

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND DIGITAL LEARNING IN K-12 WORLD
LANGUAGE EDUCATION:
A CASE STUDY

by

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This work is dedicated to my parents, who were present when this doctoral journey was still only a dream. Though neither lived to see its completion, their love and encouragement made it possible.

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ABSTRACT

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Organizational change in schools is an enduring and persistent evolution through which institutions manage internal needs, external influences, and shifting educational priorities. A large body of literature has investigated the forces that influence how leaders enact change and the impact those changes have on key stakeholders. However, considerably fewer studies have examined organizational change as it pertains to digital learning in K-12 world language (WL) education. This qualitative case study examined how stakeholders interpreted and responded to a proposed digital learning initiative within a K-12 world language program. The research was conducted in a suburban K-12 district during a period of WL program reductions and restructuring and focused on a proposed kindergarten digital learning push-in pilot within an elementary world language program. Data were collected through interviews, meeting transcripts, district documents, field notes, and researcher memos. This dissertation explored a critical but underexamined challenge in systems change management: the disconnect between the conditions necessary for longitudinally meaningful impact in WL education and top-

down initiatives designed to align program structures with changes in the broader educational environment.

Findings revealed that stakeholders did not merely resist digital innovation; rather, they interpreted the proposed changes through a historical lens of program reduction, instability, and ambiguous communication, which intensified distrust and uncertainty. Digital learning was perceived differently depending on whether it was framed as enrichment, replacement, outsourcing, or cost-saving. Organizational change was influenced by institutional pressures, resource constraints, and competing priorities. Stakeholders navigating systems with such complex dynamics experienced this tension acutely and responded through compliance, resistance, or by stakeholder mobilization in a unified attempt to influence the proposed transformation.

The findings suggest that digital learning initiatives in specialized instructional programs require transparent communication, stakeholder inclusion, and attention to the historical conditions through which proposed changes are interpreted. Along with the persistent and continual flux inherent in organizational dynamics, the emergence of digital platforms and artificial intelligence as instruments of second language acquisition, makes this a timely and relevant study.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

While not federally mandated in the United States, second language (L2) education provides a pathway to obtaining global awareness, communication, and cognitive development, all of which are essential for students navigating a rapidly evolving world. L2 proficiency has also been positively linked to improved academic performance, career flexibility, and life-long cognitive benefits. However, there is a growing trend across the U.S. among district leaders to replace world language programs with science, technology, engineering, and math programs, otherwise known as S.T.E.M., or S.T.E.A.M. if 'art' is included in the subject list. Consequently, district leaders are less likely to view L2 instruction as a key part of 21st century readiness. During times of fiscal instability, L2 programs are often among the first to be viewed as expendable. The introduction of digital tools has exacerbated this trend as they are frequently presented as cost-saving tools, rather than as a pedagogical enhancement. The establishment of digital L2 programs, particularly when imposed without WL teacher input, adds a layer of complexity to the already increasingly challenging work of world language teachers.

Change is an inherent feature of all organizations. Academic institutions, however, present a unique set of challenges due to the complex web of human relationships and the importance of student achievement. The only constant in a school system is its continual state of flux, which is influenced by evolving policies, shifting demographics, and rapidly advancing technologies. Emerging expectations and initiatives

such as demands for increased digital integration, require educational leaders to balance both stabilization and adaptiveness. Given that schools operate in environments characterized by continual change and uncertainty, leaders are required to maintain direction amid shifting conditions. In this context, digital transformation in world language departments is not simply a technological upgrade, however, it is a systems-level disruption that reverberates across scheduling, staffing, instructional practice, and the cultural values that underpin them.

Background

Disruption of the Instructional Core

Disruption of what Spillane et al. (2019) called the technical core of instruction, is often a byproduct of organizational change. Changes such as outsourcing L2 instruction through the adoption of digital technology, potentially results in ripple effects across tangential departments. World language departments are particularly vulnerable to being considered a non-essential element of a well-rounded curriculum. They are, therefore, at risk of disruption and disempowerment in such environments, particularly when solutions sought involve the integration of digital platforms without adequate input from the teachers with expertise in this unique academic area. To fully understand the impact that such uninformed changes impose, it is important to review the standards and frameworks that guide traditional L2 instructional practices.

Standards and Frameworks for Language Learning

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, commonly known as ACTFL, is an organization that promotes teaching and learning of all languages at all

levels of instruction. ACTFL developed a framework for L2 that focuses on five areas: Communications, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. ACTFL serves as the principal professional organization for world language education in the United States, and its standards and proficiency guidelines provide a common framework for curriculum development, instructional planning, assessment, and proficiency-based learning across diverse educational settings.

Among L2 systems, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an international standard that delineates language competence. The CEFR is a standard model that is referred to by educators and policy makers for creating educational materials across Europe. European L2 syllabi, curriculum guidelines, assessments, and textbooks are typically built upon the framework of the CEFR. Although developed for European contexts, the CEFR is widely recognized internationally and has influenced world language education beyond Europe, particularly within International Baccalaureate programs.

At the state level, the Michigan Merit Curriculum: World Language Standards and Benchmarks, is a document that outlines specific objectives according to grade and proficiency levels, and contributes to a well-rounded and progressive language acquisition experience for Michigan students. The standards within this document emphasize the same five areas as ACTFL, each with the goal of achieving competency in real-world contexts. These standards and benchmarks are designed to provide a consistent and clear framework for language learning across the state of Michigan. Although there is overlap with the goals of ACTFL, the Michigan Merit Curriculum is for the most part

narrower in the scope and flexibility of objectives, focus areas, assessments, and cultural integration. ACTFL's standards are generally broader and designed to be integrated across diverse educational settings and adaptable enough to use among various languages. The standards and frameworks that guide L2 instruction are further supported by established proficiency assessments and recognition programs that provide measurable evidence of language competency.

Assessment and Proficiency Measures

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award that recognizes students who have proficiency in two or more languages by the end of 12th grade. This award is conferred by schools, school districts, or states, in an effort to promote biliteracy, and the career and educational benefits that are inherent with multilingualism. It is particularly impactful for students who come from non-English speaking homes. Such students are commonly referred to as heritage students, and the Seal of Biliteracy is particularly useful to them as it recognizes language learning in less commonly taught languages. Students, therefore, are able to receive credit for the knowledge they have oftentimes acquired through familial and community interactions.

The American Councils for International Education is an organization that promotes academic exchange and cross-cultural understanding. This organization administers an exam called the National Examination in World Languages (NEWL). The NEWL measures proficiency in four languages: Arabic, Korean, Portuguese and Russian, and is administered nationally and internationally for students who would like to earn college credit or placement.

The Avant STAMP 4S (Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency) assesses four key language skills. Commonly referred to as the ‘STAMP’ test, it is a computer-adaptive assessment that is offered in fifteen different languages. The STAMP test assesses students in 4 areas (“4S”): reading, writing, listening, and speaking. STAMP provides opportunities for students to earn college credit, and test into advanced level language classes. The test questions are written according to national standards, and are based on real-world scenarios.

It is generally accepted among L2 organizations and instructors that the aforementioned national and international frameworks serve as foundations for L2 instructional programs. However, when digital instructional initiatives are adopted without adequate consideration of these frameworks, established L2 standards risk being overlooked by administrative decision makers seeking to expand course offerings or cut budgets. This scenario may produce tension between L2 instructors and administrators when digital initiatives are not aligned with the standards promoted by these frameworks.

Second Language (L2) and English as a Second Language (ESL) Program Models in U.S. Schools

Immersion and dual-language programs are designed to support bilingualism, biliteracy, and cultural awareness. Additionally, immersion programs contribute to academic agility, problem solving and cognitive flexibility. In a total immersion setting, the target language is used for instruction across various subjects. Partial immersion settings are designed primarily for language acquisition, and do not include core subject areas.

Dual-language programs come in 2 forms: one-way, and two-way programs. Two-way dual-language programs integrate speakers of 2 distinct languages within one classroom. There are two types of students in this model of dual-language program: students who come from homes where primarily English is spoken, and students who come from homes where another, non-English language is spoken. Instruction across all core subjects is provided in both languages, usually in consecutive blocks of time, throughout the day. In a one-way dual-language program, all students come from English speaking homes, but students are taught the core subjects in 2 languages. The languages used in dual-language programs are called partner languages, and the goal is for students to ultimately become proficient in both languages. The proportion that each language is spoken varies from program to program. Some programs divide teaching time into 50% increments for each language. Yet other programs allocate languages into other increments such as 80/20 or 70/30. Programs that follow the latter paradigm are generally designed to accommodate groups of students who are already fluent in one of the partner languages.

One of the advantages of two-way dual-language programs is that students learn from each other's home language. Another benefit of this model is that participants typically outperform students from monolingual classrooms, even if they come from non-English speaking homes. There are, however, challenges inherent in dual-language programs with regard to implementation. Finding teachers who are certified and skilled in teaching the core subjects, as well as the partner language, can be difficult. Some districts have set up partnerships with other countries in order to import native speakers of the

non-English partner language to the U.S. to teach in that language. Another challenge is finding textbooks in the partner language, particularly those that are aligned with state standards. A third challenge is that many states provide additional funding for students who are English learners but not for students who are English proficient. Consequently, once students become proficient in English, additional funding is not available. More information is needed that addresses policies, programming, and the challenges of implementing dual-language programs at the district level. Such data could be instrumental in allowing policymakers to expand the quantity and quality of dual-language programs.

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are designed to support non-English speaking students in English speaking academic and social settings. ESL programs are becoming increasingly necessary as student demographics across the U.S. shift from primarily anglo speaking backgrounds, to students of a wide variety of diverse backgrounds. ESL programs typically focus on four key areas: speaking, listening, reading and writing, and exist in the K-12 setting, as well as in adult educational programs. ESL students range from recent immigrants to students who have lived in the U.S. for years, however, are unable to receive language support at home. Instructional strategies in ESL programs include direct language instruction, which focuses solely on language and cultural acquisition, and content-based instruction (CBI), which combines language learning with academic instruction. The target language, therefore, is learned through the study of other disciplines such as mathematics, science, or history. CBI

integrates the knowledge that language learning is most effective when it is connected to other meaningful goals.

While ESL and L2 programs serve different K-12 populations, they share some similarities. Both programs are based on the importance of language proficiency and cultural competence. Instruction in both programs emphasizes acquiring language skills through relevant interactions and instruction. Both programs employ instructional strategies that integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing into lessons and assessments. Finally, both programs acknowledge the benefits of bilingualism in terms of critical thinking, academic achievement, and global competency.

The two programs differ in the fact that ESL is more intensely focused on assisting students in becoming functionally literate in English. The timeline is shorter, and greater emphasis is placed on rapid language acquisition in an effort to acclimate students academically and socially to the English speaking environment as quickly as possible. L2 programs gradually integrate basic vocabulary, phrases, and grammar, with cultural aspects of the target language. Students build upon this foundation as they advance through grades, with lessons in each successive year becoming more linguistically complex.

Statement of the Problem

Although the state of Michigan requires two credits of world language for high school graduation, the majority of the U.S. either does not have such requirements, or offers flexible pathways to fulfill the L2 requirements, such as computer coding or computer science. Despite Michigan's current world language (WL) graduation

requirement, WL departments often occupy a precarious position among district initiatives. Budget reform and attempts at course offering expansion through digital options, often conflicts with pedagogical alignment. As districts adopt digital L2 classes, instructors can find themselves excluded from consequential decisions, which often leads to tensions between administrative goals and instructional integrity. This study examines how the absence of robust teacher input during digital L2 instructional implementation affects the professional autonomy of WL educators, and alters the instructional environment within various non-WL departments of a school building.

Although prior research has addressed organizational change and technology integration in educational settings, limited attention has been given to how organizational context influences educator responses to innovation within world language programs. This case study focuses on less commonly studied areas of research such as how communication practices, program positioning, and professional agency intersect to influence the interpretation of innovation and its eventual enactment during periods of organizational instability. This gap in research is addressed by the analysis of these dynamics within the context of a district undergoing substantial organizational change.

Purpose of the Study

This study is a qualitative case study designed to explore how teachers and administrators within a public school district respond to the proposed adoption of a digital instructional platform in the world language department. Through observation of stakeholder reactions and evolving patterns of interpretation, this study seeks to provide insight into how potential implementation of a L2 digital initiative impacts teacher and

departmental identity, interdepartmental relationships, and instructional priorities during a time of organizational change.

This research focuses not only on whether digital tools are accepted, but also the impact they potentially make on the very foundations of L2 instruction, and how individuals and departments navigate the reframing of priorities that WL teachers consider essential. Priorities such as curriculum alignment, classroom autonomy, and assessment practice within the L2 classroom, as well the influence of digital instruction in adjacent departments such as grade level general education teams, where teachers expressed concern over the ramifications of digital L2 instruction without a certified language teacher physically present in the classroom.

Research Questions

This case study will be guided by one main research question, and four supporting questions. The collective questions will form the framework for the investigation of how a proposed digital platform is received and interpreted across various departments and administrators within a K-12 public school district. The central question under consideration is: What happens when a district introduces a digital platform to deliver world language instruction, and how do stakeholders respond?

The supporting questions are as follows:

1. How do world language educators experience and respond to the introduction of digital platforms?
2. How do district and building administrators influence or interpret this change?

3. How does change ripple across interconnected departments such as Kindergarten, Fourth grade, or Unified Arts?
4. What systemic factors influence implementation success?

Significance of the Study

The present study contributes to the ongoing academic conversation regarding educational leadership and organizational change by highlighting how the proposed restructuring of L2 instructional delivery is experienced across roles and departments within a public school system. By focusing on the case of the proposal of a digital L2 platform in the WL department, it offers a glimpse into how organizational change affects departmental identity, systematic instructional coherence, and stakeholder agency. The findings are intended to inform leaders and policymakers about the importance of transparent decision making and inclusivity, particularly when making consequential decisions affecting departments that are often excluded from decisions regarding instructional or technological changes.

Finally, this investigation addresses a void in research concerning K-12 world language education, which is an area that is frequently overlooked in educational change literature. The advent of digital learning and artificial intelligence introduces the potential for increased efficiency in L2 instruction if introduced with integrity and fidelity to a district-wide instructional vision. By documenting how L2 instruction is perceived in the digital era, this research spotlights fundamental challenges and opportunities for maintaining instructional integrity, program advancement, and sustainability.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of digital innovation and instructional change in K-12 world language education. The literature reviewed encompasses L2 acquisition models (e.g., ESL and dual language immersion), technology integration, and organizational change within educational settings, with particular attention to how these elements influence instructional practices and organizational dynamics. This study draws from these areas of research with the intention of highlighting not only the challenges but also the opportunities provided by digital transformation in L2 education, while also maintaining a focus on the practical implications for all stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework Concerning Organizational Change

Organizational Change in Educational Institutions

While corporate and manufacturing industries are both profit and efficiency driven, areas such as education and healthcare operate on a continuum that balances between profitability and being mission driven. Education is even further on the spectrum toward being mission driven, and therefore, faces a unique set of constraints when implementing change. Both healthcare and schools must navigate between regulatory requirements, moral implications, and the needs of diverse stakeholders. Both industries exist in policy driven environments that can pose limitations when attempting to make changes. They also face evolving standards, and must manage the competing demands put upon them without compromising their core missions. The following section analyzes

how organizational change theories pertain to education, most specifically in the areas of instructional practices and outsourcing.

In contrast to sectors that respond to market-driven changes that are tied to financial incentives, educational institutions are often driven to change by fluctuations in policy or industry trends. Those in charge of creating educational policies often incorrectly assume that systemic change can be enacted by imposing mandates or accountability measures, however, the educational landscape is fundamentally complex and changes are rarely linear, nor are they adopted universally. For example, various schools within the same district may utilize different organizational systems to meet the demands of the predominant demographic in their area, which could be vastly different from one end of the district to the other. In the following paragraphs I will review theories related to change fatigue, sustainable reform, learning organizations, and strategic planning. To explore why schools resist or how reforms are affected by constraints, it is important to consider Institutional, Complexity, and Resource Dependence Theories. Examination of these theories will provide an understanding of the roles of resources and bureaucracy in the unpredictable realm of institutional change.

Institutional Theory in Schools

Institutional Theory explains why factors such as organizational norms, bureaucratic inertia, and policy constraints impede a school's ability to impose changes. Contrary to change leaders' efforts to institute reforms that will change schools, Tyack & Cuban (1995) argued that schools engage in a process of hybridization which involves schools shaping the reforms rather than any significant transformations resulting from the

reforms. For example, rather than revamping administrative structures, schools might choose instead to selectively integrate new policies into existing frameworks. This approach lacks conviction and fidelity to the proposed transformation, and might help explain why attempts at restructuring fail as modification occurs to the extent that it becomes merely a version of the pre-existing system rather than a true overhaul.

In schools, there are typically multiple stakeholders, many of whom are consulted during organizational change efforts. For example, it is standard procedure for administration, teachers, parents, and the union, to be consulted regarding major organizational changes. To add another layer of complexity, each stakeholder brings their own priorities and experiences to the conversation. While including stakeholders is a strategic decision, especially when seeking buy-in to potential changes, accommodating competing agendas can become complex. However, Sarason (1996) noted that the alternative strategy of instituting top down mandates is often rendered ineffective as stakeholders who are not consulted often overtly resist or comply superficially with attempts to change. The power dynamics involved in an environment where stakeholders feel overlooked can significantly slow down or even completely derail any change reform initiatives.

In well established institutions there often exist deeply embedded procedures and bureaucratic frameworks that support beliefs about the way things should be done. Organizations such as school districts have institutional hierarchies that are arranged according to rank, each having authority over the levels below. The institution establishes

this power structure, and it tends to be quite rigid in organizations such as school districts, making it difficult for organizations to veer from the status quo.

According to Labaree (2000), hierarchical structures can contribute to educational inequity as certain groups are often favored, and the rigidity inherent in this type of organization makes it difficult to enact any substantive change. Additionally, those who are in the favored position are not typically supportive of making any substantial changes. The change process, therefore, becomes an environment ripe for stakeholders jockeying for position and favor. In an effort to streamline the measurement of standardized test scores, graduation rates, and student achievement, some schools, districts, and even nations adopt a market-driven approach. The rationale behind this approach is that by creating a framework akin to a business model, districts can more easily promote themselves as high-performing institutions, therefore, attract more students, funding, and prestige.

Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) argued, however, that the standardization of institutional change excludes marginalized students in its attempt at leveling outcomes. By prioritizing efficiency, the diversity inherent in public education is overlooked and not accommodated. Rather than improving educational outcomes and creating a more globally competitive workforce, as this type of reform is typically framed, by engaging in practices such as teaching to the test, selective enrollment, data manipulation, and holding teachers accountable for student achievement, existing inequities are reinforced. That is to say, a one-size-fits-all approach leaves behind students who have not had the same advantages as their counterparts and is inferior to a more individualized academic

framework that recognizes diverse backgrounds, learning disparities, and equitable access to resources. By emphasizing efficiency and standardized outcomes, market-driven reforms often fail to accommodate students who benefit from differentiated instruction, additional support, or alternative pathways to success. A more individualized and student-centered approach would recognize and address these disparities rather than reinforce them.

Districts that fall victim to strategies such as overlooking stakeholder engagement or teaching to the test, often lack strong leadership that prioritizes ethical considerations. Calabrese (2003) maintains that when confronted with bureaucracy that resists innovation, leaders must strategically navigate deeply embedded institutional constraints, which may include entrenched patterns, behaviors, and norms, while attempting to implement change. By failing to do so, reforms are likely to be undermined by rigid administrative cultures and dysfunctional policies.

While new initiatives are hindered by power structures, policy constraints, and cultural rigidity as explained by institutional theory, complexity theory explains the non-linear trajectory of educational change as it is stakeholder driven and therefore, challenging to control and direct.

Complexity Theory in Education

Inherent in including multiple stakeholders with competing agendas into discussions on change initiatives, is an atmosphere of uncertainty and unpredictability. Rather than focusing on a direct relationship between policy and outcomes, complexity theory examines the process of school change, which is often directed by leadership,

institutional culture and is highly context dependent. Teacher beliefs and community support are the underpinnings of successful educational change, according to Rowan and Miller (2007). These factors can vary widely from one school to another, even within the same district, which explains why reforms in some schools succeed, and fail in others. The failure to consider the subtle differences among various institutions, and to rely on a rigid, uniform approach, incites resistance to change. Meyers et al. (2012) advocated for an adaptable, and localized decision-making model that best accommodates individual organizations.

Reform implementation is most successful when leaders who are closely connected with and deeply aware of their school's unique culture, strengths, and challenges, interpret policies in ways that leverage advantages, and address deficits. Ganon-Shilon and Chen (2019) highlighted the critical role that a building principal plays in the process of successful reform. Rather than merely implementing a top-down approach, an influential leader adapts and applies policies based on their school's specific context. Reinforcing earlier insights, Sarason (1996) further emphasized the relevance of stakeholder engagement, stating that 'when teachers and administrators feel excluded, reforms risk resistance or result in superficial compliance.'

While complexity theory advocates for successful change by viewing reform through a lens that aligns with a building's or district's unique culture and needs, it does not address resource constraints. The next section examines Resource Dependence Theory, which analyzes the role that financial limitations play. Additionally, this theory

examines the impact of outsourcing, and external partnerships, and their impact on decision making.

Resource Dependence Theory in Education

Schools operate within a collaborative system and therefore are dependent upon factors such as government funding, policy mandates, and external partnerships in exchange for their contribution to society. In order to maintain stability and implement initiatives, schools must adhere to competing agendas of the institutions upon which they rely. This phenomenon is not unique to schools, however, unlike other sectors such as business or industry, schools do not generate income. This factor alone makes schools vulnerable to financial pressures. Resource dependence theory explains how external influences often force schools to prioritize financial stability over educational goals.

Reliance on funding from external sources can be a limiting factor on autonomy and agency. Pierce (2006) argued that being overly reliant on external sources can encourage schools to prioritize external goals rather than student needs. Being subject to economic and political shifts further complicates schools' ability to engage in long term planning as they struggle to operate in uncertain conditions. To navigate the imposition of financial constraints, schools sometimes outsource services in various areas such as custodial, food service, instructional, administrative, or even student support. Shifting from internal support to reliance on external services can, at times, improve efficiency. However, as Perkins and Reese (2014) pointed out, moving control away from educators can introduce conflicts of interest, and prioritize profits over educational quality. The

broader implications of outsourcing on faculty and instructional quality will be further explored in a later section.

Budget constraints can lead to difficult decisions beyond resorting to outsourcing critical school services. When facing resource scarcity, schools frequently cut unified arts programs such as world language, music, and art, as well as student support services, which further deepens educational disparities between low income and affluent districts. Resource accessibility is a key driving force behind educational change. By diversifying funding sources, schools expand autonomy and minimize reliance on funders who may operate with wavering goals. Such diversification, however, can be complicated and require extensive time and effort in an already exhausted and depleted system. No matter the funding source, schools must strive to maintain instructional quality and equity while managing financial instability, policy pressure, and external dependencies.

Critical Components for Dissertation Focus

The integration of multiple theoretical perspectives when analyzing the dynamics involved in organizational transformation will help to achieve a comprehensive understanding. The complexities involved in managing change in educational institutions stem from bureaucratic constraints, stakeholder resistance, policy mandates, and financial considerations. By integrating institutional theory, complexity theory, and resource dependency theory, this dissertation aims to provide a multidimensional framework for analyzing how schools can successfully navigate institutional change and outsourcing. A synthesis of these theories will reveal influences that promote or impede sustainable educational transformation.

In order to fully understand the implications of outsourcing educational services, a key focus of this examination, it will be analyzed through the lens of resource dependency theory. As schools increasingly rely on third party educational providers for instructional support, administrative functions, and technological integration, issues such as cost savings and specialized expertise become relevant. However, other issues such as the erosion of institutional autonomy, faculty job security, and educational equality also raise questions. By viewing these issues through the lens of resource dependence theory, this dissertation explores how financial pressures influence decision making in schools, and the potential consequences of placing educational responsibilities in the hands of private companies. A thorough understanding of these alternatives is vital in assessing whether outsourcing fortifies or disintegrates the technical core of education.

Additionally, given the interdependent nature of educational systems where, ideally, input from teachers, administrators, policymakers, students, and community members is factored into decision making, this dissertation will explore complexity theory to gain a better understanding of the unpredictability that exists due to stakeholders' competing agendas. Complexity theory provides a lens through which to analyze the dynamic interactions that occur within these interconnected decisions and negotiations among stakeholders, as meaningful change does not occur in a linear fashion. The importance of flexibility, iterative planning, and adaptation in managing instructional change and outsourcing endeavors is emphasized throughout the literature.

The integration of these various perspectives provides a dynamic framework for examining change within educational institutions. A detailed analysis of financial

constraints, institutional structures, and stakeholder engagement contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how schools negotiate change while maintaining their technical core of instruction.

Review of Research

This section of the research review is divided into three parts. The first delves into the ways in which organizational restructuring impacts instructional practices, with an emphasis on teaching and learning, how classroom educators adapt to or resist proposed changes, and the ripple effects of outsourcing instructional staff or the implementation of digital platforms. The second section focuses on L2 instructional practices with emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Content Based Instruction (CBI), and Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL). Additionally, language program frameworks such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and Dual Language Immersion (DLI) are discussed. The third section reviews research on digital platform adoption in L2 instruction. Artificial intelligence is highlighted as an emerging trend along with the benefits and challenges imposed by this revolutionary technology. This tripartite analysis provides a foundation for understanding the dynamics of organizational reform when it intersects with instructional practices in world language departments. The review demonstrates that during organizational change certain patterns tend to surface such as a disconnect between various components of the educational structure, and resistance to externally imposed reforms, as well as the conditions that support or erode instructional coherence.

Changes to the Technical Core of Work

While Resource Dependency Theory explains how decision making is shaped by financial resources and external factors, it does not address how these factors affect the technical core of instruction. The daily practice of teaching and learning responds to perpetually shifting influences such as policy mandates and funding limitations, by maintaining a mindset of continual adaptation in terms of instructional models, faculty roles, and leadership strategies. Broader systemic changes are managed by adjusting teaching methods, reallocating resources, and implementing leadership strategies that ensure educators are supported in implementing reforms, while maintaining continuity in student learning. The following section is an exploration of the impact that organizational reform has on teaching and learning, as well as an analysis of the reciprocal nature between external pressures and internal decision making.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

While reforms are often introduced as efforts to improve student achievement, without including teachers as stakeholders in the decision making process, they can unintentionally negatively impact classroom practices, instructional methods, and curriculum priorities. In response to external pressures to enact change, teachers are often required to adjust their teaching in ways that constrain their flexibility. This is particularly true when standardization models supersede context driven approaches (Skerrett & Hargreaves, 2008). Top-down mandates fail to address the complexities of diverse student populations. In order to be effective, instructional reforms must consider the needs of students in a context specific approach (Rowan & Miller, 2007).

Given that rigid reform frameworks do not typically account for circumstantial differences (Meyers et al., 2012), mandating uniform changes across a district that instructs various demographic populations, may lead to widely differing results. Such discrepancies can diminish the priority given to subjects such as the arts and world languages. Reduced class time, budget cuts, fewer course offerings, and less emphasis on professional development may result as districts feel pressured to prioritize teaching to the test over providing deep learning opportunities. Students may be left with fewer options to engage in critical thinking, creativity and exploratory experiences. Rather than producing uniform results, a standardized approach to institutional reform is more likely to result in a narrowing of the curriculum and leave teachers whose subjects fall outside of the emphasized framework feeling that their contributions are not valued.

Successful faculty adaptation is the result of how reforms are introduced and their alignment with existing goals. If reforms are instituted without faculty input, teachers may view them as burdensome disruptions, which leads to passive compliance or outright resistance (Calabrese, 2003). Administrative support, communication with leadership, and access to professional development, provide a supportive environment for teachers who must continuously adapt to shifting expectations. Teachers' willingness to adapt is strongly influenced by the degree to which the impending changes align with their goals, and how they are introduced (Conley & Enomoto, 2009).

External mandates to educational reform tend to impose broad educational objectives, which leaves faculty to reframe the reforms into relevant classroom practices. When teachers are in professional environments that encourage collaborative attempts

toward learning, reflection, and shared decision making, they are better prepared to navigate instructional reform (Meyers et al., 2012). Conversely, when reform is imposed without the structural support of adequate resources or training, teacher skepticism and disengagement from effective transformation may result (Brand, 2009).

School leaders serve as the liaison between external policy demands and internal practices. As intermediaries between the two worlds, leaders ensure that reforms align with policy mandates, and that adequate support is provided to their faculty and students, in order to adapt to the changes. Educational leaders who filter policy initiatives through the lens of their school's unique culture, are able to enact more enduring change within the system (Rowan and Miller, 2007). Engaging faculty in decision making while providing strategic guidance instead of enforcement, fosters stronger faculty acceptance.

Meyers et al. (2012) emphasize taking a collaborative and holistic approach to school leadership. They describe an ecological approach that includes shared planning, awareness that students are influenced by various systems beyond the school environment, and flexible resource allocation to meet diverse needs. Sustainable reform initiatives, according to this model, require a collaborative leadership approach among principals, teachers, and instructional coaches working together in an ecological strategy toward systemic change that includes supporting educators during the integration of new teaching practices. Providing communal support, rather than imposing reforms on teachers to fend for themselves, is the key to enacting sustainable change.

Change Fatigue and Reform Challenges

While inherent in educational reform is the aim to positively impact systemic

improvement, it is more often a ‘web of competing and conflicting goals’ (Brand, 2009). Attempting to navigate such an environment is an overwhelming task that requires teachers and administrators to participate in a balancing act that too often results not only in exhaustion, but in an overall feeling of irrelevancy.

Without operating from a holistic viewpoint, external policymakers sometimes neglect to include teacher input while initiating change. From teachers’ perspectives, changes executed in this manner replace rather than build upon previous reforms, resulting in a never-ending cycle of perpetually shifting one’s focus, which results in the interruption of process mastery. The disparity between the perspectives of policy makers’ and educational staff threatens institutional stability, and can result in low teacher morale, resistance, and passive compliance without any authentic transformation.

In contrast to the top-down mandate approach, Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) offered a different path known as the Fourth Way. The Fourth Way encourages collaboration between educators, stakeholders, and policymakers as a strategy for sustainable educational reform. While focusing on a relationship driven approach, this model views teacher agency, professional learning communities, and student centered instruction as the underpinnings of organizational stability.

Compared with the constant demands of top-down initiatives for change, some schools have the opposite challenge of pervasive inertia due to standardized curriculums, inefficient leadership structures, and overly rigid and inefficient bureaucracies. Sillins, Mulford, & Zarins (2002) proposed that schools operate as ever-evolving learning organizational structures. The focus on constant iteration, they argue, resists stagnation,

and encourages continual assessment, refinement, and practical improvement. Promoting a school culture of experimentation and shared leadership is a strategic move toward sustaining innovation and avoiding inaction.

Stollar et al. (2006) emphasized the importance of collaboration among educators, administrators, and policy makers to bolster efforts toward change implementation and reduce resistance. Even juxtaposed against progressive change models, the lack of stakeholder engagement and poor strategic planning can derail well intentioned change initiatives. Clear, deliberate, and collaborative planning can circumvent the tendency for organizational change efforts to become disjointed, inconsistently executed, or unsupported due to resource depletion or leadership attrition.

Implications of Outsourcing on Faculty and Instructional Quality

Schools that consider outsourcing as an instructional, administrative option usually do so in response to financial constraints, policy demands, or staffing shortages. Contracting external agencies for special education support, language services, or even non-instructional services such as meal and custodial services has become commonplace in current educational environments. Outsourcing can expand access to expertise particularly when faculty and staff shortages exist, while also allowing schools to economize on resources when financial constraints require careful budgeting. However, contracting out services also runs the risk of sacrificing educational quality, job security, and relationships that build over time between students, staff, and faculty members. Even non-academic in-house services such as custodial or cafeteria staff often build strong connections with students and faculty which can positively impact the building culture.

Internal staff have the opportunity to experience continuity and therefore take pride in the services they provide, whereas contracted employees often rotate buildings within a district which robs them of the opportunity to create relationships, as well as the ability to operate with efficiency due to the lack of familiarity with the environment. External employees are not typically as invested in the community as internal employees. The decision to outsource instructional and support services is a trade off between strategic spending, loss of decision making power, and equity, and must be carefully evaluated for its effectiveness.

The Role of Third-Party Educational Services

The trend toward outsourcing in education is frequently relied upon as a strategy to expand offerings while economizing on resources. Perkins and Reese (2014) analyze whether contracting educational services actually benefits students or is primarily focused on corporate interests. While technological advancements and specialized programs can sometimes become more accessible through third party providers, a certain degree of control over curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy is lost to a private company whose priorities may not align with those of the school or its students.

Digital education has become a prominent area of outsourcing in public education. Online classes, virtual tutoring, and assessment tools can expand learning opportunities for students, enhance quality control and equity, and streamline learning and assessment procedures leaving more time in the schedule for deeper learning and one-on-one teacher-student interaction. However, external digital platforms may not align with district standards. Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) argued that outsourcing

instructional programs often leads to inconsistencies in educational quality. Third party educators, they contend, often lack the same professional development and institutional knowledge as full time, in-house teachers. This issue is particularly problematic for situations where outsourcing is for student support services such as special education. External specialists in these areas can expand the district's capacity to accommodate students, however, if services are not delivered with consistency, or from alternating staff members, another layer of challenge is added to the educational experience for students who already face significant challenges. Schools must seriously consider whether the benefits of access to specialized services outweigh the risks of interrupted service delivery and weakened teacher-student relationships.

Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) predict that outsourcing educational services will disintegrate faculty relationships over time due to the disparities of working conditions between full time faculty and outsourced educators. The discrepancy between the two sectors, where in-house faculty experience job stability and full benefits, and outsourced employees receive lower pay and few, if any benefits, can result in a lack of cohesion among colleagues, which often leads to high attrition rates and therefore, inconsistent instruction for students.

Reinforcing what Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) stated in regard to the effect that a misalignment of goals between an outsourced service provider and school administration has on the quality of public education, Pierce (2006) emphasized how another area of outsourcing such as the introduction of corporate funding, whether through direct sponsorships, subsidized resources, or exclusive contracts, can shift a

district's priorities away from previously held objectives. Schools may feel pressured to adopt specific technologies or curricula that are aligned with a corporate sponsor's interests, even if they are not the best fit for their student population. Reliance on external funding can create a power imbalance between school administration and private educational service providers that diminishes teacher agency by rendering administrators less powerful over decision making.

Effects of Outsourcing on Faculty Job Security

Beyond the impact that third party educational service providers have on the quality of the education system, it also affects the professional identity of educators. As teaching responsibilities become more divided between in-house faculty and contracted providers, the role of the classroom teacher is being redefined. While contracted services introduce flexibility, which allows schools to meet diverse needs, they can also reduce full time positions which in a sense, weakens the profession, limits teacher input in instructional decisions, and deteriorates the stability of public education.

Given the challenges of ensuring quality and consistency, contracted service providers are at a distinct disadvantage. Public school educators and administrators have typically had hundreds if not thousands of hours of pedagogical training, a focus on institutional alignment, and a long term commitment to students and their families. As Skerrett & Hargreaves (2008) have highlighted, outsourcing can lead to inconsistencies in curriculum implementation, assessment strategies, and instructional methods.

Administrators that outsource programs must be vigilant about ensuring that contracted

employees receive adequate professional development and that they adhere to district standards.

Maintaining Quality

Furthermore, outsourcing can deepen educational disparities between well funded and lower income districts, according to Pierce (2006). Districts with more financial resources are able to expand their selections from a wide range of vendors, ensuring a higher quality of instruction, while schools experiencing deeper financial constraints must rely on services that prioritize affordability over quality.

In order to mitigate these risks, schools must establish clear expectations, and ensure that contracted companies operate with a level of rigor that aligns with the school's curriculum and standards. Additionally, districts must be thoughtful about the long term consequences that outsourcing may have on the stability of their faculty workforce, maintenance of institutional autonomy, and the ways in which they are able to contribute to the quality of public education while operating under the influence of private vendors.

While outsourcing can be alluring to districts in terms of cost savings and access to expanded course offerings and specialized services, it also creates substantial challenges in terms of teacher job security, consistency, and equity. Critical issues such as relinquishing at least partial control over curriculum, evolving faculty roles, and whether profit driven service providers are reforming public education in ways that demonstrate fidelity to student learning outcomes. Schools that outsource services must

carefully consider whether cost effectiveness does not come at the expense of instructional quality, teacher agency, and student well being.

Research on L2 Instructional Practices and Pedagogies

This exploration of second language learning highlights its significance in promoting and fortifying cognitive abilities, academic achievement, and global citizenship. While there is currently no federal mandate in the United States that requires students to study a second language, the benefits are widely acknowledged. The aforementioned frameworks, standards, and programs across the U.S. and Europe reflect a commitment to supporting bilingualism and biliteracy that will support students in an increasingly interconnected world. This focus on globalism further solidifies the need for instructional practices that foster both linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. The analysis of instructional strategies provided here such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Content Based Instruction (CBI), and Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), offer a comprehensive, although not exhaustive, view of the opportunities that exist in L2 education within public classroom settings.

Each of these methods is a unique approach to language acquisition, yet there is a throughline of contextualized, relevant, and therefore meaningful learning. For example, CBI combines language learning with traditional subject matter such as mathematics or history, which allows students to acquire both academic content and language skills simultaneously. Benefits of this method of L2 lie in the fact that it creates meaningful experiences for students, and reduces the anxiety that often accompanies language students when the focus is placed on the grammar, pronunciation, and accent of the target

language. Proficiency is naturally developed as students engage in understanding, analyzing, and discussing complex ideas using the target language. One of the challenges with this approach is to find teachers who are certified and adept in both the subject matter and the target language. An additional and significant challenge is that assessments in a CBI lesson must be designed in order to evaluate both content knowledge and language proficiency.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was developed as an antidote to the pitfalls of redundancy and rote learning that typically exist in traditional language teaching methods. One of the core principles of CLT is the emphasis on using the target language in context over focusing on grammatical structures. In a typical CLT lesson, the student is presented with real-life situations which require communication in order to engage in and complete the lesson. The premise is to provide learners with authentic scenarios, give them the resources they need to problem solve, and allow them to practice, make mistakes, and use the target language to solve the problem at hand. Ordering food in a restaurant, asking for directions, and participating in a meeting are all typical scenarios in which CLT lessons are designed around.

Another key aspect of CLT is to encourage fluency over accuracy in the initial stages of language development. Language is presented as a tool to achieve a goal, and mistakes are viewed as a secondary inevitability of the process rather than a barrier to achievement. Corrections can be made by subtly repeating the phrase back to the student in its correct form, which, through repetition and exposure, becomes internalized as part of the student's language repertoire. This approach can help reduce the nervousness and

fear that typically accompany students as they attempt to utter new, non-native sounds. Role-playing, group work, and simulation are techniques used in CLT to foster linguistic competence instead of grammatical accuracy.

The benefits of CLT are numerous. This method encourages students to begin to think in the target language rather than translate from their first language, therefore engaging with the language more authentically. CLT also involves active participation, movement, interaction, and tends to be more engaging and fun for students than repetition or rote memorization. There are drawbacks to CLT, however, in regard to classroom management, assessment, and provision of timely and contextually relevant feedback. CLT is best presented with a preparatory or follow-up exercise which focuses on grammar and accuracy to prepare students for subsequent assessments that expect them to be proficient in those areas. CLT requires a balanced approach and skilled teachers to ensure all aspects of second language learning are covered.

Research on Program Structures: L2, ESL, and Dual Language

World language education in the United States includes a variety of models that range from traditional classroom instruction to dual-language and immersion programs. In dual-language programs, students develop biliteracy through instruction in two languages, which can take place in one-way (monolingual students) or two-way (mixed linguistic backgrounds) settings. These models, particularly two-way immersion, have demonstrated long-term academic and cognitive benefits for both native English speakers and English learners. ESL programs, by contrast, serve non-native speakers with the explicit goal of accelerating English proficiency for academic success. While ESL and

WL programs differ in target population and urgency, both prioritize communicative competence, cultural understanding, and equitable access to resources. Implementation challenges include staffing shortages, inconsistent policy support, and disparities in instructional time across school districts.

One of the advantages of two-way dual-language programs is that students learn from each other's home language. Additionally, students in two-way classrooms typically outperform students from monolingual classrooms, even if they come from non-English speaking homes. There are, however, challenges inherent in dual-language programs with regard to implementation. Finding teachers who are certified and skilled in teaching the core subjects, as well as the partner language, can be difficult. Some districts have set up partnerships with other countries in order to import native speakers of the non-English partner language to the U.S. to teach in that language. Another challenge is finding textbooks in the partner language, particularly those that are aligned with state standards. A third challenge is that many states provide additional funding for students who are English learners but not for students who are English proficient. Consequently, once students become proficient in English, additional funding is not available. More information is needed that addresses policies, programming, and the challenges of implementing dual-language programs at the district level. District level data would allow policymakers to increase the number and quality of dual-language programs.

While ESL and L2 programs serve different K-12 populations, they share some similarities. Both programs are based on the importance of language proficiency and cultural competence. Instruction in both programs emphasizes acquiring language skills

through relevant interactions and instruction. Both programs employ instructional strategies that integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing into lessons and assessments. Finally, both programs acknowledge the benefits of bilingualism in terms of critical thinking, academic achievement, and global competency.

Where the two programs differ is in the fact that ESL is more intensely focused on assisting students in becoming functionally literate in English. The timeline is shorter, and greater emphasis is placed on rapid language acquisition in an effort to acclimate students academically and socially to the English speaking environment as quickly as possible. L2 programs gradually integrate basic vocabulary, phrases, and grammar, with cultural aspects of the target language. Students build upon this foundation as they advance through grades, with lessons in each successive year becoming more linguistically complex.

Research on Digital Platform Adoption in K-12 Contexts

In regard to L2 learning via digital platforms, and those using artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, there are a number of challenges. One issue is that depending on the algorithm used to build the learning platform, AI does not always have diverse or accurate knowledge of various languages or dialects. Some AI models are exemplary for providing feedback on pronunciation and grammar, however, many cannot currently replicate the complexity of a nuanced real-world scenario with adequate depth.

AI chatbots provide L2 learners with relevant lessons and instant feedback, which is a method that can mimic authentic conversational experiences. This aspect can be beneficial for practicing verbal communication in a private and non-judgmental

environment. Chatbots can also enable pronunciation and vocabulary correction which can help students to improve their verbal skills. AI facilitates immersive learning experiences through virtual and augmented reality. These programs can offer highly dynamic and engaging L2 experiences that place the learner in authentic learning scenarios in which they participate in activities such as ordering food, navigating a train station, and checking into a hotel.

Research on Organizational Change in Schools

Organizations exist in a constant state of change, and are influenced by the evolving policies and the inherently fluid nature of human relationships. At the core of an organization are people: leaders, stakeholders, customers, students, and employees, to name a few. Each individual has their own motivations, goals, and inevitably complex prior histories that drive behavior. It is critical, therefore, that managers and leaders draw information from all of the various areas that impact organizational culture, to predict, manage and effectively lead, while simultaneously focusing on the organization's guiding principles to direct and inform their decisions. Regulations and standards designed to govern the impact of changing forces must be alterable as they are vulnerable to becoming irrelevant due to various and ever evolving forces.

Furthermore, the rate at which organizational change occurs spans a spectrum from predictable, steady shifts, to frenetic, intense fluctuations that appear without any warning. Much like a ship equipped with stabilizing devices to alleviate the rolling and pitching during a storm, the manager of an organization relies on organizational frameworks that reduce volatility and maintain stability among the team. Allegiance to

frameworks increases the probability of procedural consistency and maintenance of alignment with organizational goals. However, just as external pressures test the stability of a vessel, changes, both external and internal, contribute to the threat of destabilization within an organization. An effective leader must develop the capacity to not only recognize, but predict potential threats that may disrupt the equilibrium of an organization. Evolving stakeholder expectations, staffing changes, and the integration of new technological tools, are but a few examples of organizational shifts that require nimble responses from its leaders to withstand turbulence and maintain steady progress toward and alignment with strategic goals.

Conclusion

Gaps in the Literature

Although there is increasing interest in educational technology and an abundance of empirical research regarding organizational transformation, studies specifically on digital platforms and organizational change within world language departments is underrepresented. Currently, case studies of digital platform implementation primarily focus on core subjects or district wide IT rollouts. Overlooked, but equally significant, are elective areas such as world language, where instructional disruption affects not only WL classes, but can ripple into core subject areas, which affects scheduling, staffing, and resource allocation across the district.

There is limited research on how L2 teachers experience digital implementation, particularly when such decisions are introduced as top-down mandates that omit their expertise in language acquisition and instructional best practices. Current literature does

not address the impact these changes have on surrounding departments such as grade level teams or unified arts, when WL programs are outsourced or restructured to include digital platforms. These exclusions highlight the need for literature that explore the realities of L2 educators during systemic change.

WL departments in the U.S. will benefit from continued or increased federal and state level support in the areas of resource allocation, professional development, and equitable access to L2. Consistent evaluation of these programs and instructional methods used to teach them will help to accommodate students and ensure district-wide efficacy.

This literature review has summarized both theoretical and empirical findings relevant to how digital technology impacts L2 education in K-12 environments, and the implications for organizational change at a district level. Areas highlighted in this review include pedagogical strategies used in L2 instruction, the range of program models, and the complexities of implementing digital technology in world language departments. The vulnerability of L2 programs facing broader organizational change, particularly when changes are driven by administrative decisions as cost-saving measures, is a salient theme that emerged. The information included in this review serves as a foundation for this case study's exploration of how WL educators, and building and central administration interpret and respond to systemic challenges associated with the implementation of digital transformation, and how these interpretations affect teacher identity, instructional design, and inter-departmental dynamics.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This chapter outlines the methods used to analyze how organizational change and digital learning impact a K-12 world language (WL) department. As digital platforms designed for second language acquisition (L2) grow in popularity, schools are increasingly integrating digital learning options into language education. Understanding how digital integration is experienced and implemented by educators and administrators is valuable for organizations considering similar changes, particularly in marginalized departments. This qualitative case study examines one public school district's experience with digital language instruction, and how a sudden, top-down change imposed by administration, ripples across multiple departments throughout the district.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research aims to examine how digital learning platforms impact organizational dynamics, particularly within world language departments, and how various stakeholders interpret and react to such changes. This study is guided by one central research question, and four sub-questions.

Central Research Question: How do K-12 world language departments experience organizational change through the adoption of digital learning platforms?

Sub-questions:

1. How do world language teachers respond to the implementation of digital platforms?

2. How do school and district administrators influence or interpret this change?
3. How do changes in the world language department affect other areas of the school system, such as grade level, or Unified Arts departments?
4. What systemic factors enable or obstruct successful integration of digital learning tools in K-12 language education?

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research approach to analyze how organizational change evolves during the implementation of a digital learning platform in a world language department. At the outset of the study, the department served grades K-12; however, district restructuring during the study eliminated kindergarten world language instruction, resulting in a grades 1-12 program. The decision to use a qualitative design stems from the interest in understanding the subtleties of various perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of stakeholders as they navigate the process of implementing digital learning tools into instruction. Teachers, district leaders, and administrators are the stakeholders involved in this study. Given that qualitative research is compatible with exploring complex, subjective experiences inherent in human behavior, organizational systems, and contextual factors (including site-specific conditions, organizational dynamics, and cultural influences), it served as an appropriate analysis for this study, which encompassed all of those components.

The design framework for this study is the single case embedded study (Yin, 1994), with distinct units of analysis, which in this case are: world language teachers, kindergarten educators, fourth-grade digital pilot classrooms, and both building and

central administrators. This structure is a solid foundation for an in depth examination of how digital tool adoption is interpreted, resisted, or embraced across various departments within the same system. To add nuance to the exploration, Stake's (1995) interpretive case study perspective enhanced Yin's structured approach by taking into consideration participants' lived experiences and process of interpretation. The integration of Yin (1994) and Stake's (1995) approaches provided a comprehensive lens through which to view the guiding questions throughout the research process.

This single-case embedded design focused on a public school district adopting digital technology, and the embedded units of analysis were: world language teachers and leaders, kindergarten teachers, fourth grade classrooms involved in a digital pilot, building level and central office administrators. The embedded design offered a comprehensive approach of analyzing the organizational system as a whole, while still recognizing the interpretations and experiences of each unit. It also supported the analysis of how changes in one department affected those around it. Subtle departmental shifts and the consequential ripple effect was detectable by employing an embedded design strategy.

Working in tandem with Yin's structured approach, Stake's (1995) interpretive case study framework was used to represent each stakeholder's experience and process of meaning making. Yin's design rigorously drove the study using pattern matching and triangulation, while Stake's interpretivist approach provided depth and nuance by capturing context, impressions, and the evolving perceptions of participants. By

employing both Yin's and Stake's perspectives, both the systemic and human dimensions of organizational change were represented.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for this study draws from several frameworks on organizational change. Barnett and Carroll's (1995) theory highlights the dual emphasis on the process and content of organizational change, providing a lens through which both the planning and the actual components of change are understood.

In addition, Battilana and Casciaro's (2013) research on affective cooptation and relational ties emphasizes how interpersonal connections influence the success or failure of a change initiative. This is particularly relevant in school settings where strong emotional ties and longstanding relationships influence organizational culture. Finally, Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology (1999) introduced the idea that systems are interconnected, and that changes in one area inevitably cause ripples across the whole organization. In educational institutions, where staffing, schedules, and prep times are closely coordinated across departments, the introduction of a new instructional model (e.g., a digital L2 platform) triggered wide-ranging impacts on neighboring areas such as Kindergarten or Unified Arts.

To visualize this conceptual model, I used a four-quadrant matrix adapted from Gerring and McDermott (2007). The matrix maps departments by two variables: (1) openness to change, and (2) level of digital integration. This framework helped organize patterns and typologies that emerged from the data and offered a lens for comparing embedded units. Together, these frameworks provided a scaffold for understanding how

organizational change is experienced at multiple levels. They also helped organize the data collection tools, especially in terms of anticipating how participant resistance, support, or adaptation might be framed and interpreted. Table 3.1 shows this structure.

Table 3.1

Typology of Academic Departments Based on Digital Integration and Openness to Change (adapted from Gerring & McDermott, 2007)

Tech Integration	Open to Change	Resistant to Change
High Tech Integration	Type 1: Innovative & Adaptive	Type 2: Tech-Heavy but Rigid
Low Tech Integration	Type 3: Traditional but Reflective	Type 4: Resistant & Traditional

Table 3.1 is a conceptual framework that presents four theoretical types of departments based on two observable categories: level of technology integration, and degree of openness to change. The table assisted in qualitatively interpreting patterns in the collected data (field notes, documents, interviews, etc.), and in describing how the departments fit into one of the four categories. This categorization supported pattern recognition across departments in the following ways: by clarifying how the proposed changes were received, comparing how openness to change impacts platform adoption, highlighting unexpected patterns, and informing interpretation of findings. It also provided insight into how cultural norms (such as attitudes toward change, innovation history, and faculty collaboration) and organizational factors (such as leadership

approaches and decision-making processes) influenced each department's placement within the typology, and was suggestive of their ultimate response to digital reform.

Researcher Role

As a public school educator with over 15 years of experience at the time of this study, my professional role included direct involvement with curriculum development, instructional technology, and departmental leadership. Given the variety of responsibilities within my role, I brought both insider knowledge and an objective perspective to this study. During the study, I was employed in the district under investigation, where I served as a teacher and world language department chair. In addition, I served in a part-time district position that involved researching digital instructional platforms. This role provided valuable contextual knowledge regarding the technologies examined in this study while reinforcing the importance of reflexivity throughout the research process. These roles provided me with insider knowledge of district operations, the decision-making processes that influence teaching and learning, and district, building, and departmental culture.

While my position within the district offered me an optimal vantage point, my proximity to the participants, and emotional connection to colleagues and the subject matter introduced the possibility of over identification and bias. In order to mitigate this potential risk, I proceeded with a heightened awareness of any tendency toward subjectivity, and maintained a commitment to transparency and accountability throughout.

To ensure objectivity and credibility, I employed multiple strategies throughout the research process, including:

- Reflexive memoing to track potential bias
- Participant reflection to validate themes
- Triangulation across interviews, documents, and observations
- Adhered to IRB-approved protocols and maintained transparency in data handling

Throughout the research, my aim was to remain actively cognizant of the possibility of personal biases and how my perspectives might influence data interpretation and the integrity of the research.

Given my status as an employee of the district under investigation, concerted effort was taken to mitigate any tension that occurred due to incompatible demands or expectations. Furthermore, as an inside researcher, all efforts were made to avoid unintended coercion or perceived pressure, including the use of personal communication channels, transparent consent procedures, and a commitment to ongoing reflexive journaling to identify any potential bias. Participants were reminded that their responses would be confidential, and that any decisions regarding participation would not have any impact on their professional status. Finally, as the researcher, I acknowledged the responsibility to protect the confidentiality, dignity, autonomy and privacy of all participants, and to report findings in an accurate, and respectful manner that is consistent with ethical integrity.

Setting and Context

The study was conducted in a small, Midwestern public school district serving approximately 5,000 students. While the district primarily serves families from mid to high socioeconomic backgrounds, the building where the research was conducted was designated as a Title I school, and served families across a wide economic spectrum. At the onset of this study the district consisted of one comprehensive high school, an alternative high school, and a specialty high school. During the course of the study, the specialty high school relocated from the district's educational farm center to the comprehensive high school campus, where it became co-located with the alternative high school.

The district included two middle schools, four elementary schools, two preschools, and a developmental center that served severely cognitively and physically impaired students from multiple surrounding districts. Additionally, the district operated a deaf and hard of hearing program housed within one of the elementary schools that served students from across the county.

The district also served as the operator of a countywide collaborative International Baccalaureate (IB) high school, for which students were admitted through a lottery process. A 40-acre nature center and a 93-acre farm were owned by the district to provide outdoor educational opportunities to students and the surrounding community. During the period of this study, the district entered into an interlocal agreement with the county parks system, which subsequently assumed operation of both properties.

Historically, the district student body population experienced relative homogeneity, however, within recent decades, it evolved into a more diverse population. In an attempt to adjust to shifting cultural and instructional dynamics, administrators poured forth concerted effort to adapt to changes including the accommodation of a growing immigrant population and coupled with that, changes within the English Language Learners (ELLs) program, and a broadening range of socioeconomic levels. The district served suburban neighborhoods consisting primarily of single family homes, but with an increasing number of students coming from apartment complexes. It was a varied environment of instructional needs and implementation challenges.

World language instruction in the district was historically robust, with as many as seven language offerings at the high school level at one point. Spanish was introduced at the elementary level in the mid-1990's and remained the only world language offering at that level through the time of the study. The elementary Spanish curriculum underwent several iterations over the years in terms of pedagogical content, instructional time, and scheduling frequency. Early versions provided Spanish instruction two to three times per week in grades K-5, with class periods lasting 20 to 40 minutes. At the secondary level, middle schools offered both Spanish and French, while the high school offered Spanish, French, American Sign Language, and Chinese. At the time of the study, however, Chinese was scheduled to be phased out. German was historically offered at both the middle and high school levels, however, that too was completely phased out during the study. Throughout the secondary level, Spanish was the most commonly selected world language among district students. In the early 2010s, in response to parent feedback

regarding the utility of elementary Spanish learning, the district launched an updated K-5 curriculum consisting of six units of study, each culminating in a graded progress report at the end of each unit. Given that elementary school student enrollment ranged from approximately 350 to 600 students, this initiative substantially increased teacher workload. World language teachers were required to administer and grade pre- and post-assessments for every student six times per academic year, prepare progress reports at the conclusion of each of the six instructional units, complete personalized end-of-semester reports for each student, and carry out their regular instructional responsibilities. The model was well-intentioned as it was an effort to legitimize Spanish instruction for detractors of the program, however, it approached a threshold of unsustainability in practice.

Although the curriculum was standardized across all elementary schools and formally documented, central administration played a minimal role in its ongoing implementation. Without sustained support or oversight throughout the transition, some teachers found the workload excessive and implementation became inconsistent across the district. The curriculum was developed collaboratively by the principal of one elementary school, who also served as the district world language department head, the world language consultant from the county Intermediate School District (ISD), and two of the five elementary Spanish teachers. The development process was extensive, spanning the academic year and continuing into the summer, during which participating teachers received stipends for their work.

Report cards were updated at the ISD level to reflect the new curriculum, and all elementary Spanish teachers were expected to implement it consistently. Although building principals historically had some input regarding scheduling and implementation logistics, instructional decisions were made with minimal involvement from building or central administration. When teachers raised concerns over increased workload, scheduling logistics, and feasibility of delivering the full curriculum, the central office responded by significantly reducing the program, ultimately cutting it approximately by half. These changes were announced via memorandum one week before the 2022-2023 academic year, without input from world language teachers, leaving little time for implementation or adjustment. The reductions were implemented without collaborative planning and with a marked deterioration in the relationship between central administration and the elementary Spanish department.

Although these comments were not made publicly, they were conveyed to the department through union representation and the department head. The elementary Spanish program was reduced from five teaching positions to two full-time and one part-time position. The part-time elementary teacher traveled between an elementary and the high school, another teacher traveled between two elementary schools, and the remaining teacher was assigned exclusively to a single building with a reduced classroom teaching load due to a district-appointed digital research position responsible for investigating digital language-learning platforms. Kindergarten Spanish was eliminated entirely, although it continued to appear on the district website, and was promoted during informational school tours and Kindergarten Round-up events. Decision-making

regarding scheduling and program frequency remained largely centralized, with few opportunities for meaningful teacher input into program design.

The site selection for the study was both intentional and pragmatic. As the building in which I spent most of my professional time during the period of this study, it made logistical sense because it offered direct access, cultural familiarity, and practicality for data collection. While there were several opportunities to conduct the digital pilot in other elementary schools within the district, expanding the digital pilot to additional world language classrooms was met with resistance or disinterest. Although a broader pilot was desirable as it could have yielded additional relevant data, the site selection process ultimately narrowed to one elementary school as the only viable option. Furthermore, because this school was designated a Title I school, it provided an appropriate setting for collecting a variety of data across socioeconomic levels, and exploring potential connections between digital innovation, instructional equity, and departmental marginalization. Given the complexity of the organizational dynamics within the setting, it also provided an appropriate context for investigating how digital innovation influenced not only a diverse student population, but also professional identity and organizational change within a department that was often underfunded, overlooked, and increasingly excluded from decision making.

Furthermore, the district piloted a digital language learning platform at the fourth-grade level in the same school following the recent reconfiguration of elementary WL programming. This convergence of departmental changes created a highly relevant setting for examining the ripple effects of organizational change across grade levels,

departments, and school buildings. The complexity of the change process was further elevated by the simultaneous presence of teacher resistance and administrative support. These competing dynamics offered rich insight into the challenges and complexities of organizational change in K-12 settings.

The emergence of multiple contextual factors which included emerging digital initiatives, departmental reduction and marginalization, grade level and interdepartmental ripple effects, and complex leadership and staff dynamics, positioned this district as an information-rich and compelling setting for a qualitative case study of organizational change.

Participants

This study used a purposeful sampling strategy to select participants who had met specific criteria, and who were directly or indirectly involved in or affected by the proposal of a digital platform designed for elementary Spanish instruction. The goal was to include stakeholders who potentially offered insight into the implementation process, instructional and systemic shifts, and organizational responses at multiple levels within the district.

Individuals who provided information for this analysis included:

- World language teachers who were tasked with integrating digital lessons into their instructional practice. Their perspectives offered insight into teacher resistance, adoption, and professional identity during change.

- The kindergarten team who were directly and indirectly affected by the proposal of digital platform adoption, scheduling shifts, or cross departmental shifts generated by changes in world language instruction.
- The fourth grade pilot program, which consisted of teachers and students participating in the digital pilot, and whose feedback provided data regarding platform efficacy, teacher and student acceptance, and instructional feasibility.
- Building and central administrative leaders who oversaw the implementation, scheduling logistics, policy alignment, and professional development were included in data gathering as their input was essential for understanding leadership strategies, organizational direction, and systemic vision.

The inclusion criteria was determined by participants' proximity to the site, their professional role, and potential to contribute meaningful data to the central and sub-research questions. Participant willingness and availability during the data collection timeframe was also considered. In order to recruit participants, outreach was initiated via in-person and private email communications, using personal email accounts. The goal in reaching out in this manner was to reduce perceived professional pressure and increase the probability of ensuring participant comfort. Participants received formal invitations, and were provided a description of the study's purpose, and a consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation was entirely voluntary, and every

effort was made to ensure maximum confidentiality while minimizing, if not eliminating, professional pressure or coercion.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews, field notes and informal observations, document review, and reflexive journaling were the primary data collection instruments for this study. Each source was designed or selected to align with the central and sub-research questions, and to provide maximum value for triangulated understanding. For example, all four types of data (interviews, field notes and observations, documents, and journaling) were examined with the goal of understanding the change process from multiple perspectives. Data were cross checked and findings were confirmed by looking for consistencies and contradictions between sources with the desired result of uncovering deeper layers of understanding of the systemic change process.

Ideally, semi-structured interviews would be the primary data source. However, due to anticipated limitations in staff availability connected with concerns about professional exposure, formal interviews were limited. For those participants willing to engage in interviews, protocols were developed to ensure consistency and ethical transparency, while also allowing space for personal elaboration on unique experiences and perspectives. The conceptual model informed the question design, and themes of departmental status, resistance to change, leadership influence, and systemic change were maintained throughout. Participation was sought from world language teachers, administrators, kindergarten and fourth grade teachers. Given the anticipated reluctance of some participants, particularly world language and kindergarten teachers, the study

placed greater emphasis on document review, field observations, and researcher reflexivity to supplement the interview data.

Field Notes and Informal Observations

Field notes were collected and used to capture and document informal observations and details during meetings, relevant interactions, or site visits. Environmental factors, nonverbal communication, and organizational dynamics and nuances that may not have otherwise been captured during formal interviews or written documents, were recorded here.

Document Review

Document review was conducted and included examination of relevant school and district materials. For example, emails, schedules, digital program proposals, meeting notes, professional development materials, and any sort of communication related to the digital pilot were analyzed for clues regarding dynamics that contributed to the success or failure of the organizational changes under investigation. Additionally, these documents provided insight into how the digital initiative was framed, implemented, communicated, and supported or resisted across all organizational layers of the system.

Reflexive Journaling

Journaling was used as a tool to track and categorize evolving interpretations, emotional responses, and observable tensions related to departmental or district position. Additionally, these notes held me, as the researcher, accountable for any potential tendencies toward bias, and increased the probability of transparency during the analytical process. These notes provided an additional record of the details and nuances

in regard to how the digital initiative was framed, launched, communicated, and supported or resisted throughout the district.

Timeline of Data Collection

Interviews were conducted during the initial phase of the study, during and after school hours, based on participant availability. Document review occurred throughout the study, with additional documents incorporated as they became available. Informal observations and field notes were collected and reviewed during the latter phase of the study to document ongoing organizational developments associated with the implementation of the digital learning initiative.

Site Access and Permissions

Permission to conduct research at the site was requested through district protocol, and included administrative approval and IRB authorization. As an on-site and district employee, measures were taken to ensure that the researcher maintained confidentiality, ethical boundaries, and avoided all conflicts of interest.

Data Storage and Protection

All data, including any interview recordings and transcripts, field notes, documents, and written records of personal observations, were stored on a password protected device, and periodically backed up to an external hard drive. Identifying information was presented anonymously during note taking and transcription. Consent forms were stored separately in a secure, locked location. Only the primary researcher had access to the raw data.

These combined sources and procedures were designed to maximize confidentiality and enhance trustworthiness through triangulation, a nuanced understanding of the setting, and ethical integrity.

Data Analysis

This study followed both Yin's (1994) case study methodology and Stake's (1995) interpretive methods. The goal in employing this diverse approach was to use Yin's strategy to uncover patterns within embedded units, while also considering the context, participants' voice, and interpretation, which are hallmarks of Stake's methodology.

The first step in the data analysis process involved thematic coding to organize and interpret transcripts, field notes, and documents. Two approaches were used during code development. In the first, codes were generated from the conceptual model in expected areas such as resistance to change, relational dynamics, or systemic ripple effects. In the second approach, codes emerged inductively from the data. Unexpected patterns, phrases, or concerns that emerged while during data analysis were coded accordingly. This strategy ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the theoretical framework while remaining open to new or unexpected insights. Themes uncovered during the coding process were refined into broader categories through Yin's pattern matching strategy, which compares observations with predicted patterns based on the theoretical framework.

In addition to Yin's structured approach, participants' experiences and interpretations were analyzed using Stake's (1995) strategies. The researcher's

reflexivity, as well as any contradictions or silences that surfaced, were examined throughout the analysis. The researcher's field notes were analyzed along with other data sources in order to maintain transparency regarding the potential influence of the researcher's perspectives.

This study adapted a typological framework from Gerring and McDermott (2007) to classify embedded units according to their openness to change and level of technology integration. The framework was used to identify patterns across departments while examining observations, interview data, and documents. These patterns were then compared both within and across embedded units to facilitate cross-case analysis.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, several validation techniques were employed:

- Triangulation across data sources (interviews, field notes, and documents)
- Thick description to present a detailed and holistic view of each embedded unit
- Reflexive journaling to identify and examine potential researcher bias

When appropriate, opportunities for informal participant validation were incorporated to clarify interpretations and enhance the credibility of the findings. These strategies were intended to enhance the authenticity of the analysis and ensure that the findings accurately represented participants' experiences. Their use was particularly important given the researcher's dual role as researcher and district employee, as well as the interconnected nature of stakeholder relationships within the district.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and participants were notified of their right to decline or withdraw at any time without consequence. All facets of the study were conducted in accordance with established IRB protocols, and a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and safeguards was provided to participants prior to obtaining informed consent.

The primary goal of the study was to contribute meaningfully to the scholarly literature on organizational change management, particularly in the areas of digital innovation and world language education. To accomplish this, a thorough analysis of a district undergoing organizational change was conducted to generate rich qualitative data. Data were collected through interviews, field notes documenting interactions among organizational trends, and interpretations. To ensure confidentiality, identifying information was removed from all data sources. Pseudonyms were used throughout the report, electronic data were stored on a secure, password-protected device accessible only to the primary researcher, and consent forms were maintained separately in a locked location.

The research was designed specifically to incorporate multiple strategies to address credibility issues, transferability, and dependability. Credibility was reinforced through triangulation across data sources (interviews, field notes, and documents), clarification was sought from participants when feasible, and reflexive journaling was utilized to uncover and analyze researcher bias. These strategies helped ensure that the complexity of the organization and participants' experiences were accurately represented.

In an effort to offer an account that informs broader discussions of digital innovation and organizational change in K-12 settings, particularly within lower-status departments such as world languages, thick description was used throughout the results to provide readers with relevant contextual detail. This strategy allows readers to assess the degree to which the findings are transferable to similar settings.

An audit trail of data collection and decision making was maintained to support dependability and confirmability. Reflexive practices such as ongoing reflections, code refinement, and documentation of methodological choices (e.g., adjustment to data sources, coding strategies, or analytic focus based on evolving conditions), were recorded to support transparency and accountability. Maintaining this audit trail provided a basis for understanding how findings were generated and interpreted throughout the research and analysis process.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter examines the findings from a qualitative case study that investigated how one Midwestern school district responded to the proposal of digital innovation in its elementary world language (WL) program. Data were collected from interviews, transcribed meetings, and internal district documents, and used to analyze the organizational dynamics, stakeholder viewpoints, and underlying systemic pressures that influenced the implementation of a digital platform within the Spanish language program.

As described in Chapter Three, I used a blended approach of both inductive and deductive coding to thematically organize this chapter, and have maintained alignment with the central research question and the four sub-questions. These themes include administrative decision-making and communication, departmental status and marginalization, administrator-led innovation and educator resistance, and broader curricular and organizational trends. Quotations from stakeholder interviews and field notes have been integrated throughout the study to illustrate participants' experiences and the complexities and nuances inherent in the organizational change process. I paid particular attention to the tensions between central administration's top-down mandates, the WL department's efforts to respond to evolving expectations, and to the convergence of departmental marginalization with the district's drive for innovation and instructional equity. Chapter Four begins with a brief description of the site context and study's participants, followed by an introduction of the themes, excerpts from the data, and thick

description. The findings provide the foundation for the interpretation and discussion in Chapter Five.

To contextualize the findings, it is important to outline the structure of the dataset, and the analytic framework used to organize it. I analyzed data through iterative cycles of inductive and deductive coding, and as such, four major themes emerged during this process, and are organized accordingly. The framework used to classify and organize the findings follows the analytic rationale summarized by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (1994). Within this framework, categories drawn from theory and emergent patterns are integrated to form a comprehensive overview for analyzing data.

Theme 1: Administrative Decision-Making and Communication

To provide the case study with a comprehensive analysis of the district's approach to organizational change, this investigation begins with an examination of the decision-making process and associated communications of the proposed changes to the elementary WL program. The following account of these events provides depth, and ground the study in contextual history.

In 2013, in response to parental concern over academic rigor and allocation of district resources as they related to elementary Spanish instruction, the district engaged in an extensive collaboration with the local Intermediate School District (ISD), which included consultation with a WL curriculum specialist. Participants described the district's goal as demonstrating the academic legitimacy of the elementary Spanish program to families, particularly through frequent progress reporting and individualized feedback that made learning visible. This effort was rooted in a detailed, vertically

aligned K-5 curriculum that was housed in an instructional platform used to map learning objectives, resources, and assessments across grade levels, with the intention of preparing students to start middle school Spanish classes with a solid linguistic foundation. Given the fluctuating nature of instructional frequency and class duration over the years, the goal was proficiency in foundational skills and the acquisition of basic to intermediate competence, rather than fluency. The result was a vertically aligned program that introduced fundamental vocabulary and grammar concepts delivered through a spiral curriculum. This approach was chosen as it allowed students to revisit concepts across grades and units in incrementally more complex lessons. The collaboration, which lasted several months, involved multiple WL teachers, each of whom were offered a stipend for their involvement, and the ISD WL curriculum coordinator. The resulting curriculum included clearly defined learning objectives and multiple formative and summative assessments throughout the year to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.

In the fall of 2015, a survey regarding the elementary Spanish program was sent to all parents, districtwide. It consisted of approximately ten survey questions, all of which centered on the academic value and rigor of the elementary Spanish program, and its significance in parental decision-making when determining where to enroll students for their primary academic experience. To provide further background, there are competitively ranked neighboring public school districts, and internationally recognized, private day and boarding schools nearby. Therefore, the district recognized the broad array of options available to parents, many of whom were practicing professionals and industry leaders at the top of the socio-economic scale, who held academic achievement

as a central focus for their students. The resulting survey data are unavailable. However, the elementary Spanish program remained unchanged for the next several years, suggesting that the program continued to receive sufficient support to remain in place.

In 2017, in response to WL departmental struggles and individual teacher complaints regarding imbalanced schedules and demanding curricular expectations, a WL administrator approached a building administrator to suggest a review and potential iteration of the schedule and curriculum. For further context, the elementary Spanish schedules included between eight to ten classes per day, with minimal, if any, breaks or prep time between classes. The curriculum included 6 pre and post summative assessments per year, across grades K - 4, for student bodies of 350 - 600 per building. District expectations were for teachers to submit official grades and lengthy, individualized report card comments for students, twice per year, in addition to 6 personalized progress reports throughout the academic year.

Teacher comments during departmental meetings throughout this period of time reflected the sentiment that a disproportionately large amount of their time was devoted to test preparation, grading, and reporting, which resulted in inadequate time not only for preparation of instructional delivery, but for establishing teacher-student relationships, a critical component of education that is largely regarded as a cornerstone of successful teaching and student achievement. Furthermore, as a language acquisition class, the academic rigor of the program was high, unlike other unified arts classes such as Gym, Music, or Art. Successful linguistic performance was dependent on students' ability to build upon grammar and vocabulary structures learned in previous lessons, something

that was challenging given the amount of days between each class period, and exacerbated by missed classes due to holidays, snow days, school assemblies, etc.

The principal's response to the WL administrator's suggestion indicated the program was already a vulnerable topic during district leadership meetings, and any suggestion of revision could potentially lead central administration to reduce or eliminate the program. The WL administrator, at that point, advised the WL team to use digital platforms meant for assessment as a time-saving measure, but did not pursue further curricular or schedule changes. Subsequent planning and professional development meetings were spent on the exploration and demonstration of such platforms. WL teachers shared their experiences using digital platforms not only for assessment, but also for language acquisition activities and games.

While the team initially supported this approach, over time, some members independently shared concerns with central administration regarding scheduling demands and student reporting requirements. Feedback from one WL administrator who was also a building administrator, suggested these concerns were not positively received at the district level. Within that same academic year, normal programming was disrupted by the Covid19 shutdown, at which point the focus shifted to the adaptation of district-wide online instructional delivery. All general education as well as Unified Arts (UA) teachers focused on developing digital curricula to engage students and provide as little disruption as possible for students during the pandemic. Much of the professional time during this process was spent not only on developing the curricula, however, becoming technologically literate in order to effectively deliver rich and engaging lessons.

Interview data revealed that during this period, teachers felt that attendance during UA classes was presented as optional. This dynamic deepened the disconnect between UA departments, building level, and central administration, and left UA teachers feeling unseen and unsupported.

Following the return to in-person instruction, district leadership communicated that elementary Spanish instructional time in grades 1-4 would be reduced by half, and that kindergarten Spanish programming would be eliminated entirely. This decision was not announced solely to the WL department, but in an email addressed to all district elementary teachers approximately one week prior to the beginning of the school year, leaving limited time for staff to respond or adjust. This communication was disseminated via a district-wide memo shortly before the start of the academic year, with no prior indication that such changes were under consideration.

During a district-wide meeting following the announcement, questions were raised regarding the feasibility of maintaining existing curricular expectations given the reduction in instructional time. Specifically, concerns centered on the continued use of report cards aligned to a six-unit curriculum, despite the reduced schedule. Responses from leadership did not provide clear guidance on how to reconcile these discrepancies, and no immediate structural supports were provided. As a result, the misalignment between instructional time and reporting expectations persisted for an extended period.

In response to the timing of the communication and the lack of clear guidance, teachers expressed concern and dismay over the abrupt change and the absence of structured support during the transition. Additionally, two elementary Spanish teachers

were reassigned to middle school world language and elementary general education positions within the district, reducing the team to 2 full time and 1 part time position.

Simultaneously, a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) program was introduced. In-district teachers were offered and reassigned to teach the program. At the time of implementation, participants noted that the STEAM program was in an early stage of development and did not yet have a fully articulated district-wide curriculum, assessment framework, or formalized professional training. In contrast, expectations for WL instruction remained aligned with an established curriculum and assessment structure. Despite these conditions, the remaining elementary WL team members worked quickly to navigate inconsistencies such as report cards that still reflected learning targets from the previous schedule of twice-weekly instruction, even though instructional time had been reduced by half.

The combination of unanticipated decision-making and the abrupt communication style relative to the reduction of Spanish instruction contributed to a prevailing sense of distrust among some members of the K-12 WL department toward leadership. The lack of forewarning not only disrupted instructional planning, but also led to the feeling that professional status and agency within the school community had been degraded. A prevailing sense of marginalization and skepticism toward central administration was increasing, and it was within this ruptured environment, characterized by strained relationships and diminished confidence in leadership, that the digital platform initiative was introduced.

Theme 2: Departmental Status and Marginalization

The confluence of the sudden reduction of a developed WL program, and one in which the design included student outcome evaluation, and the introduction and full support of a STEAM program that was still in the early stages of development, contributed to an overall sense of inequity within the UA department. Although data did not reflect any blame had been placed on the STEAM department, the close proximity of the divergent approaches to organizational change positioned the two departments in a de facto relationship of comparison, and further exacerbated the existing divide between teachers and central administration.

Furthermore, the unilateral and opaque decision to reorganize the UA department significantly diminished WL teacher morale. Participants described a dissonance between external messaging and internal program realities. Amidst reductions to instructional minutes and the elimination of kindergarten Spanish, the district continued to market the elementary WL program in digital materials and parent informational and exploratory sessions as though no fundamental programmatic changes had occurred. New kindergarten families were told their children would receive Spanish instruction during informational parent meetings, and during district tours prospective parents were told that the Spanish classes they were informally observing met twice per week, starting in kindergarten. WL teachers described attempts to raise concern over this incongruity were met with silence. This further exacerbated the disconnect between portrayal and reality, and amplified feelings of marginalization. Educators interpreted this to mean that their work was being symbolically showcased for district image and marketing purposes, while

their professional expertise and growing instructional reductions were insufficiently acknowledged. Attempts at organizational sensemaking through private conversation, during staff meetings, or in writing, were frequently unresolved.

It is noteworthy that interview and field note data consistently reflected that STEAM teaching staff were regarded respectfully, particularly given that teachers in the newly formed program were tasked with developing curriculum, direction, and an ongoing assessment of the needs of the program. One participant noted that a more measured and transparent approach, and collaboratively planned transition would not only have benefited existing UA programs, but the newly formed STEAM program as well. Field notes indicated that one participant stated they were “...building the airplane while flying it, without a map.” An atmosphere of spontaneity and inequity described here reflects discrepancies in how the district managed, communicated, and publicly framed program rollout, rather than a narrative of teacher effort or instructional value.

A Perceived Hierarchy: World Language as "Lower Status"

A dominant theme emerged across participant interviews, WL teachers consistently described the development of the STEAM program and the diminishment of the Spanish program as an indication of an institutional hierarchy within the UA department. It was teachers’ perception that STEAM was associated with innovation and district prestige, while Spanish was increasingly framed as an expendable, “filler” class that provided prep time for general education teachers. One teacher described the prevailing sociocultural context as influential in these dynamics: “As a society, we don’t value language learning. Superintendents want data and money. STEAM gets that

attention. Spanish doesn't." Another WL teacher described watching STEAM receive staffing, resources, and administrative support while WL faced cuts or potential outsourcing: "It's like STEAM is innovation and Spanish is an inconvenience. That's how it feels."

These perceptions were validated by an administrator's claim that since Spanish/English bilingual speakers were not prevalent in the Midwest, any WL programming would be academically insufficient, and therefore, not an economical use of time. That is to say, there was a district perception that introductory WL classes at the elementary level would yield a low return on investment (ROI). Notably, similar ROI expectations were not applied to other UA subjects. For example, students in general music classes were not expected to demonstrate fluency in music theory, nor were art students required to attain professional-level mastery of art techniques and processes.

These perceptions were reinforced by administrative decisions aligned with STEAM's expansion and the reduction of the WL program, including instructional minutes reduced by half, a shift in teacher placement that resulted in imbalanced scheduling loads - some teachers were assigned heavy teaching loads at multiple buildings, while others had noticeably lighter schedules within one building, and the exploration of kindergarten push-in models delivered by non-district WL teachers or via asynchronous digital tools. Several WL educators described feeling disempowered by this trend within the system, citing shifts in how colleagues and administrators considered the legitimacy of their work: "I just feel...invisible."

As the WL department struggled to restabilize following a series of unexpected

changes, along with the return to in-person teaching after the COVID 19 lockdown, and other factors such as unclear or absent communication and the lack of collaboration or support, a shift in the environment occurred in which pressure began shifting inward. Consistent with research on marginalized groups within school settings, teachers who experience instability and diminishing status often direct frustration toward each other rather than toward the systemic forces influencing the unwanted changes. Organizational change intensifies behavioral responses and group pressure among colleagues (Borges & Quintas, 2020); interpersonal relationships and interaction patterns can magnify resistance, strain previously collaborative alliances, and create disruption among long-standing working relationships (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013).

Theme 3: Educator Led Innovation and Resistance

As teachers struggled to find stability following the reductions to the Spanish program, one WL administrator assumed responsibility for researching potential digital instructional strategies intended to support language acquisition. As this work expanded, the district formalized the effort by creating a part-time position dedicated to researching and evaluating digital instructional platforms. The researcher assumed this role while continuing to serve as a world language teacher and department chair. Field note data indicated that many WL teachers viewed this initiative with distrust and skepticism, and expressed concerns regarding the district's motives and whether the introduction of a digital platform aligned with the best interest of the WL program. Attempts by the WL administrator to make collaborative decisions regarding a potential digital platform were met with a prevailing sense of dismissiveness. Furthermore, teachers who felt overloaded

were absent from the classroom more frequently, in an effort to mitigate the strain of their schedules. The changes in the WL department were beginning to have a detrimental impact on student learning, particularly at certain schools where teachers shouldered the imbalance.

The task at hand, however, was to find a digital platform that would bolster the program, regardless of teacher buy-in. Foremost among the district's digital platform initiative ideas was the proposal of a kindergarten push-in program (KPIP) for Spanish instruction. Although KPIP was presented as an opportunity to engage in innovative learning, it quickly revealed deep relational, procedural, and structural tensions within the elementary instructional system. Patterns of conflicting and inconsistent administrative guidance, sporadic collaboration, and resistance from kindergarten teams influenced how WL teachers approached the pilot. Field note data revealed that skepticism within the WL department existed from the outset, and internal departmental tensions contributed to the overall sense of uncertainty and distrust that revolved around the initiative. That momentum extended beyond the WL department and influenced other UA teams, kindergarten teachers districtwide, and additional instructional staff groups.

Kindergarten Push-In Pilot

The KPIP model was introduced during significant instructional and professional upheaval as two of the four middle schools had recently closed and consolidated, and many teachers were transferred to different teaching posts within the district. Additionally, as stated above, the elementary WL schedule was reduced by half, and the kindergarten Spanish program was eliminated. The KPIP was proposed by district

leadership as an innovative model to offer equitable WL instructional opportunities across the district and elementary grade levels.

While the KPIP was offered as an opportunity rather than a directive, participants described the initial premise as interesting but too vague. Details such as instructional allocation, role boundaries, curricular alignment in the kindergarten as well as the WL departments, and implications for short and long term staffing were not clearly outlined. Given the context of recent program reductions and level of transparency, this obscurity made an irreversible impact on both WL and kindergarten teachers, and contributed to an overall atmosphere of confusion and distrust about the purpose and potential consequences of participation.

In fall of 2023, a WL administrator introduced the KPIP model to kindergarten (K) staff and invited teachers to participate in a pilot. Two kindergarten teachers expressed strong interest and agreed to be part of the pilot. Subsequent to this initial agreement, the K teachers met to collaborate with the WL administrator to explore the integration of Spanish instruction into existing classroom curriculum and routines. The pilot was designed as a push-in model, rather than as a stand alone special as was previously offered. Of the two possible pilots, the first included live instruction featuring interaction between a remote instructor who would connect with students through synchronous video instruction, and lead them through short lessons, stories, opportunities for verbal practice, and quick assessments through personal iPad accounts. The second option included a pre-set curriculum that included asynchronous video lessons, and

accompanying workbook and iPad lessons and activities. This platform could be accessed at home as well as in the classroom.

Although two K teachers initially agreed to participate, the KPIP was not implemented. As collaborative planning discussions continued, concerns grew among the K team regarding workload, role expectations, and instructional time. One participating K teacher expressed continued interest in pursuing the pilot, while another requested a meeting with the WL administrator to express dissent. During this meeting, misconceptions regarding the format of the push-in model and K teaching involvement were asserted and remained unresolved despite attempts at clarification.

Prior to the planned pilot implementation, K teachers within the participating building contacted colleagues across the district and collectively sought union guidance. Once this escalation occurred, the building administration confirmed that the pilot would not proceed. As a result, the pilot was discontinued prior to implementation.

Participants described how resistance to the KPIP was a reaction to institutional pressure rather than a rejection of an opportunity to engage in innovation. The vague communication, abrupt, top-down decision-making, increasing workload in other subject areas such as mathematics, and sense of loss regarding professional agency influenced how the pilot was received. The pilot became associated with an amplification of duties, role confusion, and further degradation of professional autonomy. Resistance served as self-protection in a context of uncertainty, rather than an outright rejection of digital innovation. In contrast to the kindergarten pilot, the fourth-grade digital pilot generated minimal response from stakeholders. As it did not significantly alter existing schedules,

roles, or instructional routines, it remained largely unnoticed within the broader organizational context. This contrast suggests that stakeholder response was driven less by the innovation itself and more by the degree to which it disrupted established systems.

Following the discontinuation of the pilot, participants described some strain in professional interactions between the WL personnel and the building K team. This was characterized by avoidance, reduced communication, and presumptive mistrust. In addition to concerns raised by the K team, skepticism toward the KPIP and its supporting research, emerged from other instructional staff whose teaching assignments were not directly affected by the proposed model. During WL departmental meetings and informal interactions, questions were raised that consistently challenged the legitimacy of the pilot, with some educators publicly characterizing it as unproductive and inefficient. These critiques circulated through informal professional networks and contributed to a more pervasive climate of doubt surrounding elementary WL digital innovation, despite the absence of direct impact on those educators' instructional responsibilities, schedules, or workloads.

Persistence of Resistance Beyond the KPIP

This pattern of resistance was not limited to the KPIP pilot itself. Proposed opportunities for cross K-12 collaboration within the WL department which included shared professional development intended to align curricula and instructional practices, were similarly dismissed during departmental conversations.

For example, another proposed initiative focused on amplifying the visibility of the WL program within the district. This approach was described as “living loudly,” and

was intended to highlight student learning and program presence to families, central administration, and the broader school community. Although secondary-level WL educators expressed agreement with the need and value of such an initiative during K-12 departmental meetings, implementation during elementary WL meetings did not materialize. Suggested actions, which were designed to be flexible, low effort, and easily integrated into existing practice, were met with interactional avoidance including deflection, hesitancy, topic shifting, and a lack of explicit response during departmental discussions. Despite the perceived feasibility of this initiative, it resulted in a lack of follow-through.

Other efforts to increase program visibility included an additional initiative involving the creation of a WL focused social media presence. This approach was modeled after existing district accounts, including those maintained by Music and STEAM staff, and service dog handlers, which had garnered positive feedback from families. The WL team started the account with the intention of highlighting student learning and cultivating an informal connection with the school community. However, the initiative was met with mixed response during departmental meetings: some team members embraced the idea, and put forth effort to create interesting posts, while others immediately dismissed the idea, and expressed public criticism of the platform and toward the educator responsible for managing it. As a result, the account was not sustained, and the initiative was discontinued.

A related proposal involved strengthening communication with district families by issuing a brief, monthly WL newsletter. The purpose of this initiative was to make

families aware of instructional goals, reinforce the value of the program, and increase visibility of WL learning opportunities across the district. To minimize the burden, the WL administrator offered to draft the newsletter in full, with the option for colleagues to distribute it as drafted, or personalize it as they chose. Despite the low-effort nature of the proposal and its alignment with common best practices, the initiative was not adopted. While there was no formal rejection, the initiative was met with disengagement, and subject changing.

Additional resistance surfaced in response to WL administrators' attempts at instructional alignment across grade levels. One initiative drew on a previously successful instructional strategy involving short poems that corresponded to elementary WL learning targets. The WL administrator requested the inclusion of middle school educators to support continuity and vertical alignment during the transition from fifth grade to middle school. Despite documented effectiveness and focus on vertical articulation, which held the distinct possibility of increasing successful outcomes for middle school students and teachers alike, the proposal was dismissed during departmental discussions, which sustained any meaningful consideration. The rejection of this initiative further illustrated how efforts to promote collaboration between elementary and secondary WL departments were constrained.

In addition to interactional avoidance during meetings, resistance also occurred through restricted access to instructional information. The WL administrator requested access to middle school curriculum materials with an intention to support vertical alignment. The request was met with the response that a middle school curriculum was

non-existent, and the request was inappropriate without additional administrative support in terms of release-time to develop a formalized course of study. This response effectively shifted the conversation from an instructional information request to an assertion of work overload. However, in contrast, the same request was also met with immediate sharing by another middle school educator. While the shared curriculum was broad in scope, it clearly outlined instructional goals and expectations for all middle school Spanish courses. The discrepancy between responses to the same request illustrated how access to information necessary for collaboration was permitted only by individual discretion rather than departmental cohesion or policy.

In an effort to better understand how WL instruction was offered, distributed across grade levels, and organized within the school day, teacher schedules were requested from elementary and middle school educators. The request was not uniformly met with cooperation as some in the department chose a similar pattern of silence and lack of follow-up. The request was framed as informational and intended to support coordination and strengthening of the WL department, rather than evaluation of individual teachers' professional duties. However, most schedules were not provided. The absence of follow-through further constrained any opportunities for alignment, which reinforced other departmental patterns of restricted access to routine instructional materials and planning documents.

Collectively, these examples indicate that resistance extended beyond the district's sweeping reforms of the UA department, and included opposition to small initiatives aimed at collaboration and support of the WL department. In contrast to the

district's changes which included reduction or elimination of some programs, and the sudden introduction of others, the small, departmental, research-based initiatives were related to visibility, communication, instructional alignment, and digital innovation. However, across both contexts, suggestions of change were met with interactional avoidance, silence, selective gatekeeping, limited follow-through, and in some cases, overt rejection.

Contrast with 9-12 AI Digital Tool Acceptance

Participants described notably different responses to the proposal of digital tools at the secondary level. In grades 9-12, digital and AI platforms were optional, teacher-selected, and although all K-12 digital platform explorations were framed as extended learning opportunities, the 9-12 WL teachers did not experience the same professional anxiety as their K-8 counterparts. The upper level WL teachers did not operate under the presumption that new digital platforms would serve as replacements for instructional time or staffing.

Field notes from an initial K-12 WL meeting, indicated a markedly different tone among upper secondary teachers. Discussions at the 9-12 level reflected that digital and AI tools were considered time-saving and optional tools, and were described as potential “game changers.” 9-12 teachers expressed excitement about opportunities for students to practice independent speaking that would generate immediate feedback, and could be used after school hours or during school when students finished their in-class assignments. The digital tools were described as an opportunity to engage in transformative language acquisition, and there was overall excitement about the

proficiency levels students could potentially reach using such supports. This enthusiasm contrasted sharply with the resistance expressed by elementary and middle school teachers during subsequent department meetings. At the K-8 level, digital initiatives were equated with an assault to program legitimacy, program survival, and career stability.

Resistance was also apparent during discussions related to digital innovation. During a K-8 WL department meeting, the WL administrator invited colleagues to consider piloting a digital artificial intelligence instructional program that had generated enthusiasm among WL teachers during an earlier K-12 meeting. Despite prior interest, the proposal was met with minimal engagement, as most participants remained silent. One response asserted that district funding was unlikely, and devalued the merits of extended learning opportunities through AI as detrimental to students, noting it was “sad” that students had felt more comfortable verbalizing the language to an AI bot, than in front of their classmates during a previous pilot of another AI tool. Although a counter-argument was presented affirming AI use as a potential springboard to peer-to-peer conversations once learners gained comfort with language or grammatical concepts, the previous assertion that any initial practice using AI was deficient effectively closed the discussion before substantive pedagogical or implementation considerations could be explored. At that same meeting, a subsequent proposal to develop and pilot an internally designed AI tool incorporating the existing curriculum was similarly challenged, and no collaborative exploration or follow-up occurred.

WL digital initiatives within this environment became entangled with multiple organizational concerns such as teacher workload, professional agency, program

legitimacy and stability. This overview of organizational and situational dynamics reveals how resistance against the prospect of innovation prevailed over engagement, despite initial interest in technological advancement and the potential to facilitate language acquisition and instructional improvement.

While Theme 3 has illustrated how educator-led innovation resulted in resistance through formal and informal discourse, premature and inaccurate sensemaking, and withdrawal of practitioner consent, these dynamics did not occur in isolation. Data drawn from participant interviews and field notes suggests that responses to the KPIP and related initiatives were shaped by changing curricular priorities, institutional narratives, and broader educational trends that extended beyond the WL department. To better understand these findings within the district's wider context, Theme 4 examines the broader curricular, regional, and social dynamic, as well as organizational trends that influenced how innovation within WL instruction was perceived, supported, and valued districtwide.

Theme 4: Broader Curricular and Organizational Trends

While themes 1-3 focused on district-wide organizational dynamics and educator responses to innovation, theme 4 situates these findings within broader curricular, institutional, and regional contexts that influence the decision making process in the district. Theme 4 examines how broader curricular, institutional, and regional dynamics influenced WL instruction and the perception and support of proposed innovations. These forces include fluctuating narratives, market pressures related to school choice, and broader sociocultural and regional assumptions about the value of WL education.

Participants consistently described a district narrative that prioritized certain subject areas as representative of innovation and prestige. For example, multiple participants mentioned the district's development of the STEAM program as evidence of what was framed by the district as forward-thinking and in alignment with 21st century skills, while simultaneously reducing and restructuring the WL program. In a district-wide meeting addressing UA programming, central administrators characterized STEAM as the primary "new" initiative, stressing its expansion across grade levels, including efforts to push the program "as far down as kindergarten as possible."

In contrast, WL instruction was described as a program with flexible instructional time that could be adjusted to accommodate scheduling and staffing constraints, with instructional frequency and duration determined by scheduling limits rather than pedagogical best practices.

Regional and Market Pressures

Field notes also reflected that central administration decision making was influenced by regional and market educational expectations. Although the district had historically enjoyed decades of top-tier educational status, while being situated in an increasingly competitive environment within the Midwest, where school of choice, elite private institutions and high performing public schools were present and actively recruiting students from neighboring districts. Additionally, some families opted to transfer to parochial schools during the Covid lockdown, as many opted out of remote instruction. Many of those families did not return when public schools reopened. In this landscape, participants described heightened awareness of parental perceptions,

enrollment trends, and community visibility. Curricular options conveyed innovation, academic rigor, and signaled an environment that prepared students to engage in a globalized and technologically advanced world.

At the same time, participants noted that the district was navigating a growing need to accommodate an influx of students needing foundational preparedness such as English language and related services. Field notes indicated that some of these students arrived with complex social-emotional needs such as experiences of displacement and other trauma related events that emerged in the classroom. For example, field notes describe classroom challenges associated with students whose families had experienced displacement or instability prior to entering the district. Participants noted that some students exhibited reluctance to participate in classroom routines, difficulty engaging in structured activities, or behaviors that differed from typical expectations within the classroom setting. In several instances, educators noted students with histories of disrupted schooling or residence in regions affected by armed conflict. These experiences appear to have influenced student-teacher and peer-to-peer interaction within the classroom, as well as social-emotional regulation. Participants described needing additional instructional, relational, and emotional support to manage these challenges, as they often occurred in classrooms already facing issues such as language development and foundational academic needs.

Participants also referenced challenges related to differing expectations of classroom norms, particularly in relation to authority and participation. These differences were discussed in meetings in terms of requiring increased cultural responsiveness and

professional support for educators, rather than behavioral or disciplinary management concerns.

These coinciding events created a synergistic effect that stretched district and administrative resources beyond where they had previously been, which left administrators and staff hastening to reorganize in an effort to accommodate every student. The struggle to address competing priorities influenced how programs were introduced, supported and sustained. Within this context, WL priorities were described as diminishing in relevance.

Implications for WL Innovation & Marginalization

Taking a holistic view of the findings across Themes 1 through 4, it is evident that the confluence of influential factors may have overshadowed the merits of the proposed digital innovation in the elementary WL department. Administrative decision-making styles, historical marginalization, changing demographics, and market pressures jointly created an atmosphere that influenced how innovation was perceived and accepted. Specifically, participants described a shifting organizational landscape in which WL innovation was considered flexible or supplemental rather than central to maintaining relevance with current educational technologies. District scheduling logistics, broader educational trends, and market-based considerations drove changes in world language minutes and frequency, rather than being guided primarily by best practices and language pedagogy. Even with the contributions of extensive WL curriculum design and professional expertise, World Language was ultimately deprioritized, which allowed room for initiatives that aligned with current educational and market-based trends.

While each theme has been analyzed independently, the findings suggest a great degree of interconnectedness among administrative decision-making, program positioning, and educator response to innovation. Communication approaches and information dissemination, in particular, appeared to function as a connector across themes, which may have influenced perceptions of marginalization as well as interpretations of the proposed digital initiatives. Similarly, program status shifts contributed to the environment within which innovation was considered. These dynamics overlapped and therefore suggest that educator responses were not formed in isolation, but were shaped by a broader complex organizational system characterized by multiple factors operating simultaneously.

This chapter presented and organized the findings from a qualitative case study that examined a Midwestern school district's response to the proposal of digital innovation within an elementary WL department. Four themes emerged through in-depth analysis: administrative decision making and communication, departmental status and marginalization, administrator-led innovation and educator resistance, and broader curricular and organizational trends. Collectively, these findings illustrate how educators' responses to innovation were influenced by organizational change processes, institutional narratives, and cultural and situational pressures. Chapter Five expands on and interprets this analysis to draw implications for those leading through organizational change.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine organizational decision-making, departmental status and positioning, and educator responses to digital innovation within a midwestern public school district's elementary world language program. This chapter interprets the findings relative to relevant theoretical frameworks and examines them within broader contexts of educational change, stakeholder influence, and curricular prioritization, with particular attention to communication practices, professional agency, and program positioning.

Chapter 5 is organized into five sections. The first section summarizes the purpose of the study. The second section presents a summary and interpretation of the findings, highlights the key findings that emerged from the data, and analyzes what they suggest about the organizational dynamics under study. This section also connects the findings of this study to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and considers how the results support, extend or challenge existing research. The limitations of the study are discussed in the third section. The fourth section provides an overview of directions for future research. The final section concludes with reflections on the study's contributions to the field.

Discussion of Findings

Administrative Decision-Making and Communication

Over the previous two decades, the district made a series of shifts in its approach to the elementary world language curriculum. In the early 2010s, district leadership implemented a structured program grounded in academic rigor, a clearly articulated assessment framework, and a format for consistent teacher-parent communication. In the mid-2010s, parental feedback was solicited to assess perceptions of the elementary Spanish program's value and its influence on school choice decisions.

By the early 2020's, however, the district abruptly reduced Spanish instructional time by half in grades 1-4, and eliminated the kindergarten program entirely. These changes represented a stark departure from earlier investments in curriculum development and assessment, and were implemented with limited advance notice or opportunities for teachers to contribute to the decision making process.

The transition from a collaboratively developed, assessment-driven Elementary WL program to a diminished model implemented without forewarning, reflected a change in how decisions were made and communicated. Reductions were experienced as abrupt and unilaterally delivered, which affected teachers' level of trust in leadership credibility and institutional stability. As a result, the manner in which the policy changes were carried out was as consequential as the changes themselves.

According to Institutional theory, organizations, in an attempt to maintain legitimacy, often respond to shifting external expectations by adopting or modifying programs (Scott, 2014; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Within school districts, such shifts may

occur rapidly in response to community priorities or broader educational trends. Barnett and Carroll (1995), however, posit that the organizational change process as well as the change itself, are distinct, yet both are influential to organizational outcomes. In this case study, the district's decision to restructure the elementary WL program may have reflected evolving institutional dynamics, however, the procedural components of the decision, limited collaborative dialogue and abrupt communication, negatively influenced internal reactions.

From a complexity perspective (Rowan & Miller, 2007; Ganon-Shilon & Chen, 2019), schools operate as interconnected systems where stakeholder interpretation affects implementation. Actions of leaders reverberate through informal networks, and influence trust, morale, and amenability to reform. The findings suggest that the district's approach to communication and collaboration became a driving force in shaping organizational climate, which reinforces the importance of process in educational change efforts.

Additional developments within the district that occurred during the period of this study reflected similar communication dynamics. In a separate issue involving the relocation of an alternative education program, students were informed of the change during the school day, however, parents received communication later. This resulted in confusion and strong emotional responses that led to organized resistance efforts such as petitions. This event was not a primary focus of data collection, however, it aligns with the patterns identified which further illustrates how the timing and sequencing of information dissemination affect stakeholder perception and response to organizational change.

Departmental Status and Marginalization

Theme 2 findings indicate that World Language (WL) educators experienced a sense of marginalization not only within the district at large, but specifically within the Unified Arts (UA) department. This sentiment developed gradually over a period of years and intensified during a series of sudden organizational changes. Multiple participants described the juxtaposition of the expansion of the STEAM program alongside reductions to the elementary WL program as creating an imbalance in how district priorities were interpreted. The evolution of these changes occurred amid unilateral and insufficiently transparent decision-making processes and communication. At the same time, district communications did not announce the reductions to families, and continued to portray the WL program as a stable program, which contributed to a growing disconnect between public messaging and internal realities. Teachers described attempts to raise concerns through various channels as largely unacknowledged. While no fault was attributed to the STEAM program itself, the disproportionate allocation of resources and public marketing of the programs contributed to perceptions of inequity in how UA programs were valued.

The findings suggest that perceptions of marginalization were influenced less by the program reductions themselves and more by the communicative and structural climate within which those changes were enacted. The simultaneous expansion of the STEAM program and reduction of the WL program implicitly signaled shifting priorities within the elementary staff and curricular contexts. Although no explicit statements were reported regarding the value of individual UA programs, participants interpreted the shift

in resource allocation, administrative attention, and public visibility as indicators of institutional value.

Furthermore, the absence of transparency during this time of fundamental change coupled with communications distributed to district families that did not acknowledge the WL program reduction, contributed to an erosion of trust and professional agency, which reinforced perceptions that WL had been relegated to a peripheral role within the UA department.

The evolution of a perceived hierarchy within the UA department illustrates how organizational value is often inferred through patterns of resource investment and visibility, rather than formal declarations. When one program is publicly promoted, expanded and resourced, while another within the same department is reduced, reorganized, and excluded from critical conversations, participants may reasonably conclude that these patterns are indicative of institutional significance. In this case study, WL educators' experiences suggest that symbolic signals were equivalent to formal district decisions influencing professional identity and belonging.

Theme 2 findings concur with institutional theory's claim that organizational value is often influenced by dominant cultural narratives alongside internal instructional factors. Decisions in educational environments are not made in isolation, but are often influenced by broader cultural or regional narratives such as state policy, federal initiatives, public opinion, parental expectations, or regional competition. By aligning with dominant narratives, institutions signal innovation, economic relevance, or competitive advantage.

In this context, the expansion of STEAM and the simultaneous reduction of WL can be interpreted as an organizational response consistent with the historic reputation the district enjoyed as being progressive and driven by innovation. Certain academic areas, according to Labaree and Hargreaves & Shirley, are symbolically associated with forward-thinking and institutional prestige. Institutional theory posits that such shifts do not need explicit declarations, rather, are communicated through patterns of investment, visibility, and administrative attention.

Resource dependence theory further illustrates how programs that are perceived as on the periphery of relevance in terms of institutional survival, experience vulnerability when the organization is fiscally or otherwise constrained within the context of resources. When educational leaders respond to external influences such as enrollment trends, families, or regional competition, decisions regarding securing legitimacy and stability may advance in importance. Through this lens, WL reductions can be interpreted as strategic reallocations prompted by perceived resource scarcity or stakeholder influence, rather than efforts to maintain instructional improvements and relevancy.

Lastly, prior research on organizational change indicates that status shifts within departments are rarely perceived with neutrality. Battilana and Casciaro (2013) discuss how hierarchical repositioning within departments and access to resources affect how stakeholders interpret reform initiatives. In that same vein, Borges and Quintas (2020) suggest that perceived marginalization can intensify relational strain when organizations undergo change. The findings in this study further illustrate these perspectives by

suggesting that discrepancies in how UA programs were funded, promoted, and supported created a perception in hierarchy within the department. Although there were no explicit statements that WL was less valued, these patterns affected how teachers interpreted their professional status and sense of belonging within the broader Unified Arts department.

Educator-Led Innovation and Resistance

A key takeaway from this study was that educator responses to the proposed KPIP pilot were frequently interpreted as resistance to digital innovation, however, the data indicated that responses may have been indicative of a complex interplay of concerns regarding instructional integrity and professional stability. The initiative was introduced as an opportunity to increase access to Spanish learning opportunities and integrate digital language platforms into existing instruction; however, several educators expressed hesitation regarding the intentions behind the initiative as it was presented by central administration, as well as the structure and implications of the model. These reactions occurred within a wider perspective in which the elementary WL program had recently experienced substantial reductions in instructional time, the elimination of kindergarten Spanish, and other organizational changes that diminished the department's role within the district. Consequently, the KPIP initiative was interpreted by some educators not merely as an opportunity for innovation, but as an initiative that could potentially reconfigure or further diminish, or even eliminate the existing program and instructional practices.

Educator resistance was primarily a response to uncertainty, perceived instability, and concerns regarding professional roles, rather than a rejection of digital innovation. Furthermore, the timing of the KPIP proposal played a significant role in teachers' interpretations. Given the initiative followed significant program reductions and perceived diminishment in departmental status, proposed changes were viewed through a lens of caution, fear, and skepticism, rather than enthusiasm for innovative program design. Within this context, hesitancy observed among stakeholders along with scrutiny about workload, pedagogical integrity, and the potentially evolving role of proposed digital platforms reflected efforts to protect both the program and professional roles from further erosion. For teachers who had invested significant time and resources in developing existing world language programming, the instinct to protect their investment was understandable.

Notably, the data indicate that teachers were not resolutely opposed to digital tools as several described independently incorporating digital resources into their teaching practices. Professional agency, it appeared, was the differentiating factor as the teacher-led introduction of digital tools were universally viewed positively, whereas administrator-led digital initiatives during organizational change were met with skepticism.

Additionally, these findings not only highlight, but extend Battilana and Casciaro's (2013) work on resistance, in particular their work pertaining to the role of relational dynamics and its impact on responses to change. While their model underscores the importance of strong ties in influencing a positive outcome, this study

suggests that stable communication patterns within the organization may function as a predictor that is ultimately supportive of a prevailing sense of trust or skepticism. In this case, the absence of transparent communication appeared to compromise relational trust, which was an instrumental component of how stakeholders interpreted the proposed change.

The findings from this study align with previous research on educator responses to organizational restructuring in academic settings. Institutional theory indicates that when stakeholders experience exclusion from the decision-making process, rather than executing changes with fidelity, the resulting behavior is often superficial compliance or resistance (Sarason, 1996; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). These dynamics are mirrored in this study relative to the documented educator skepticism toward digital platform implementation. Although adoption was not categorically denied, teachers appeared to be concerned over the implementation of the digital initiative and the potential impact on the WL program and teachers' professional roles. These factors appeared to supersede the potential for curiosity regarding opportunities to innovate and optimize the existing curriculum.

According to complexity theory, change in educational institutions is often nonlinear and context dependent. Building or district culture strongly influences reforms, stakeholder relationships, and instructional practices. Therefore, interpretations of organizational reform vary according to contextual factors across schools and departments (Rowan & Miller, 2007; Meyers et al., 2012). Although responses among WL and kindergarten teachers varied, there was a small but vocal group of teachers

across the district that appeared to influence the tone of the discussion to the extent that those who were initially open to exploring digital tools, ultimately declined to participate in the pilot. Interestingly, several of the most vocal detractors were not directly involved in elementary world language instruction and therefore would not have been immediately affected by the proposed changes. Within this context, although opinions were not homogenous, teachers who were open to experimentation with digital tools quietly removed themselves from the conversation, suppressed their perspectives, and an apparent solidarity among WL and kindergarten teachers prevailed. This suggests that the resistance observed in this study potentially reflected broader district dynamics rather than concerns over exclusively instructional practice at the elementary level. The varied responses from this study reflect a broader challenge of implementing initiatives in environments with coexisting subcultures. Various and distinct instructional goals and professional practices across departments and buildings appeared to fragment any potential cohesion relative to implementation of the proposed digital innovation.

The findings also suggest that beyond broader organizational dynamics, informal influence networks played a significant role in influencing educator responses to the proposed initiative. Perspectives appeared to be reinforced within certain subgroups through close relationships that extended beyond formal workplace interactions, which contributed to a shared interpretation of the initiative. In some cases, individuals not directly involved with the proposed changes nonetheless contributed to the tone and direction of the conversation, which may have impacted the level of amplification of skepticism and mistrust across the group.

This pattern aligns with perspectives on complexity within organizations, which note that responses to change are determined by factors beyond formal structures such as informal networks and interpersonal influence. Consequently, even a small number of vocal stakeholders may significantly influence group dynamics at a broader scale. Environments characterized by uncertainty or diminished trust are particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon.

Lastly, resource dependence theory illustrates the impact of financial pressures and external partnerships on school decision making (Pierce, 2006). When educational institutions are fiscally constrained, leaders sometimes consider technological or outsourcing solutions in an effort to economize on resources, both time and cost. In this case, although the digital platform was presented as a tool to enhance and streamline pedagogy, educators appeared to interpret it as an indicator of sweeping structural changes affecting not only the world language program, but potentially of all unified arts and kindergarten curricula.

Within this setting, the introduction of a digital platform initiative immediately subsequent to a substantial program reduction may have been interpreted by teachers as an indication of shifting district priorities relative to resources rather than an innovative instructional tool. In settings that have recently undergone staffing or instructional time reductions, rather than experiencing digital initiatives as enhancements or time-saving tools, faculty may experience them as replacements rather than complementary supports. As a consequence, educators' skepticism toward the KPIP initiative may have been partially the result of concerns over the sustainability of the WL program and the

possibility that digital platforms could ultimately replace, rather than supplement, existing programs and instructional roles. Collectively, the findings from this study suggest that educator responses to the proposed digital innovation were influenced not only by pedagogical concerns, but also by district dynamics such as context, stakeholder relationships, and perceived fiscal pressures.

Broader Curricular and Organizational Trends

While the elementary Spanish program was well regarded by many families, a small but vocal subset of families openly questioned its value. At the same time, educational institutions nationwide experienced shifting priorities and fiscal shortages, which affected the status of world language programs. During this period, higher education institutions began eliminating or downsizing world language programs due to budgetary constraints. For example, West Virginia State University (WVSU) proposed significant reductions of its world language offerings in response to budgetary constraints. Corresponding trends in K-12 institutions surfaced as districts increasingly replaced world language programs with STEAM initiatives as they symbolized innovation, competitiveness, and 21st century skills.

Collectively, these broader regional and national initiatives formed the landscape against which the district's programmatic decisions were interpreted. Within this context, the reduction of the elementary WL program appeared to reflect not only broader educational trends, but also shifting educational priorities that were occurring across a national educational backdrop.

The findings suggest that the forces driving these shifts was the amalgamation of parental influence, and broader educational trends. Situated within this context, the world language program reductions seem less regionally driven and more as a broader shift of district priorities concerning changing perceptions of the educational value of WL programs, public perception, and budgetary pressures.

Given the influencing factors in this environment, a small but vocal group of district parents questioning the WL program value may have carried a disproportionate weight in terms of administrative interpretations of community priorities. When combined with the far-reaching national narrative which emphasized the importance of STEAM programs as they related to workforce readiness, these concerns may have contributed to the perception that the expansion or even merely the maintenance of the status quo in the WL program was less aligned with dominant educational trends. As a consequence, the reductions in the WL program may reflect not only district program evaluation, but also an attempt to align district initiatives with broader educational trends regarding innovation, competitiveness, work-force readiness, and fiscal sustainability.

According to Institutional theory, organizations often initiate change as a way of publicly indicating their alignment with the dominant educational climate, particularly during times of instability or competition. In this context, organizational decision-making is predominantly responsive to external pressures rather than exclusively internal instructional priorities. The district's early initiative to invest in a rigorous elementary world language curriculum reflected one set of priorities, which signaled it was a district that valued academic rigor, global thinking, and responsiveness to parental expectations.

Later reductions corresponded with shifting national educational narratives that prioritized STEAM as an innovative and economically relevant component of a comprehensive learning experience, therefore maintaining the district's legitimacy as a progressive educational institution.

Resource dependence theory illustrates how a small number of stakeholders can disproportionately exert influence on organizational decisions. Programs perceived as underperforming are more vulnerable to reductions when faced with financial constraints.

Within this backdrop, the broad base of families who supported the program may have been overridden by the concerns of a small subset of parents vocally questioning the validity of the elementary WL program. When academic organizations depend on community approval and enrollment stability or growth, leadership may more readily resonate with vocal stakeholders whose concerns signal potential reputational or political risk. In this case, the perceived vulnerability of the WL program, along with shifting national educational narratives and district fiscal priorities, may have made the program substantially more vulnerable to reduction.

Limitations

Several limitations emerged during this case study research, and should be considered when interpreting the findings of the study. The limitations primarily related to restricted access to certain data sources and the range of participant perspectives available for analysis. Participant access may have been influenced by time constraints, comfort level, or concerns related to professional roles and responsibilities. These factors may have influenced the scope of perspectives represented.

Furthermore, while every effort was made to reduce bias, my insider role presented the potential for overidentification with participants, and selective interpretation of data. These risks were mitigated through ongoing self-reflection, triangulation, and a commitment to using credible, well-justified methods, in an effort to maintain balance, transparency, and objectivity. Additionally, adherence to systematic data analysis and regular consultation with my committee chair supported a transparent and balanced approach throughout the research process.

The first limitation of this study was insufficient access to the elementary world language survey conducted in the fall of 2015. I was aware of its existence as I was a district parent at the time of its distribution. However, the survey instrument and resulting data were not available for analysis for this research case study. Participant accounts regarding parental perceptions and their possible influence on administrative decisions were the primary source of data in this area. Access to the survey instrument and the related data could have provided further insight into parent attitudes toward the elementary world language program and how program decisions were made during this period as a result. The absence of these data limited my ability to systematically analyze and compare educator perceptions of parent influence with documented and anonymous parent responses.

Retrospective participant perspectives are the second limitation inherent in this study, as participants described experiences, events, and decisions made over a period of several years. Given the lengthy timespan and the limitations of human memory, participants' interpretations may have been influenced by a complex internal narrative

shaped by subsequent experiences or evolving perspectives. As with all retrospective narratives, partial or evolving memories may have influenced the data collected. These interpretations, nevertheless, are valuable for understanding some of the multiple perspectives involved in organizational change, and specifically how change was experienced by the educators who were directly involved in the program.

Lastly, the study articulates the perspectives of teachers interpreting organizational decisions as they were relayed from central administration, rather than district leadership's comprehensive internal decision-making process. These perspectives provided a deeper understanding of how programmatic changes were experienced within various departments of the greater organization. However, access to administrative notes or interviews of district leaders may have provided a more holistic view of the internal strategy and various dynamics influencing those decisions.

Although the insights generated from this case study are not diminished by these considerations, they potentially provide a point of departure for several areas of future research. The limited scope of data sources and the contextual nature of this study suggest there exist further opportunities for research which may provide a more comprehensive understanding of organizational change in world language programs. The following section reviews several directions for future research that may expand the findings of this study.

Directions for Future Research

This case study may be relevant for future research by serving as a reference point to build upon when examining how organizational decision-making, program status, and

stakeholder influence inform curricular change in world language programs. While the scope of this study is limited to one district's experience during a period of reorganization of its Unified Arts departments, additional research across a wider breadth of institutional environments holds the potential to further elucidate how educators respond to digital innovation initiatives that are introduced during times of organizational instability, and may highlight the role of transparency in communication channels.

Future researchers may find it beneficial to examine multiple districts undergoing similar programmatic reorganization. Determining whether patterns observed in this study are unique to the district culture, or whether they reflect more pervasive organizational dynamics could provide useful data for districts planning similar initiatives. Comparing results across districts with varying demographics, socioeconomic, and administrative structures could reveal how institutional norms and practices influence the status of world language programs within the unified arts departments.

Another area of study that may warrant further research is the role that professional agency plays in influencing educator responses to digital innovation. Findings from this study indicates that district educators were more amenable to considering digital tools when the initiative was teacher-led rather than mandated by administration. Future researchers might consider analyzing how professional autonomy, collaborative decision-making models, and district and departmental culture interface and affect the ultimate adoption of digital tools in world language departments.

Another potential area for future research lies in examining the function of parent and community pressure relative to curricular decision-making within public school

systems. This study identified and examined the impact of a small but vocal subset of parents, however, a broader analysis of survey data and perspectives throughout the community holds the potential for garnering additional insight into how parental expectations, educational trends, and public narratives influence program evolution. Engaging in a longitudinal study of districts' interpretations and responses to varying levels of parental and community involvement, may further reveal how certain programs are prioritized, maintained, reduced, or even eliminated over time.

A study of regional economic influences may also provide valuable insights into districts' curricular priorities. In regions historically influenced by industrial economies, districts may be more aligned with educational initiatives that emphasize innovation, engineering, and technology as these factors are deeply entrenched in community identity and regional workforce expectations. An examination of local narratives and how they influence perceptions of value across academic disciplines may provide valuable insights into how and whether districts situate and include world language programs in their unified arts departments, but also how world language programs are prioritized and positioned within the broader district curriculum.

Collectively, these suggested directions indicate the potential value of future research centered on stakeholder influence, regional and organizational contexts, and teacher agency, and the extent to which more data in these areas may affect decision-making in unified arts programs. Expanding on this path of research across various educational settings may produce a more comprehensive understanding of how districts negotiate conflicting priorities regarding innovation,

resource allocation, and district identity. In the following section, this study culminates in a reflection on the broader implications of these findings.

Conclusion

This qualitative case study examined organizational decision making, program positioning, and educator responses to digital innovation in a midwestern public school district during a time of significant organizational change. My research explored how administrative actions, communication practices, and broader educational trends impacted the implementation and perception of a proposed digital initiative. Through examining the experiences and perspectives of in-district teachers, the study aimed to better understand how innovation is interpreted and enacted within a complex organizational system.

The findings of this study suggest that educators are less resistant to change itself, and more so by the organizational context in which it is introduced. Several key themes emerged across the study: the role of administrative decision making and communication, the perceived marginalization and shifting status of the world language program, the relationship between educators' professional agency and educator-led innovation, and the influence of broader curricular and organizational trends as they relate to school districts. When considered collectively, these findings indicate that the responses to digital innovation cannot be fully understood in isolation, rather holistically by examining the structural, relational and symbolic factors present during the proposed implementation.

Specifically, educator perceptions were significantly influenced by administrative procedures related to decision-making communication transparency and inclusion.

Educators were more likely to respond with skepticism when proposed changes were introduced without clear communication and opportunities for meaningful stakeholder input. This phenomenon occurred throughout the study beginning within the context of prior program reductions when the lack of transparency created uncertainty and diminished trust. It continued with the sudden reduction of the grade 1 - 5 Spanish program and elimination of the kindergarten program altogether.

These patterns were also identified during a broader change involving a recent district decision to relocate an alternative high school program from a school farm setting to the main high school campus in which the change was communicated in a manner that left stakeholders feeling similarly unsettled. While the contexts in these examples differ, the response reflects a consistent pattern in how organizational change is introduced, implemented, and experienced. The leadership approach observed, therefore, suggests that it extends across multiple contexts within the district, and results in similar perceptions of uncertainty, obscurity, and faltering stakeholder trust. One could conclude, based on these findings, that communication is not an inconsequential or routine component of effective change management, rather a primary driver that influences how initiatives are understood and received.

The role of program positioning within a district and its influence on perception and response to change is further illustrated within the theme of departmental status and marginalization. The contrast of the world language program reduction juxtaposed with the expansion and visibility of the STEAM program initiative contributed to a perceived hierarchy within the Unified Arts department. Patterns of resource allocation, visibility,

and administrative attention served as symbols that indicated value, and consequently contributed to how educators interpreted their roles within the district as well as the long term viability of their program. These patterns suggest that formal decision-making is not the only factor determining program status, but that unspoken communication delivered implicitly through organizational signals also affects educators' perceptions.

Innovation within educational organizations is shaped less by the initiative itself and more by the organizational context in which it is introduced. Communication practices, leadership approach, and program positioning collectively create an organizational culture which fosters trust, skepticism, or a combination of both. These dynamics were evident across contexts within the district, which suggests that leadership practices produce consistent patterns in stakeholder perception. As a result, responses to innovation may be understood not as isolated reactions to specific initiatives, but as reflections of broader organizational dynamics that influence trust, professional identity, and interpretation.

Findings related to resistance and innovation led by educators provide additional insights into how innovation is experienced within educational settings. The data indicate that educators were not inherently resistant to incorporating digital resources into their teaching practices, contrary to assumptions that resistance reflects opposition to change. Throughout the study, participants described independently researching and incorporating digital resources into their practice. It appears that resistance functioned instead as a protection against perceived instability, unclear communication, potential threats to professional roles, and fidelity to instructional integrity. These findings underscore the

importance of professional agency during initiatives such as digital innovation, and suggest that the inclusion of educators in the design and implementation of such initiatives may influence their reception.

Resistance in this context can be understood as a form of professional self-preservation, rather than opposition to innovation. Educators responded primarily to the conditions under which changes were proposed, rather than the innovation itself. This response was most evident when the antecedent conditions were perceived as unstable, lacking transparency, and diminishing professional agency.

The findings also suggest that in addition to sentiments of skepticism and resistance, there was a degree of professional disengagement that continued beyond initial responses to administrative decisions. While distrust toward central administration was a widespread sentiment prior to the digital initiative proposal, subsequently, several educators adopted a stance of resignation that extended over time and was characterized by diminished efforts to advocate for the program or to contribute to its evolving value and position within the broader community. Attempts to promote or reposition the WL program through visible promotions of instructional quality and professional expertise did not gain traction among stakeholders. This situational apathy suggests that educators, in some cases, had disengaged from efforts to influence central administration as well as external stakeholders such as the community at large. Frustration over internal organizational dynamics may have contributed to this response, but also a limited recognition of the potential influence of community engagement as a strategic mechanism designed to garner program support. Consequently, instead of engaging

external stakeholders, some educators appeared to withdraw entirely from advocacy efforts, which reinforced a cycle of low morale, diminished visibility, and perceived marginalization. This pattern suggests that prolonged instability within an organization contributes to resistance, but also may lead to professional disengagement, which over time can contribute to a self-defeating cycle that limits opportunities for advocacy and program evolution.

These findings challenge the assumption that resistance reflects opposition to innovation, but instead suggest that it represents a predictable response to instability, unclear communication, and perceived threats to professional roles.

These findings are further supported by Brand (2009), who highlights exhaustion as a factor related to the cumulative effects of continuous change, increased demands, and non-existent or limited inclusion in decision-making processes. Brand (2009) contends that when teachers experience minimization of their professional knowledge and reforms that are imposed rather than integrated with meaningful consultation, trust is diminished and frustration increases. This perspective strengthens the interpretation that resistance in this case was not opposition to innovation, rather a response to systemic conditions that were perceived as unstable, underrepresented by teachers, and diminished professional agency. This study reflects that educators' responses were formed as cumulative reactions to an organizational environment characterized by high demands and low levels of trust.

Cumulatively, these findings suggest that resistance to change is not inherently oppositional, but can be a predictable outcome of systemic conditions characterized by

low levels of trust, inconsistent communication, and limited professional inclusion. In this context, resistance can be interpreted as an attempt at professional self-preservation, which reflects educators' efforts to stabilize professional agency and integrity within an environment of continual change.

This interpretation provides important implications for educational leadership. If resistance is mischaracterized as opposition, leaders may respond by increasing control or instituting additional mandates, which could further exacerbate the conditions which produced resistance. Alternatively, recognizing resistance as a response to dysfunctional organizational conditions has the potential to influence leadership approaches toward improved communication, trust-building, and meaningful inclusion of educators in the change process.

Furthermore, it appears that the program related decisions in this study were influenced by factors beyond the immediate institutional circumstances, such as broader curricular and organizational trends. Changing educational priorities such as an increased emphasis on innovation, technology, and preparation for 21st century skills, seem to have contributed to how district programs were evaluated and supported. Within this context, the reduction of the elementary WL program can be understood as less of an isolated decision, and instead part of a broader restructuring of district priorities. These findings fortify the idea that systemic change within educational settings is produced by a complex network of local conditions, stakeholder expectations, and broader societal trends that evolve over time.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate important implications for educational leaders. District innovation efforts may be more effective when educators are purposefully included in decision making processes and when communication is transparent and aligned with stakeholder concerns. Additionally, leaders should consider how practices regarding resource allocation and program visibility may be interpreted by educators as signals of value and priority. Accounting for symbolic factors inherent in organizations during the decision making process may help mitigate unintended messages of marginalization and favoritism, and as a consequence may support a more equitable implementation of academic initiatives across programs.

This study also contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how innovation functions within a school setting. Innovation in educational settings is influenced by organizational systems, stakeholder relationships, and the organizational culture. Innovation success depends not solely on the value of the initiative, but also on timing, communication, and alignment with educator identity. These findings suggest that institutional context may play a critical role in determining the success of an innovation initiative, and may in some cases outweigh the importance of the initiative design itself.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of considering educational change through a systems perspective. By examining the ways in which program status, stakeholder influence, and institutional priorities influence educator perceptions and responses, this case study contributes to a more multidimensional understanding of how innovation evolves within school systems. As districts navigate conflicting priorities related to curriculum, resources, and stakeholder expectations, remaining cognizant of

these dynamics may support more thoughtful, inclusive, and sustainable strategies for change.

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Date: August 21, 2025

Study #: IRB-FY2026-44

Study Title: Organizational Change and Digital Learning in K–12 World Language Education:
A Case Study

Submission Type: Initial

IRB Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Research Team:

Susan Farah

Julia Smith

The above referenced study has been has been determined to be No Human Subjects Research according to federal regulations.

The IRB decision is based on the following:

- Research Using Publicly Available Data. The project is limited to analyzing publicly available data. "Publicly available" means that the information is shared without conditions or restrictions on use. Data sets that require a fee or creating a login to gain access to the data are not considered "publicly available."
- Research on Organizations. The project is limited to gathering information about organizations, including information about operations, budgets, etc., from organizational spokespersons or data sources. The project may not include identifiable private information about individual members, employees, or staff of the organization
- More specifically, the researcher will be using using publicly available data about schools (such as census data, aggregated/non-identifiable student achievement data from public sources, school board meeting agendas, and public-school reports, etc.) in addition to using her own writings, journals, reflections on her own experiences. None of the information used by the researcher identifies others and cannot be linked back to individuals.

Please retain a copy of this correspondence for your records. If you have any questions, please contact the IRB staff.

Thank you.

The Oakland University IRB

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