on the 4-Year External Research and Evaluation Study.
Conducted by the Center for Equity for English Learners at Loyola Marymount University
and Wexford Institute for the Sobrato Family Foundation.



<http://www.wexford.org>

<http://soe.lmu.edu/centers/ceel/>

<http://www.sobrato.com/SEAL>

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