

BUILDING CULTURAL AGILITY IN FUTURE TEACHERS: PATHWAYS FOR
MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

by

HOLLY LARAINÉ WALKER

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Doctoral Advisory Committee:

Julia B. Smith, Ed.D., Chair
Jana Nidiffer, Ed.D.
Robert Martin, Ph.D.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my students and teaching colleagues. Then and now

Holly Laraine Walker

ABSTRACT

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Adviser: Julia Smith, Ed.D.

Increasingly, teachers are called upon to differentiate instruction for Multilingual Learners (MLLs). Typically, the methods of differentiation and scaffolding for MLLs are carried out through ESL programming supports. Many districts that host MLLs have a district ESL coach or coordinator who oversees ESL assessment, placement, progress, and instruction within the standards established by the state. If a district is typical, there will be an ESL support person employed for each school where MLLs attend. In a more progressive scenario, a school may have a team of ESL instructors dedicated to each grade level. At the high school level, there may be sheltered classrooms where MLLs learn content together for their core subjects. There are models that focus on bilingualism, immersion, and transitional instruction where students start their education in the home language and work toward doing academics entirely in English over time.

Districts nationwide face funding crises that impact the level of services available for MLLs. In addition, there is an ESL teacher shortage impacting the sustainability of ESL programming. Districts needing attention for MLLs may only have one person in their district overseeing services for all the students. Districts with high numbers of

MLLs may have one person in each school overseeing hundreds of students. Due to shortages of ESL support staff, content area teachers are left to their own devices. Many teachers are not skilled in language development and instruction modalities. Teachers are overwhelmed with the task of supporting MLLs in their classrooms and teaching content without sacrificing instructional time and academic rigor. I believe that we can change this landscape by addressing some of these challenges in the pre-service teacher training phase.

To explore the pre-service training of currently practicing teachers, I conducted a survey that included items around attitudes toward culture in the classroom, teaching multicultural and multilingual students, and how prepared teachers felt in supporting these MLLs. Respondents indicated the level of support they are getting in the workplace through professional development, available resources, and information that can help them support multilingual learners in their classrooms. The survey included items that measured how well pre-service training prepared teachers in each of these areas.

Results of the survey indicated that teachers believe culturally responsive teaching is important. The survey showed that teachers want to increase their cultural competence but are unsure where to find appropriate support materials. Some respondents indicated that support is lacking at the institutional or district level, and professional development would help. In terms of pre-service training, the degree of preparedness for multicultural students varied based on certificate type. Participants with master's degrees tended to feel more prepared than those with bachelor's degrees in education or alternative certifications.

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CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Jean Ricardo is a ninth-grade student at a high school in an island community off the Gulf of Mexico. Jean has been in the United States since August and has attended school since then. Jean's schedule includes two language courses: Developmental Language Arts and English 1 for ELLs (English Language Learners). Both courses are considered "sheltered" which means that they are for ELL students only and the focus is on gaining language skills and proficiency in English. Jean Ricardo's name comes up often among faculty due to behavior concerns and his various referrals to the main office due to an inability to follow directions, behave appropriately in class and stay on task. He is aggressive with other students, talks over the teachers in his classes, disregards rules, and is generally resistant to the systems in place at school. Jean's father has been contacted several times regarding the situation, but there has not been any significant improvement.

Mr. Jackson is a new teacher at the high school and teaches English. One of the courses on his schedule is English 1 for ELLs. Mr. Jackson has over twenty years of teaching experience but has not taught English as a second language before. Mr. Jackson spent his career teaching high school English at an elite private high school where the focus was on literature and preparing for Advanced Placement exams. Mr. Jackson and his wife recently moved to the island community to retire, but the appeal of helping the

“less fortunate” called him back to the classroom after a conversation with a friend who teaches in the local school district. Mr. Jackson applied for and started his position in the second quarter of the school year. Mr. Jackson feels overwhelmed by the number of students who don’t speak English, trying to learn a new curriculum, and teach the content. Mr. Jackson is using the skills he has always used, and which earned him a Teacher of the Year nomination in his home state, but those skills aren’t working, and he doesn’t understand why.

Mrs. Arias is an instructional coach at the high school and works with teachers who have high numbers of ELLs in their classes and Mr. Jackson has been added to her rotation. In working with Mr. Jackson, Mrs. Arias can tell that he is an experienced teacher and is motivated to do well in his position and genuinely cares about the quality of his work. However, it is clear that Mr. Jackson does not understand the culture of the island community, the immigrant community within it and the cultural differences of the students in his sheltered classes. Mr. Jackson has sent several frustrated emails to Mrs. Arias and other English teachers asking why his ELLs don’t have “more skin in the game” of learning English when it should be so important to them. He does not understand why the students aren’t working hard and diligently to learn English and help themselves. Mr. Jackson views learning English as the singular task the students have in making their lives better and their futures more promising.

One of the students that Mr. Jackson has mentioned by name is Jean Ricardo. Jean defaced two books in one class period in Mr. Jackson’s class and is non-compliant. Mrs. Arias has consulted with a Haitian Creole speaking parent contact at the high school who was able to give some insight into Jean Ricardo’s situation. The parent contact told Mrs.

Arias that Jean Ricardo left Haiti with his father after the Haitian president was assassinated in the summer of 2021. Jean and his father traveled to Panama where his father did manual labor for several months before traveling through Central America and through Mexico to the border of the United States. Once at the border, Jean and his father were trafficked across by a Coyote and made their way to the island community they are in currently, where they reunited with Jean's uncle with whom they live. Jean's mother remains in Haiti. Meanwhile, it is calculated that Jean has not been in school consistently for at least two years.

While Mr. Jackson is well-intended and cares about his performance as a teacher, he does not understand the cultural context in which he finds himself. Mr. Jackson's students are mainly Spanish or Haitian Creole speaking, but he also has other students who speak Uzbek, Chinese, and Vietnamese. The island community at-large is populated by various social strata. During the high season of tourism, the island hosts many retirees and tourists, but those who call the island home year-round are working class and there is a very large immigrant population. Twenty-two percent of the students at the high school do not speak English and are in ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) program. Mr. Jackson has not been trained in cultural competence, trauma-informed practice, or language learning theory. He feels as a fish out of water and is overwhelmed with the linguistic and cultural demands of his classroom.

Mrs. Arias has tried to explain to Mr. Jackson that Jean Ricardo has gone through trauma being removed from his home, country, friends, family, and language and that his behavior reflects that. She has explained that PTSD can cause students to seem disengaged and that it takes longer for them to trust new people. In addition, it is difficult

to learn when one is in a post-traumatic state and that patience cannot be overemphasized. Regarding the skills of teaching ELLs, language learning theory has its own rules and nuances. Lessons must be scaffolded, and the classroom must be a collaborative space. Collaboration is particularly important for the students in the island community because they largely come from collective cultures where families help each other and know each other. On such a small island, the immigrant community lives in three or four neighborhoods, and they all know each other's families and children. The students at the high school work together when they complete an assignment and get up out of their seats to help each other and ask each other questions. However, since Mr. Jackson doesn't speak the languages spoken by his students, he assumes that they are not focused and that they are being disruptive and disobedient. He has referred several students to the office and made calls home to parents for misbehavior not understanding that the students have been on-task and working in the ways they know how. It wasn't until Mrs. Arias came into his classroom and helped teach a lesson that he realized he had it wrong.

What if Mr. Jackson had been trained in cultural competence during his pre-service training courses? What if preparing new teachers for multicultural and multilingual students were more focused on in undergraduate education programs? What if we were intentional about preparing future teachers to teach ELLs? There are more ELLs in classrooms around the country than there have been ever before. It is not always possible to hire out of a diverse applicant pool. So how can we move toward a more competent teacher population for those students who need additional cultural and linguistic support? A three-hour professional development training is not enough. A

workshop is not enough. What if we prepared pre-service teachers so that they had the skills they need before they even enter the classroom? It seems that this could be the most promising scenario.

Background

According to much of the literature surrounding American education, Latinos are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the nation. While this group has been the fastest growing demographic in the United States over the last few decades, Latinos have not experienced a comparable increase in educational attainment to their growth in numbers. The reasons for this are several, and among them we can include socioeconomics, cultural values and institutional barriers including a national dialogue that resists affirmative action. To be sure, Latinos are not the only linguistically diverse group making their way to the United States and into the American educational system. Over the last several years due to human migration worldwide, American schools have received an influx of new students whose first language is other than English. In Key West, Florida, for example, there has been a rise in Haitian immigrants and refugees fleeing civil war and political instability resulting in over 130 new arrivals to the high school alone. In addition, the school district hosts students of over 60 languages aside from English making the number of English Language Learners enrolled very high in comparison to districts further north.

The need for teachers who have been trained in language learning, ESOL strategies, cultural competence, and differentiated instruction is very high. Problem-solving for deficiencies in teacher preparation is difficult, at best. In addition, it is difficult to keep teachers employed when they feel frustrated by their inability to reach all

students, understand their students in the cultural context, and maintain effective pedagogical practices. Many teachers do not persist in their positions in the Florida Keys due to frustration and the fact that they feel ineffective at their craft. We can mitigate some of these challenges by offering better preparation to teachers in their pre-service time by emphasizing skills in cultural competence, differentiated instructional strategies, and cultural responsiveness.

The increasing diversity of classrooms across the United States reflects broader demographic trends, particularly in districts with high numbers of immigrants and refugees. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), over 25% of children in U.S. public schools are from immigrant households, and many are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) (Zong et al., 2017). These students face unique challenges in adapting to a new linguistic, cultural, and educational environment. Consequently, there is a critical need for skilled teachers who are not only proficient in teaching English as a second language but also culturally competent to support these learners' holistic development.

The demand for skilled ELL teachers stems from the rapid increase in non-English-speaking populations in specific regions, often referred to as "immigrant gateways." For instance, urban districts in states like California, Texas, and New York often serve students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and Somali speakers (Sugarman & Geary, 2018). In recent years, smaller communities in traditionally less diverse states, such as Tennessee and Minnesota, have also seen an influx of refugees, further expanding the need for specialized instruction (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022).

Effective instruction for ELLs requires teachers who are trained in strategies that integrate language acquisition with academic content. Unlike monolingual classrooms, ELL settings require approaches such as scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and the use of visual aids to bridge language gaps (de Jong, 2011). However, a shortage of educators equipped with these skills persists. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), many districts report vacancies in ESL and bilingual education positions, highlighting a systemic failure to meet growing demands. This shortage is compounded by a lack of professional development opportunities for general educators, who often work with ELLs despite not having specialized training (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Cultural competence is equally vital. Teachers must understand and respect the cultural identities and lived experiences of their students to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Immigrant and refugee students often arrive with trauma from war, displacement, or other adverse experiences, requiring educators to be sensitive to these challenges while creating a classroom atmosphere that promotes safety and belonging (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012). Furthermore, teachers must recognize the value of bilingualism and biculturalism, countering any implicit biases that may prioritize assimilation over integration (Gay, 2018).

Developing cultural competence involves building relationships with students' families, understanding their cultural norms, and using this knowledge to inform instruction. Teachers who view cultural diversity as an asset rather than a barrier are better equipped to engage students and enhance academic outcomes (Ladson-Billings,

1995). Without such competencies, educators risk alienating students and exacerbating disparities in educational achievement.

Terminology

To facilitate a discussion around the issues of cultural competence in education, we must agree on terminology. There are some areas in which multiple terms are used. For example, in referring to non-English speaking students, some terms are used in legislation where they are not used in a school setting. At the same time, some terms go in and out of preference depending on the background of educators and how a district refers to the students in their population (English Language Learners versus Multilingual Learners, for example). The following are the terms that I will be using to discuss the areas of impact within the scope of this project.

- 1. Cultural competence (for educators):** the ability of an individual to understand and respect attitudes, beliefs, and practices that differ across cultures and to be able to consider them and respond appropriately in planning, implementing, and evaluating educational programming and interventions
- 2. Content area teacher:** those teachers who teach academic subjects which are represented on standardized tests (math, science, social studies, language arts)
- 3. Educational access:** refers to the services, opportunities and programs that allow all citizens to participate fully in the educational process.
- 4. ELL:** English Language Learners
- 5. ESOL:** English for Speakers of Other Languages
- 6. Home language:** the language predominantly spoken in a student's home
- 7. Immigrant:** a person who has come to live permanently in another country.

8. L1: first language

9. L2: second language; any language acquired after the first language.

10. Refugee: a person who has been displaced by violence or life-threatening circumstances and has come to live permanently in another country through a legal process directed by federal government programs.

11. Target language: the language which is the focus of learning / use as a second language

12. Target culture: any additional culture other than one's home culture / native culture

Theory

I chose to examine the theoretical perspectives within Transformative Learning in order to explore the critical self-reflection and development of teachers. Teachers enter the classroom each academic year, or semester, without necessarily having prior knowledge of their students or their students' backgrounds. Educators are expected to perform their jobs, complete professional development and learning plans, work as part of a team, engage with the families of their students, and improve student outcomes with whichever combination of learners ends up in front of them. Mezirow's breakdown of the ten phases of transformative learning begins with what he calls a "transformative dilemma." I will explore transformative learning to resolve the problem that occurs when the transformative dilemma is a student's identity. If teachers are unable to manage the cultural makeup of their classrooms, this can have detrimental effects on their students and in their professional practice. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the intersection of a diverse student body and the need for further cultural preparation among

pre-service teachers; particularly in areas where there is a large population of migrant and refugee students.

In this dissertation, I used transformational learning theory as a pathway to explore the ways in which we can better prepare pre-service teachers entering multicultural classrooms. I was especially interested in the role of teachers who worked with largely immigrant and refugee students in the various parts of the United States where these populations make up a large part of the student body. While teachers must teach content, in the context of large populations of multilingual learners, there are additional skills that are needed to facilitate learning in the classroom. Of course, many schools employ teachers whose content area is English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), but the level of funding for these positions depends on the school district and may be limited to one ESOL instructor per building, or one per grade level. In some cases, grade-level homeroom teachers may have an endorsement in ESL or ESOL, but these teachers cannot spend enough time with ESOL students and cover all of the content in a day without some type of support. Additionally, regular classroom teachers do not always have the capacity to communicate with international families in their native language and there can be barriers in the attempt to establish collaborative relationships with students from other countries and their families. For example, in many communities, the immigrant population may have limited access to the types of technology that schools use to disseminate information, send emails, etc. and the culture of school in the United States may be very different from that of the home country. Many times, teachers are so overwhelmed with their daily tasks that creating additional communications, seeking support and resources, etc. can be very challenging.

To further explore the teacher's role in these communities, we must consider the cultural agility of the teacher and whether they are able to read cultural norms and how well they can work with the parents of their students in this regard. Teachers in communities with high numbers of foreign students must come to the classroom equipped to teach the content of their classrooms, manage linguistic differences, and manage cultural differences. Much of this work has traditionally fallen under the umbrella of tasks held by ESOL and foreign language teachers. If a teacher in the school is multilingual, they are asked to step into the classroom to interpret, translate documentation, meet with parents, attend meetings with administrators, etc. to facilitate communication and partnership. This is also in addition to the ESOL instructor's own caseload - and this can be significant if there is only one ESOL instructor per building.

So, how do we best support grade level teachers? I propose that the issue can partly be addressed at the pre-service level before the student teaching / internship phase OR as a part of the internship phase of teacher education programs. To lay the groundwork for the possible answers to this question, it is helpful to discuss adult learning theory, but there are also pertinent characteristics within language teaching that can help us in this discussion. Language teachers have been trained to examine the cultural readiness of students to predict their success in the language classroom. We know that language learners do better in learning a second language if they are open to the culture that they are exploring.

Cultural biases can hinder learning and growth in language acquisition and learning about the cultures within which a language is spoken helps students understand the context of its use. Likewise, it is my presumption that some of the pillars of foreign-

or second- language pedagogy can be used in the teacher preparation arena as a guide for cultural agility and its practice with multilingual learners. To challenge what might be currently held cultural assumptions, we can refer to cultural contexts and the notions of cultural difference within the school community and consider ways in which we train new teachers to work with students who represent a variety of cultures and traditions in the classroom. Transformative Learning Theory is relevant to this process in that it explores the ways in which our currently held assumptions can be challenged, views can be changed, and we can change our worldview through the experiences that propose a dilemma and force us out of our comfort zones.

Since the 1960s, a field of study has grown around adult learning principles. I will discuss each of these, with special attention to transformative learning with the belief that it has the best chance at working toward an educational model for increasing cultural competency for adult learners. In tandem, I believe that second language acquisition theory is a paradigm that can offer parameters and benchmarks to meet for successful cultural competence training. If we combine the cultural context aspects of language learning with transformative learning theory, we may be able to encourage cultural competency in adult learning environments across a variety of contexts and also speed up the process by deliberately designing curricula and programming that achieve this end in a scheduled sequence of learning milestones.

Adult learning indicates that developmental milestones are in the past and learners possess an established worldview that will continue to evolve, but has developed through experience, societal and cultural influence, and presumptions about the world. Adult learners are not still in developmental phases that involve changes in the structure of the

brain, socio-cultural milestones, or physiological changes related to human development. Adult learners have requirements for learning that involve adopting information that is relevant to their experience and that can be integrated and applied immediately in a real context. Most adult learners are in a learning environment to improve their economic or personal growth. While educators have learning goals, adult learners have goals for their learning. In addition to this fact, the cognitive complexities that are involved in advancing cultural competence cannot be overlooked. While there are several pedagogies that have been established around adult learning, second language acquisition considers a variety of factors that can enhance or inhibit the learning process that accompanies sociocultural learning in a planned context. When we teach a second language to any learner, it is presumed that the learner has a degree of competence in their first language; meaning that those learners who perform better in their L1 (first language) will perform better in their L2. In addition, those learners who are more open to the cultures of the target language (TL) will have a better chance at language proficiency or fluency due to their willingness to integrate new information and the intellectual curiosity to continue to engage in the learning process.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory, developed by Jack Mezirow, focuses on how adults undergo profound shifts in their perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors through critical reflection and experience. This theory suggests that adults learn best when they are confronted with disorienting dilemmas that challenge their existing worldview and prompt them to reevaluate their assumptions. Transformative learning emphasizes the role of critical reflection, dialogue, and experiential learning in promoting personal and

societal transformation. "Transformation theory seeks to elucidate universal conditions and rules that are implicit in linguistic competence or human development. Specifically, it seeks to explain the way adult learning is structured and to determine by what processes the frames of reference through which we view and interpret our experience (meaning perspectives) are changed or transformed" (Mezirow, p. xiii).

Transformation theory builds on the constructionist position that meaning exists within each of us and we assign meaning to our experiences through human interactions. "At its core, transformative learning is about more than just acquiring new knowledge or skills; it is about undergoing a profound shift in consciousness that empowers individuals to see themselves and the world in new ways." (Dirkx, 2008, p. 55) Within transformation theory, meaning is created by the process of interpretation that we apply to any thing or experience. For learners, there is no meaning that belongs to a thing or an experience except for that which we apply through our reflection on the experience and how we internalize it. This is not to say that there is no meaning in the external world, but that the experience we interpret from the external world is filtered through our senses and the meaning we apply is a result of the sequence of a priori knowledge, plus experience, plus interpretation. Transformation theory is not derivative of any other learning theories, though it does exist alongside other theories of adult learning (Mezirow 1991). The critical pillar of transformative learning is the idea of "perspective transformation." According to Mezirow, this involves a process of critically examining our assumptions, beliefs, and frames of reference, and then putting them together. This process often occurs through a disorienting dilemma, a situation that challenges an individual's existing worldview and prompts them to reevaluate their perspectives.

One of the key elements of transformative learning is critical reflection. Critical reflection involves questioning our beliefs and assumptions, considering other viewpoints, and critically examining different perspectives. Critical reflection requires openness to new ideas and willingness to confront discomfort or uncertainty as one considers conflicting information. Another important aspect of transformative learning is the role of experience. Experiential learning, or learning through direct engagement with the world, can be a powerful catalyst for transformation. Whether through travel, volunteer work, or interpersonal relationships, experiences that expose individuals to diverse perspectives and ways of life can challenge their assumptions and broaden their understanding of the world. Transformative learning also emphasizes the importance of dialogue and discourse in the learning process. Engaging in meaningful conversations with others who hold different perspectives can provide valuable insights and opportunities for growth. Through dialogue, individuals can test their assumptions, clarify their thinking, and learn from the perspectives of others.

The outcomes of transformative learning can be profound and far-reaching. Individuals who undergo transformative learning often experience shifts in their self-concept, worldview, and relationships with others. They may develop greater empathy and understanding for people from different backgrounds, become more flexible and adaptive in their thinking, and feel empowered to enact positive change in their lives and communities.

In the field of education, transformative learning has significant implications for teaching and curriculum design. Educators can foster transformative learning by creating learning experiences that challenge students' assumptions, encourage critical reflection,

and promote dialogue and inquiry. This might involve incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, facilitating discussions that encourage students to question their beliefs, and providing opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning.

Outside of formal education settings, transformative learning can also occur through various forms of personal development and self-exploration. Activities such as journaling, meditation, and participation in support groups or community organizations can facilitate transformative learning by encouraging individuals to reflect on their experiences, explore new ideas, and engage with others in meaningful dialogue. Transformative learning offers a powerful framework for understanding how individuals undergo profound personal and societal change through critical reflection, experience, and dialogue. By fostering transformative learning, educators, policymakers, and individuals themselves can promote greater empathy, understanding, and positive change in the world.

In higher education settings, transformative learning theory challenges traditional approaches to teaching and learning by emphasizing the need for educators to create environments that support critical reflection and dialogue. Instead of simply transmitting information to students, educators are encouraged to design curricula and learning activities that prompt students to question their assumptions, engage with diverse perspectives, and apply their learning to real-world contexts.

One implication of transformative learning theory for higher education is the importance of experiential learning. Rather than relying solely on lectures and textbooks, educators can incorporate hands-on experiences, such as internships, service-learning projects, and study abroad programs, that allow students to apply their knowledge in

meaningful ways and confront the complexities of the world outside the classroom. These experiences can serve as catalysts for transformative learning by challenging students' preconceptions and fostering deeper understanding and empathy.

Additionally, transformative learning theory underscores the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that respect and value diverse perspectives. By promoting dialogue and collaboration among students from different backgrounds, educators can help learners recognize their own biases and assumptions and develop the skills needed to navigate complex social issues. This emphasis on diversity and inclusion not only enhances the learning experience for all students but also contributes to the development of informed and engaged citizens who can address the challenges facing society.

For adult learners, transformative learning theory offers valuable insights into the process of personal and professional development. Adult learners often come to higher education with rich life experiences and diverse backgrounds, making them particularly well-suited to engage in transformative learning experiences. However, adult learners may also face unique challenges, such as balancing work, family, and educational responsibilities, that can impact their ability to fully engage with the learning process. Adult learners may also gain the ability to recognize and address the barriers to their ability to engage in transformative learning. This may include providing flexible learning options, such as online or evening classes, that accommodate learners' busy schedules, as well as offering support services, such as counseling and mentorship, to help adult learners navigate the challenges they may encounter along their educational journey.

Transformative learning theory highlights the role of self-directed learning in the adult education process. Rather than being passive recipients of knowledge, adult learners are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and actively seek out opportunities for growth and development. This may involve setting personal learning goals, seeking feedback from peers and instructors, and reflecting critically on their own experiences and beliefs. By empowering adult learners to take control of their learning, educators can help facilitate transformative learning experiences that have a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. Transformative learning theory has significant implications for higher education settings and adult learners alike. By fostering environments that support critical reflection, experiential learning, and inclusive dialogue, educators can create opportunities for personal and societal transformation that empower learners to navigate the complexities of the world and contribute to positive change.

Transformative Learning and Cultural Competence

Transformative learning and cultural competence are two essential concepts that intersect in the realm of education, professional development, and societal progress. Transformative learning, rooted in critical reflection and experience, enables individuals to undergo profound shifts in their perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors. Cultural competence, on the other hand, refers to the ability to effectively interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, understand their perspectives, and navigate cultural differences with respect and inclusivity. This essay explores the synergistic relationship between transformative learning and cultural competence, highlighting how they complement each other in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Cultural competence encompasses a range of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable individuals to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Cross et al., 1989). It involves recognizing and respecting cultural differences, understanding the impact of culture on behavior and communication, and adapting one's approach to accommodate diverse perspectives. Culturally competent individuals demonstrate empathy, humility, and a willingness to learn from others, which are all hallmarks of transformative learning.

Transformative learning and cultural competence are inherently interconnected processes that reinforce and complement each other in various ways. For example, transformative learning promotes critical reflection and self-awareness, which are foundational elements of cultural competence. As Sue, et al. states, "Cultural competence requires ongoing reflection, self-assessment, and a commitment to continuous learning and growth." (Sue et al., 2019, p. 102) To broaden this perspective a bit, Brookfield's 2015 work explains that "transformative learning challenges individuals to confront their biases, assumptions, and privilege, and to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society." (Brookfield, 2015, p.88) In the reflective process of transformative learning, if we are open to examination and change, we can challenge ourselves to recognize the limitations of our perspectives and develop a better understanding of our views of diverse cultures, and by taking a step back from ourselves, design a more equitable learning community for our students.

Research Focus

In my study, I looked at how much culture and language difference preparation teachers received in their pre-service training programs. I surveyed teachers from districts

that host high numbers of immigrant and refugee students to determine what their perceived effectiveness is at managing the cultural and linguistic demands of their classrooms. The challenges of non-English speaking students arriving mid-stream into an educational system that uses English as the primary language of instruction has a long list of implications. First, students must learn the language of instruction while at the same time trying to maintain their content area knowledge and keep up with the pace of instruction. Second, assessments are used to determine whether a teacher can be considered “highly qualified” or whether they need additional training. In addition, teacher salaries are based on their ability to achieve highly-qualified status and maintain it as they go. So, how can we keep students in the pipeline, prevent knowledge attrition, teach them a second language, and not sacrifice educational rigor for them and for the students who don’t require language intervention? What preparation is necessary for teachers to be able to do all of these things? And finally, how can teacher preparation programs address these issues to shorten the learning curve for new teachers? The goal of this project is to explore the intersection of a linguistically diverse student body and the need for further cultural preparation among pre-service teachers; particularly in areas where there is a large population of immigrant and refugee students whose home language is not that of instruction.

Significance of Research

Research on the need for skilled and culturally competent teachers for English Language Learners (ELLs) in immigrant-rich districts is significant for shaping equitable and effective educational practices. The increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in U.S. classrooms highlights the urgency of understanding how to best support ELL

students, whose success hinges on having access to educators equipped to meet their unique needs. This research is critical because it addresses systemic inequities, informs teacher preparation and professional development, and contributes to broader discussions about diversity and inclusion in education.

First, addressing the needs of ELL students is essential for promoting educational equity. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), ELL students are more likely than their peers to face academic challenges, including lower standardized test scores and higher dropout rates. Research shows that teachers trained in evidence-based strategies, such as scaffolding and differentiated instruction, can significantly improve ELL students' language acquisition and academic performance (de Jong, 2011). Moreover, understanding and addressing the cultural and socio-emotional barriers faced by immigrant and refugee students is vital for fostering a sense of belonging and engagement in school (Hersi & Watkinson, 2012). By identifying effective teaching practices, this research can inform policies and interventions to reduce disparities in educational outcomes.

Second, the research has significant implications for teacher education and professional development. Despite the growing number of ELL students, many educators lack the training to teach this population effectively. Studies indicate that even general education teachers frequently work with ELLs but often do so without adequate preparation (Samson & Collins, 2012). Research on this issue emphasizes the need for integrating ELL-specific strategies and cultural competency training into teacher certification programs. This can help educators move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to instruction and instead embrace practices that are responsive to the diverse needs of

their students (Gay, 2018). Additionally, ongoing professional development initiatives informed by such research can help current teachers stay updated on best practices for ELL instruction.

Finally, this research contributes to broader efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in education. Teachers with strong cultural competence can create more inclusive classrooms that celebrate rather than marginalize students' cultural identities. This is particularly important for immigrant and refugee students, who often face discrimination and stereotypes in addition to the challenges of adapting to a new culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). By highlighting the importance of culturally responsive teaching, the research supports a shift in education toward valuing multiculturalism and equity. Furthermore, it underscores the role of schools in promoting social cohesion and integration within increasingly diverse communities.

Research on the need for skilled and culturally competent teachers for ELLs is foundational for improving educational outcomes, enhancing teacher preparation, and fostering inclusive learning environments. It equips educators, policymakers, and stakeholders with the knowledge and tools to ensure that all students, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background, can thrive.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Cultural competence encompasses a range of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable individuals to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Cross et al., 1989). Cultural competence involves recognizing and respecting cultural differences, understanding the impact of culture on behavior and communication, and adapting one's approach to accommodate diverse perspectives. Cultural competence refers to the ability of individuals and organizations to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This concept is essential in various fields, including healthcare, education, social work, and business, to ensure effective communication, service delivery, and mutual respect. This literature review explores the development, application, and impact of cultural competence across these domains.

Culturally competent educators create inclusive learning environments that respect and value diverse perspectives, allowing students from different cultural backgrounds to thrive (Gay, 2018). In healthcare, cultural competence is essential for providing quality care to patients from diverse cultural backgrounds, understanding their unique health beliefs and practices, and addressing their healthcare needs effectively (Betancourt et al., 2003). In business, cultural competence enables organizations to navigate relationships with global partners, build working relationships with diverse

stakeholders, and promote a better working environment (Thomas & Inkson, 2004).

Cultural competence is essential for promoting social justice, reducing inequality, and fostering healthy relationships in our increasingly diverse societies.

Cultivating cultural competence requires the integration of education, reflection, and real-world experience. Education and training, self-reflections, developing self-awareness, exposure to diversity, and building cross-cultural skills are all strategies we can implement in becoming more culturally competent. Each of these areas are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Providing education and training on cultural diversity and cultural competence is essential for raising awareness and building foundational knowledge. Workshops, seminars, and diversity training programs can help individuals understand the complexities of cultural diversity, challenge their biases and stereotypes, and develop a deeper appreciation for cultural differences (Diller & Moule, 2005). Cultivating cultural competence begins with self-reflection and awareness. Individuals must examine their own cultural identity, biases, and privileges, and reflect on how these factors influence their perceptions and interactions with others. Engaging in activities such as journaling, self-assessment exercises, and cultural immersion experiences can help individuals develop greater self-awareness and empathy (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998).

Exposure to diverse cultural experiences and perspectives is essential for cultivating cultural competence. Individuals should seek out opportunities to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, engage in cross-cultural communication, and participate in multicultural events and activities. Immersion experiences, such as studying

abroad or volunteering in diverse communities, can provide valuable insights and perspectives (Gurin et al., 2002).

Culturally competent individuals possess a range of skills that enable them to effectively navigate cultural differences. These skills include active listening, empathy, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and the ability to adapt one's behavior and communication style to accommodate diverse cultural norms and expectations. Practicing these skills through role-playing, simulations, and real-life scenarios can help individuals develop greater confidence and competence in cross-cultural interactions (Sodowsky et al., 1994).

Cultural competence is a critical skill that enables individuals and organizations to navigate cultural diversity effectively, promote inclusion, and create a space for relationships in increasingly multicultural societies. By understanding the significance of cultural competence and implementing strategies for cultivating it, individuals can become more effective communicators, collaborators, and leaders in diverse global environments. Cultivating cultural competence requires ongoing education, reflection, and practical experience, but the benefits – including enhanced understanding, empathy, and collaboration – make it a worthwhile endeavor for individuals and organizations alike.

The concept of cultural competence has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Initially rooted in the field of anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, early studies focused on understanding cultural differences and their impact on human behavior (Bennett, 1986). The term gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s,

particularly in healthcare, as practitioners recognized the need to address the cultural and linguistic barriers affecting patient care (Campinha-Bacote, 1999).

Cultural competence has emerged as a critical aspect of effective practice in human service fields, reflecting a growing recognition of the diverse and multicultural nature of modern societies. The concept encompasses the ability of professionals to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. This essay traces the evolution of cultural competence in human services, examining its origins, development, and current applications.

The roots of cultural competence can be traced back to the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. These movements highlighted the systemic inequalities and discrimination faced by minority groups, prompting a reevaluation of social services and their accessibility. Early pioneers like Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989) developed frameworks to address these disparities, advocating for services that are responsive to the cultural needs of diverse populations. This period marked the initial phase where cultural awareness began to influence the design and delivery of human services.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, cultural competence gained further traction, evolving from a peripheral “concern” to a central component of professional practice in human services. Scholars such as Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) expanded the concept to include not only awareness but also knowledge and skills. They emphasized the importance of understanding cultural differences, acquiring cultural knowledge, and developing cross-cultural communication skills. This comprehensive approach aimed to

ensure that human service professionals could provide effective and respectful care to clients from diverse backgrounds.

In the 21st century, cultural competence has become an integral part of education and training programs for human service professionals. Accreditation bodies and professional organizations, such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), have established guidelines and standards for cultural competence. These guidelines emphasize the need for ongoing self-assessment, education, and adaptation of practices to meet the evolving cultural contexts of clients (NASW, 2015).

Moreover, cultural competence is now seen as a dynamic and multifaceted concept that extends beyond race and ethnicity to include factors such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability. This broader understanding aligns with the increasing recognition of intersectionality, which examines how various social identities intersect and influence individual experiences and access to services (Crenshaw, 1989).

The emergence and evolution of cultural competence in human service fields reflect a growing awareness of the need to provide equitable and effective services to diverse populations. From its origins in the civil rights era to its current status as a fundamental aspect of professional practice, cultural competence has evolved to encompass a broad range of cultural identities and experiences. As human service fields continue to grapple with issues of diversity and inclusion, the ongoing development and refinement of cultural competence will remain crucial to ensuring that all individuals receive the care and support they need.

Pillars of Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is a critical framework within human service fields aimed at improving the ability of professionals to effectively work with diverse populations. It encompasses several key pillars: *awareness, knowledge, skills, encounters, and desire*. These pillars serve as the foundation for developing and maintaining cultural competence, ensuring that human service professionals can provide respectful, effective, and inclusive services.

Awareness involves recognizing one's own cultural background, biases, and assumptions. Self-awareness is essential for professionals to understand how their cultural identity and personal experiences shape their perceptions and interactions with clients. It requires an ongoing process of reflection and self-examination to identify and mitigate potential biases that may affect service delivery. By becoming aware of their cultural lens, professionals can avoid imposing their own values on clients and can approach each interaction with greater empathy and openness (Sue et al., 1992).

Knowledge is the second pillar and entails gaining a thorough understanding of different cultural practices, values, and worldviews. This involves both formal education and informal learning about the histories, traditions, and experiences of various cultural groups. Knowledge extends beyond superficial traits to include deeper aspects such as communication styles, family dynamics, and health beliefs. This comprehensive understanding allows professionals to appreciate the complexity of cultural identities and to tailor their services to meet the unique needs of each client (Campinha-Bacote, 2002).

Skills refer to the ability to effectively apply cultural knowledge in practice. This includes developing specific communication techniques and intervention strategies that

are culturally appropriate and responsive. For example, professionals might learn how to use culturally relevant metaphors or nonverbal cues to enhance understanding and rapport with clients. Skills also involve adapting service delivery to accommodate cultural preferences and practices, such as modifying treatment plans to respect religious beliefs or dietary restrictions. Cultivating these skills enables professionals to bridge cultural gaps and foster meaningful connections with clients (Betancourt et al., 2003).

Attitude highlights developing empathy, reducing stereotypes, and enhancing cultural sensitivity. Embracing cultural encounters as learning experiences fosters a deeper appreciation of diversity and strengthens the overall competence of professionals (Campinha-Bacote, 2002). The motivation and commitment to becoming culturally competent cannot be understated. A genuine interest and willingness to engage in continuous learning and self-improvement is paramount and this desire is driven by an intrinsic respect for cultural diversity and a dedication to providing equitable and inclusive services. This commitment to lifelong learning ensures that cultural competence remains a dynamic and evolving process (Cross et al., 1989).

The pillars of cultural competence—awareness, knowledge, skills, encounters, and attitudes—collectively form a comprehensive framework for enhancing the effectiveness of human service professionals in diverse settings. By cultivating self-awareness, acquiring cultural knowledge, developing practical skills, engaging in meaningful encounters, and maintaining a strong desire for growth, professionals can provide culturally competent services that respect and honor the diverse backgrounds of their clients. These pillars are essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable approach

to human services, ultimately contributing to better outcomes for individuals and communities.

Research on Cultural Competence

Cultural competence has become a cornerstone in the "helping" professions, which include social work, counseling, healthcare, and education. This concept refers to the ability of professionals to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The importance of cultural competence is underscored by its impact on service delivery and client outcomes.

Research in cultural competence has primarily focused on understanding its components and developing frameworks for implementation. According to Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992), cultural competence encompasses awareness, knowledge, and skills. Awareness involves recognizing one's own cultural biases and perspectives. Knowledge refers to understanding different cultural practices and worldviews. Skills pertain to the ability to apply cultural knowledge in practice, ensuring that services are respectful and effective.

Campinha-Bacote (2002) further developed this framework by introducing the concept of cultural encounters, emphasizing the importance of direct interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. These encounters are crucial for developing cultural empathy and refining practical skills. Additionally, the motivation or desire to become culturally competent is essential for ongoing learning and improvement.

Cultural competence is essential for addressing disparities and promoting equity in service delivery. Professionals who are culturally competent are better equipped to understand and address the unique needs and challenges faced by clients from

marginalized communities. This is particularly important in multicultural societies where diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds are prevalent.

Cultural competence is a critical aspect of effective practice in the helping professions. Research highlights the importance of awareness, knowledge, skills, encounters, and desire in developing cultural competence. It directly affects the quality of care and support provided to clients from diverse backgrounds. Betancourt et al. (2003) found that culturally competent care leads to better patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment, and overall health outcomes. In social work and counseling, cultural competence helps in building trust and rapport with clients, facilitating more effective interventions and support. By embracing these components, professionals can provide more inclusive, respectful, and effective services, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for clients from diverse backgrounds. In the field of education, we see similar outcomes when teachers are more culturally responsive to their students.

The Role of Cultural Competence in Social Work

Cultural competence in the social work professions established the foundation for the same in the education professions. As societies become more multicultural, the need for cultural competence in social work has become increasingly important. Research in cultural competence within social work has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Early studies focused on defining the concept and identifying its key components. Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) were among the pioneers who conceptualized cultural competence as comprising awareness, knowledge, and skills. Awareness involves recognizing one's own cultural biases and assumptions. Knowledge

refers to understanding different cultural practices, values, and beliefs. Skills pertain to the ability to apply this knowledge in practice to deliver culturally appropriate services.

Recent research has expanded on this framework, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural competence. Lum (2011) introduced the concept of cultural humility, which emphasizes the ongoing process of self-reflection and learning, recognizing that cultural competence is not a static achievement but a continuous journey. This approach underscores the importance of humility and openness in understanding and respecting cultural differences.

The social work profession considers a wide range of complex issues, including poverty, mental health, child welfare, substance abuse, and domestic violence. These issues are often intertwined with cultural factors, making cultural competence crucial for effective practice. For instance, cultural beliefs and practices can significantly influence clients' perceptions of mental health and their willingness to seek help (Sue et al., 2009). Without cultural competence, social workers may misinterpret clients' behaviors and fail to provide appropriate interventions.

Moreover, social workers often work with marginalized and vulnerable populations who may have experienced discrimination and systemic injustices. Cultural competence helps social workers to understand the historical and sociopolitical contexts that shape clients' experiences and to advocate for social justice and equity. By acknowledging and addressing the cultural dimensions of clients' issues, social workers can develop more effective and culturally relevant interventions (NASW, 2015).

Cultural competence helps social workers to tailor their interventions to the unique needs and preferences of clients. This may involve incorporating cultural practices

and beliefs into treatment plans, collaborating with culturally relevant resources and supports, and advocating for clients' cultural rights and needs. By providing culturally responsive services, social workers can enhance clients' engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes (Fong, 2004).

To prepare social workers for culturally competent practice, social work education programs must incorporate cultural competence into their curricula. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) has established standards for cultural competence, emphasizing the need for social work programs to integrate cultural competence into all aspects of education, including coursework, field placements, and professional development (CSWE, 2015).

Effective cultural competence education involves a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Coursework should cover topics such as cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, and the impact of culture on social issues and interventions. Additionally, experiential learning opportunities, such as cultural immersion experiences, service learning projects, and field placements in diverse communities, are essential for developing practical skills and cultural empathy (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

Social work educators must model cultural competence in their teaching practices. This includes creating inclusive and respectful learning environments, addressing cultural biases and stereotypes, and fostering open and critical discussions about cultural issues. By promoting cultural competence in education, social work programs can prepare future social workers to provide effective and equitable services to diverse populations (Lum, 2011).

Experiential learning and reflection are vital components in social work education for fostering cultural competence. Experiential learning involves hands-on activities that immerse students in diverse cultural settings, providing practical experience with different cultural practices and perspectives. These activities include field placements, service learning projects, and cultural immersion experiences. By engaging directly with diverse communities, social work students develop a deeper understanding of cultural dynamics and enhance their ability to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts (Lee & Greene, 2003). Incorporating experiential learning and reflection into social work education ensures that students not only gain knowledge about cultural competence but also internalize and apply it in their practice, ultimately leading to more effective and culturally sensitive social work interventions.

Reflection is equally important, serving as a process for students to critically analyze their experiences and understand their cultural biases and assumptions. Reflective practices, such as journaling, group discussions, and supervision, encourage students to contemplate their interactions and reactions, promoting self-awareness and cultural humility (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Through reflection, students can identify areas for personal and professional growth, adjust their attitudes and behaviors, and develop a lifelong commitment to cultural competence.

Cultural competence is vital for the social work profession, enabling social workers to effectively address the complex and culturally influenced issues faced by clients. Research highlights the importance of awareness, knowledge, and skills in developing cultural competence, while recent approaches emphasize the ongoing nature of this journey. Understanding clients' cultural backgrounds and contexts is essential for

building trust, enhancing communication, and providing culturally relevant interventions. Incorporating cultural competence into social work education programs is crucial for preparing social workers to meet the needs of diverse populations and promote social justice and equity. By embracing cultural competence, social workers can ensure that their practice is inclusive, respectful, and effective.

We can learn much from the evolution of cultural competence training in the social work professions in order to improve outcomes in teaching and learning. We can borrow practices from social work education programs and apply the same principles to teacher preparation. The helping professions have a lot in common and rather than reinventing the wheel, we can build on the expertise we already have in order to push further into effective training and practice,

The Role of Cultural Competence in Teaching

In today's diverse and multicultural classrooms, cultural competence has become an indispensable skill for teachers. Cultural competence refers to the ability to effectively interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, understand their perspectives, and create inclusive learning environments that respect and value diversity. The need for cultural competence in education is indicated by demographic changes and the growing diversity within classrooms. Cultural competence allows teachers to create inclusive environments that respect and acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds, which is critical for promoting equity and improving educational outcomes. Gay (2002) states that culturally responsive teaching can enhance student engagement and academic achievement by making learning more relevant and accessible.

First and foremost, cultural competence is essential for fostering positive relationships and rapport between teachers and students. When teachers demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of students' cultural backgrounds, they build trust and mutual respect, which are crucial for effective teaching and learning (Gay, 2018). Students are more likely to engage actively in the learning process and feel valued and supported when they see their cultural identities reflected and affirmed in the classroom.

Cultural competence is essential for addressing the diverse learning needs and preferences of students. By recognizing and respecting cultural differences, teachers can adapt their teaching strategies and instructional materials to accommodate diverse learning styles, language abilities, and cultural norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This flexibility and responsiveness to students' cultural backgrounds promotes equity and accessibility in education, ensuring that all students can succeed. Cultural competence also plays a critical role in promoting social-emotional development and well-being among students. When teachers create inclusive learning environments that celebrate diversity and promote positive intercultural interactions, they foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among students (Howard, 2003). This sense of belonging is essential for students' social and emotional development, as it enhances their self-esteem, resilience, and sense of identity.

Cultural competence enables teachers to effectively address cultural stereotypes, biases, and prejudices in the classroom. By promoting critical thinking and reflection, teachers can help students recognize and challenge stereotypes, develop empathy and understanding for people from different cultural backgrounds, and cultivate positive attitudes towards diversity (Banks, 2013). This critical consciousness is essential for

fostering intercultural understanding and promoting social justice and equity in society. In addition, cultural competence is essential for preparing students for success in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. In today's global economy, students need to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to navigate diverse cultural contexts and collaborate with people from different backgrounds (Deardorff, 2006). By promoting cultural competence, teachers equip students with the intercultural competencies they need to thrive in a diverse and multicultural society.

Cultural competence is a fundamental skill for teachers in today's diverse and multicultural classrooms. By demonstrating an understanding and appreciation of students' cultural backgrounds, adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learning needs, promoting positive intercultural interactions, challenging stereotypes and biases, and preparing students for success in a globalized world, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that foster student learning and success.

Cultural competence in education is essential for creating inclusive learning environments that respect and celebrate diversity. As classrooms become increasingly multicultural, educators must develop the skills and knowledge necessary to address the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. Culturally competent teaching practices can significantly enhance student engagement and achievement, particularly among marginalized groups. This essay discusses the importance of cultural competence in education, its impact on teaching practices, and the necessity of comprehensive training programs in teacher education.

Cultural competence in education involves the ability of educators to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This

competence is vital for creating learning environments where all students feel respected, valued, and included. Research has shown that culturally responsive teaching practices can lead to higher levels of student engagement and academic achievement, especially for students from marginalized groups (Gay, 2010). By recognizing and addressing the cultural needs of students, educators can create a more supportive and effective learning environment.

Culturally responsive teaching practices involve using students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. This approach includes integrating culturally relevant content into the curriculum, employing teaching methods that are inclusive of diverse learning styles, and creating classroom environments that reflect the cultural diversity of the student population. These practices not only enhance student engagement but also validate the cultural identities of students, promoting a sense of belonging and self-worth (Gay, 2010).

For instance, incorporating literature, historical perspectives, and examples from various cultures into the curriculum can make learning more relevant and interesting for students. Additionally, using diverse teaching methods that cater to different learning styles can help ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Culturally responsive teaching also involves fostering an inclusive classroom environment where cultural differences are respected and celebrated. This can be achieved through activities that encourage students to share their cultural backgrounds and learn from each other, promoting mutual respect and understanding.

Teachers' cultural competence significantly impacts their expectations, interactions, and instructional methods. Educators with high cultural competence are

more likely to have positive expectations for all students, regardless of their cultural background. These positive expectations can influence students' self-perceptions and academic performance. Conversely, teachers who lack cultural competence may have lower expectations for students from marginalized groups, which can negatively affect these students' academic outcomes (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Moreover, culturally competent teachers are better equipped to interact effectively with students and their families. They are more likely to use communication strategies that are culturally appropriate and responsive, fostering stronger relationships and better understanding. These positive interactions can create a more supportive and inclusive classroom environment, contributing to students' overall well-being and academic success.

Given the importance of cultural competence, comprehensive training programs in teacher education are essential. These programs should provide prospective teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to teach in culturally diverse classrooms. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), teacher education programs should include coursework and field experiences that focus on cultural competence. This training should cover topics such as cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Experiential learning opportunities, such as student teaching placements in diverse schools and community engagement projects, can help prospective teachers apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Reflective practices, including journaling, discussions, and supervision, can encourage prospective teachers to critically examine

their cultural biases and assumptions, promoting ongoing personal and professional growth.

Additionally, teacher education programs should emphasize the importance of cultural humility, which involves recognizing the limitations of one's cultural knowledge and being open to continuous learning. By fostering cultural humility, these programs can prepare teachers to adapt to the ever-changing cultural landscape of their classrooms and to engage in lifelong learning about cultural competence.

Cultural competence is vital in education for creating inclusive learning environments that respect and celebrate diversity. Culturally responsive teaching practices can enhance student engagement and achievement, particularly among marginalized groups. Teachers' cultural competence impacts their expectations, interactions, and instructional methods, highlighting the need for comprehensive training programs in teacher education. By integrating cultural competence into teacher education, we can prepare educators to effectively meet the needs of diverse student populations and promote equity and inclusion in education.

Cultural Competence Frameworks for Education

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), developed by Milton J. Bennett in 1993, provides a framework for understanding how individuals experience and engage with cultural differences. The model outlines a continuum of six stages that describe the progression from *ethnocentric* to *ethnorelative* orientations towards cultural diversity.

In the initial ethnocentric stage of denial of difference, individuals are unaware of cultural differences and may avoid or ignore cultural diversity. They perceive their own

culture as the only reality, often leading to isolation or separation from those who are different (Bennett, 1993). Defense against difference gives individuals the impulse to recognize some cultural differences but view them negatively. They may feel threatened by these differences and adopt a defensive stance, often characterized by stereotyping and denigration of other cultures (Bennett, 1993). In the third stage of minimizing difference, individuals acknowledge cultural differences but minimize their significance, believing that human similarities outweigh cultural variations. This can lead to an oversimplified view of other cultures, neglecting the complexities and unique aspects of cultural identities (Bennett, 1993).

When we arrive at the ethnorelative stages, we begin with acceptance of difference where Individuals reach a point in which they appreciate and respect cultural differences. In this phase, we recognize the validity of different cultural perspectives and are open to learning about and understanding these variations (Bennett, 1993). In the next phase, we practice adaptation to difference. In this stage, individuals develop the ability to adapt their behavior and communication styles to different cultural contexts. They become more flexible and capable of empathetic engagement with people from diverse backgrounds (Bennett, 1993). Finally, we reach the level of integration of difference which involves individuals integrating cultural differences into their identity. They can move fluidly among cultures and view cultural diversity as an integral part of their self-concept, leading to a deeper intercultural competence (Bennett, 1993).

Bennett's model provides a valuable tool for educators and practitioners in fostering intercultural sensitivity and competence. By understanding these stages,

individuals and organizations can develop targeted interventions to promote cultural awareness and adaptability.

Processes of Becoming Culturally Competent in Education

Cultural competence in education is essential for fostering inclusive learning environments that respect and celebrate diversity. Teachers play a pivotal role in creating such environments by recognizing and addressing the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. The process of becoming culturally competent involves several key components: self-awareness and reflection, knowledge acquisition, and skill development. These elements collectively enable educators to effectively engage with and support students from various cultural backgrounds.

The first step in becoming culturally competent is developing self-awareness and engaging in reflective practices. Teachers must become aware of their own cultural identities, biases, and preconceptions. According to Milner (2003), reflective practices such as journaling and discussions can help educators identify their assumptions and understand how these influence their teaching. Reflective practices encourage teachers to examine their beliefs and attitudes toward different cultural groups, promoting a deeper understanding of their own cultural lens. By becoming aware of their biases, teachers can take steps to mitigate their impact on their interactions with students and create a more inclusive classroom environment.

Once teachers have developed self-awareness, the next step is to acquire knowledge about different cultural groups. This involves understanding students' cultural backgrounds, values, and traditions. Banks (2006) emphasizes the importance of gaining a working knowledge of the historical and social contexts that affect students'

educational experiences. Educators need to recognize how cultural factors influence students' behavior, communication styles, and learning preferences. By acquiring this knowledge, teachers can better appreciate the diversity within their classrooms and create more relevant and meaningful learning experiences for all students. Knowledge acquisition also involves staying informed about current issues and challenges faced by various cultural groups, which can further enhance teachers' ability to support their students effectively.

The final component of becoming culturally competent is skill development. Teachers must develop specific skills to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies. Gay (2010) highlights the importance of adapting instructional methods, designing inclusive curricula, and employing diverse assessment techniques. Culturally responsive teaching requires educators to modify their teaching approaches to meet the needs of diverse learners. This may involve using culturally relevant materials, incorporating students' cultural experiences into the curriculum, and employing teaching strategies that are responsive to different learning styles. Additionally, teachers should develop skills in creating inclusive classroom environments where all students feel valued and respected.

Adapting instructional methods may include using cooperative learning strategies that promote collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds, thus fostering mutual respect and understanding. Designing inclusive curricula involves integrating multicultural content and perspectives into the curriculum, ensuring that all students see their cultures represented in the learning materials. Employing diverse

assessment techniques means using a variety of assessment methods to accommodate the different ways students demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

The processes of becoming culturally competent in education are essential for creating inclusive and effective learning environments. Self-awareness and reflection enable teachers to recognize their biases and understand how these influence their teaching. Knowledge acquisition provides educators with the information needed to appreciate and support the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. Skill development equips teachers with the tools to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed. By committing to these processes, educators can foster a more inclusive and equitable educational experience for all students, ultimately promoting a more just and diverse society.

Professional Development for Cultural Competence

Professional development is essential for fostering cultural competence among teachers, enabling them to create inclusive and effective learning environments. Effective professional development programs possess several key characteristics: they are sustained and ongoing, collaborative and reflective, contextually relevant, and supported by strong leadership. By integrating these elements, professional development can help educators cultivate the skills and knowledge necessary to support diverse student populations.

One-off workshops are insufficient for developing cultural competence; instead, effective professional development must be sustained and ongoing. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), continuous professional development provides long-term support and opportunities for teachers to practice and refine their skills. This approach ensures that

teachers have the time to internalize new concepts and strategies, leading to more profound and lasting changes in their teaching practices. Continuous professional development can take various forms, such as regular training sessions, follow-up workshops, and ongoing mentoring or coaching. These sustained efforts help teachers stay engaged and committed to their professional growth, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural competence.

Collaboration and reflection are critical components of effective professional development. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) highlight the importance of fostering a community of practice where educators can share experiences, challenges, and strategies. Collaborative professional development encourages teachers to learn from one another, promoting a collective approach to cultural competence. Reflective practice, facilitated through peer discussions and coaching, allows teachers to critically examine their teaching methods and biases. By engaging in reflective practice, educators can identify areas for improvement and develop more inclusive teaching strategies. This ongoing reflection and collaboration create a supportive environment where teachers can continuously enhance their cultural competence.

Professional development must be tailored to the specific contexts in which teachers work, addressing the unique cultural dynamics of their student populations. Sleeter (2001) argues that contextually relevant professional development considers the local cultural, social, and economic factors that influence students' educational experiences. By focusing on the particular needs and challenges of their student body, teachers can develop more effective and culturally responsive teaching practices. Contextually relevant training also involves understanding the broader community

context and fostering relationships with students' families and communities. This holistic approach ensures that professional development is directly applicable and meaningful to teachers' everyday experiences.

School leaders play a crucial role in promoting and sustaining cultural competence by providing the necessary resources, time, and supportive environment for professional growth. Leithwood et al. (2004) emphasize that effective leadership involves creating a school culture that values and prioritizes cultural competence. This includes allocating time for professional development activities, providing access to relevant resources, and encouraging a collaborative and reflective professional community. Supportive leaders also model culturally competent behaviors, setting a positive example for teachers to follow. By fostering an environment that supports continuous professional growth, school leaders can help ensure that cultural competence becomes an integral part of the school's ethos.

Professional development is vital for fostering cultural competence among teachers, enabling them to effectively support and engage diverse student populations. Effective professional development programs are sustained and ongoing, collaborative and reflective, contextually relevant, and supported by strong leadership. By incorporating these elements, professional development can help educators develop the skills and knowledge necessary to create inclusive and effective learning environments. As a result, teachers will be better equipped to understand and address the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students, promoting equity and inclusion in education.

Cultural competence is a skill that affects each realm in which we have contact with others; socially, professionally, and in our relationships. Without developing our

skills in cross-cultural relations and communication, we can experience missteps that degrade our relationships with others or defeat our efforts in trying to work with people who come from a different cultural context from our own. Our ability to navigate cultural differences in the helping professions is integral to the work we do and our ability to achieve the outcomes we seek to achieve with our clients, students, colleagues and the general public.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Overview

As described in Chapters One and Two, teacher preparation for cultural and linguistic responsiveness is essential in today's increasingly (linguistically) diverse classroom. Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to design and promote learning environments where students from various cultural backgrounds are supported. Teacher preparation might involve understanding the complexities of multicultural education, which includes recognizing and addressing issues related to race, ethnicity, language, religion, and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, practical experience in diverse classroom settings is crucial. Pre-service teachers should have opportunities to work with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts.

To understand what teachers might be experiencing in communities with large multilingual populations, I explored how prepared current teachers felt when tasked with educating culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. The study outlined here aimed to reveal possible gaps between the training teachers received pre-service and the skills required of them in the realities of their day-to-day work. I attempted to identify areas where teacher education programs may have under-equipped educators for effective teaching when some students require linguistically or culturally nuanced pedagogies. Did teachers feel their pre-service training focused enough on language development and

multilingualism as a likely task they would have to master?

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

1. What do teachers believe about the role of cultural competence in education / the classroom?
2. What do teachers believe about the value of cultural diversity and inclusivity in education / the classroom?
3. What do teachers believe they should do to implement culturally relevant practices in the classroom?
4. Are teachers aware of resources and training opportunities to improve their cultural responsiveness?
5. Have teachers received training in cultural responsiveness or have they sought their own information to improve practices?
6. How do teachers create a culturally responsive classroom environment?
7. What are perceived challenges in doing any of the above?
8. Do teachers feel their pre-service training prepared them for the linguistic and cultural demands of the modern classroom?

The study explored whether there has been a perceived lack of accessible, up-to-date information and training opportunities for teachers who must balance curriculum delivery with student needs.

Overview of Research Design

This study used quantitative methods to explore teachers' preparation and experiences in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. Quantitative research is a method focused on the systematic investigation of phenomena using

statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques, and has been a dominant approach in the scientific community. The roots of quantitative research lie in the need to measure, quantify, and generalize findings, making it particularly powerful for identifying patterns, testing hypotheses, and predicting outcomes. The evolution of quantitative research mirrors the development of the scientific method and statistical tools in research. The origins of quantitative methods can be traced to the early efforts to apply mathematics and empirical methods to understand natural phenomena that don't seem to pair with mathematics at first glance. Over time, the quantitative approach spread across multiple disciplines, including the social sciences, economics, psychology, education, and health sciences, becoming a foundational method in modern research.

A quantitative survey can get at the beliefs that practicing teachers have about their effectiveness in teaching multicultural students (recent-arrivals, or “newcomers” specifically), and their perceived level of preparedness in doing so. From there, I hope the data will give us points to consider in making decisions about pre-service teacher training and how we go about preparing new teachers to enter the workforce.

Quantitative surveys are ideal for assessing the prevalence of certain educational outcomes or practices across larger populations. For example, a survey might be used to assess the impact of a new teaching method on student achievement across multiple schools, providing statistically robust evidence of effectiveness. The ability to generalize findings from a representative sample to a broader population makes surveys a powerful tool for educational policy and decision-making (Mertens, 2020). Sukamolson's (2007) “Fundamentals of Quantitative Research” dives into the particulars of quantitative research. One key finding was that quantitative research, as it is founded in empirical

evidence, offers objectivity by using numerical data to describe and explain phenomena. The quantitative approach is particularly useful in disciplines like the social sciences, where researchers commonly want to measure variables like student performance or students' attitudes toward learning. The use of structured tools like questionnaires and tests, enables researchers to convert subjective information, like opinions or beliefs, into quantifiable data, which can be analyzed and, through statistics, generalized for a broader view.

For this dissertation, I conducted a survey of practicing teachers. I asked teachers to reflect on their experiences in the classroom as well as their experiences during their pre-service training. I asked questions about how prepared they felt going into their field and whether they believe they are supported adequately by their schools as things change over time. I wanted to know whether, going into the classroom, teachers felt their pre-service education (teacher training) programs prepared them for the reality of the classroom in which they find themselves as currently practicing teachers. In addition, I wanted to see whether teachers are open to cultural and linguistic training if it is made available at their schools / within their districts.

Population and Sample

The target population for this research consisted of teachers working in school districts characterized by populations of immigrants and refugees at numbers over 15% of the total student population. These districts offered a unique opportunity to study the nuances of multicultural education in environments where cultural and linguistic diversity is most pronounced. To widen the survey's reach and capture a broader array of experiences, I encouraged a snowball sampling technique. The eighty-nine teachers who

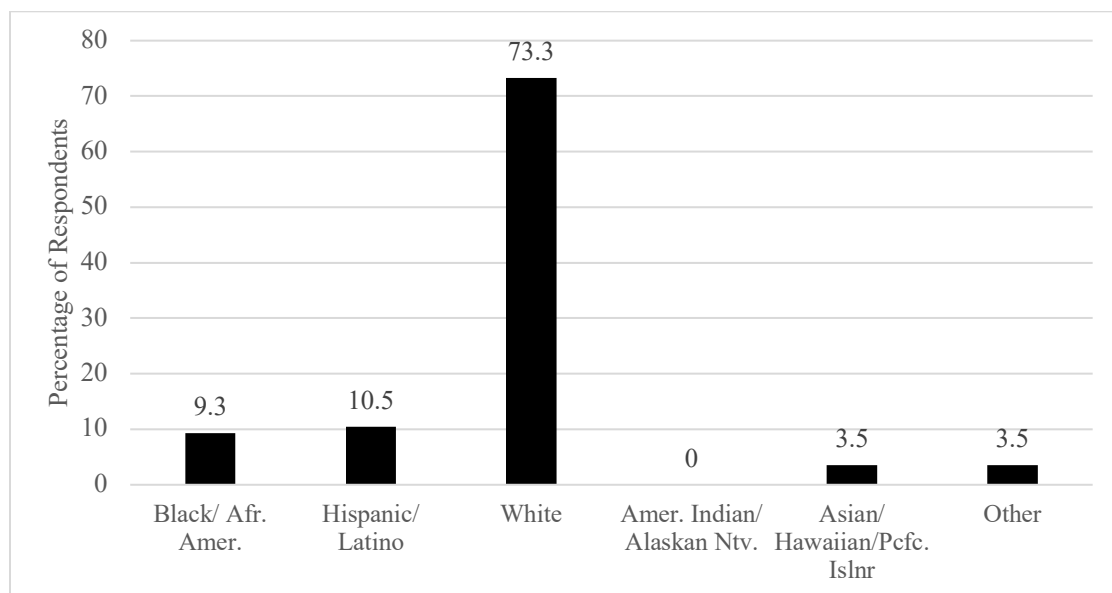
completed the survey were encouraged to forward it to their colleagues and professional networks, expanding the sample size and diversity of responses.

Participant Characteristics

The first survey question asked teachers to identify their racial identity. The largest share of respondents selected White, non-Hispanic. Smaller proportions identified as Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin and Black or African American. A collective 3.49% identified as Asian, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, and the same selected “Other.” No respondents identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Percentages reflect those who answered the item; excluding three of 89 total participants who did not respond to the question. Bars display the percentage of respondents by race/ethnicity. The figure below shows the distribution of the responses. Each bar shows the percentage who selected that category.

Figure 3.1

Ethnic Distribution of the Survey Sample



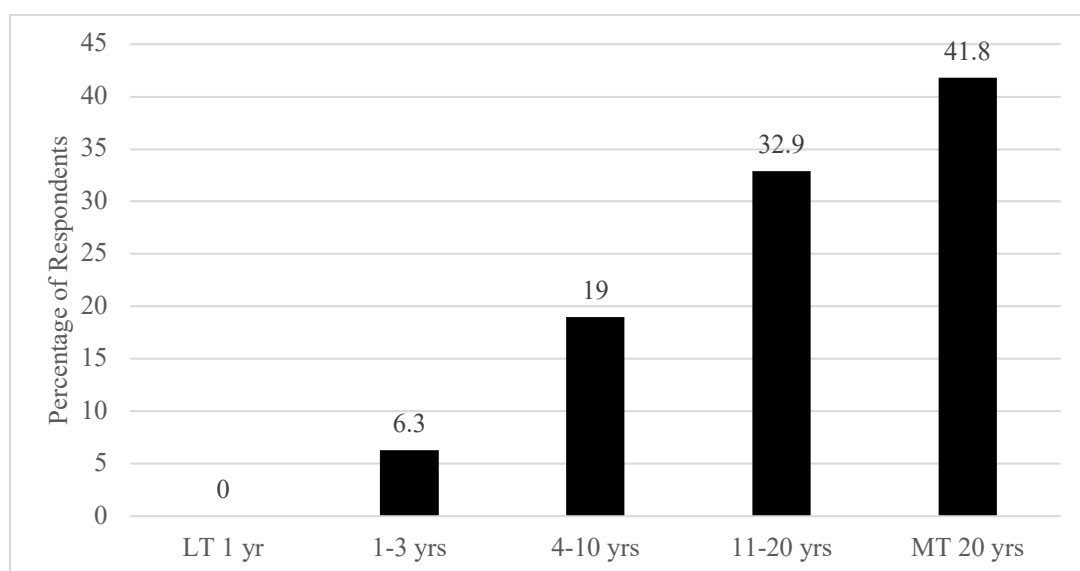
Overall, the sample for this item was predominantly White, with notably smaller representations from racial or ethnic minority groups. The distribution below provides context for interpreting the additional findings regarding culturally responsive beliefs and practices also reported.

Question two asked whether participants identified with more than one culture. Twenty respondents (23.5%) responded affirmatively, while sixty-five (76.5%) responded negatively. The data exclude four participants who did not respond to the question. This information may have little bearing on the results of other results reported in Chapter Four but speak to the cultural makeup of the survey participants. This information may account for the potential likelihood of recorded responses later in the survey.

Question 3 asked teachers to indicate their years of teaching experience. The figure below shows the distribution of results.

Figure 3.2

Years of Teaching Experience

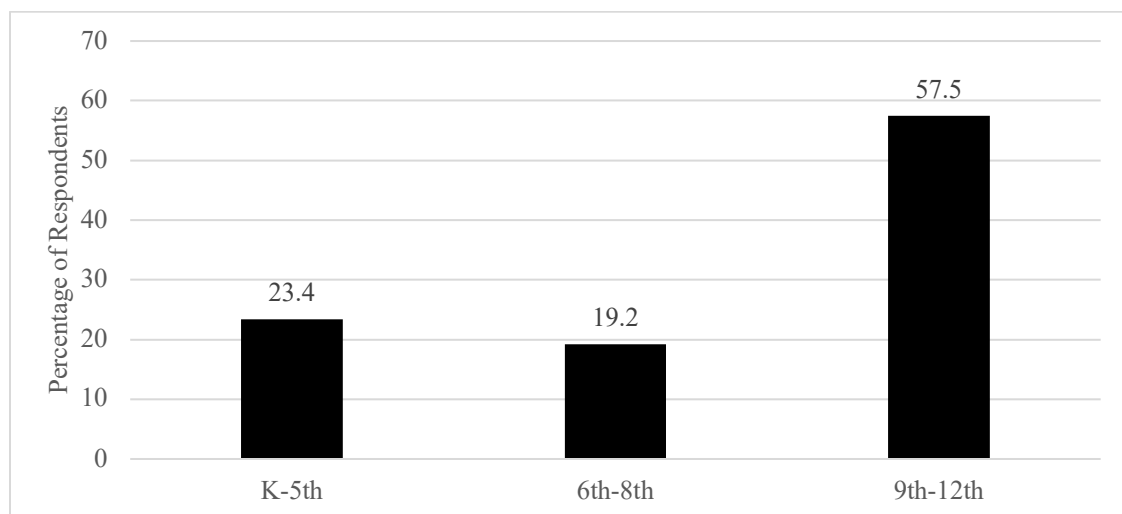


Results show a broad distribution across the career span, with the largest proportion reporting more than 20 years of experience, followed by 10–20 years. A smaller percentage of educators reported 3–10 years teaching experience, while 1–3 years accounted for the smallest group. No respondents selected less than 1 year of professional teaching experience. Taken together, these results indicate that the sample skews toward experienced practitioners, providing a useful lens for interpreting perspectives on culturally responsive practice that may reflect extensive classroom exposure, accumulated professional learning, and long-term engagement with multilingual learners. If this is the case, then results may indicate less need for training or gaps in training and experience over time that could be addressed by districts and/or individuals.

Question 4 asked teachers to indicate the grade level at which they taught. Levels were divided into three categories as shown in the figure below:

Figure 3.3

Grade Level Taught

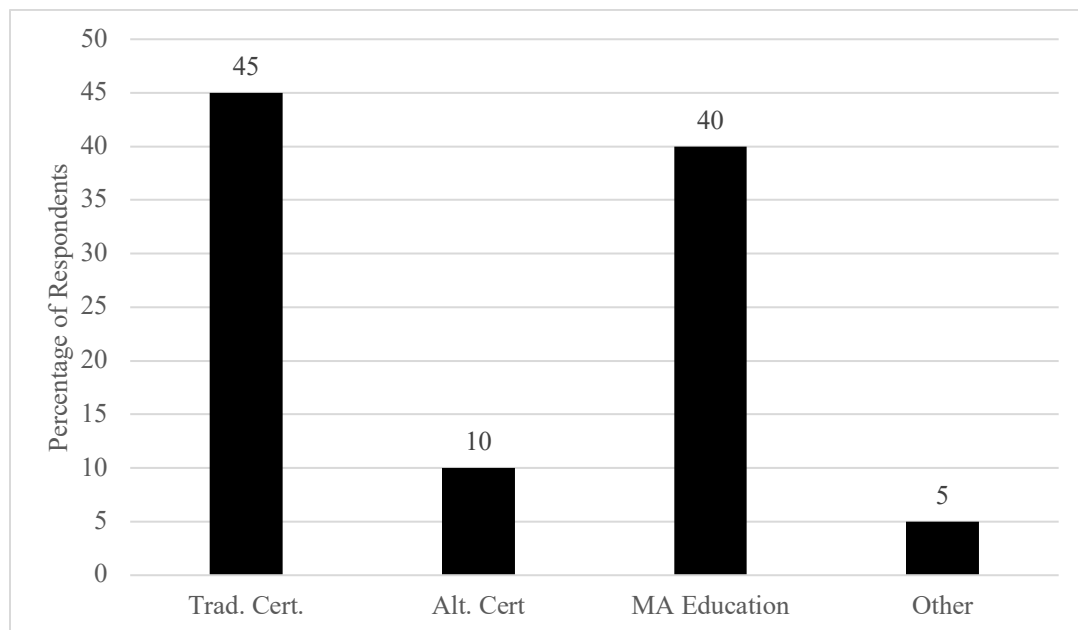


As we can see in the distribution, secondary education accounted for most responses, followed by K-5 and grades 6-8 respectively. Responses suggest that perspectives in the sample are anchored more heavily in high school contexts, with fewer voices from elementary and middle grades. Interpreting findings should consider the curricular structures, scheduling patterns, and instructional demands common to secondary settings, which can shape opportunities and constraints for implementing culturally responsive practices with multilingual learners.

Question 5 asked respondents to indicate the type of certification program they completed. The figure below illustrates four options included in the survey question as follows:

Figure 3.4

Type of Teaching Credential



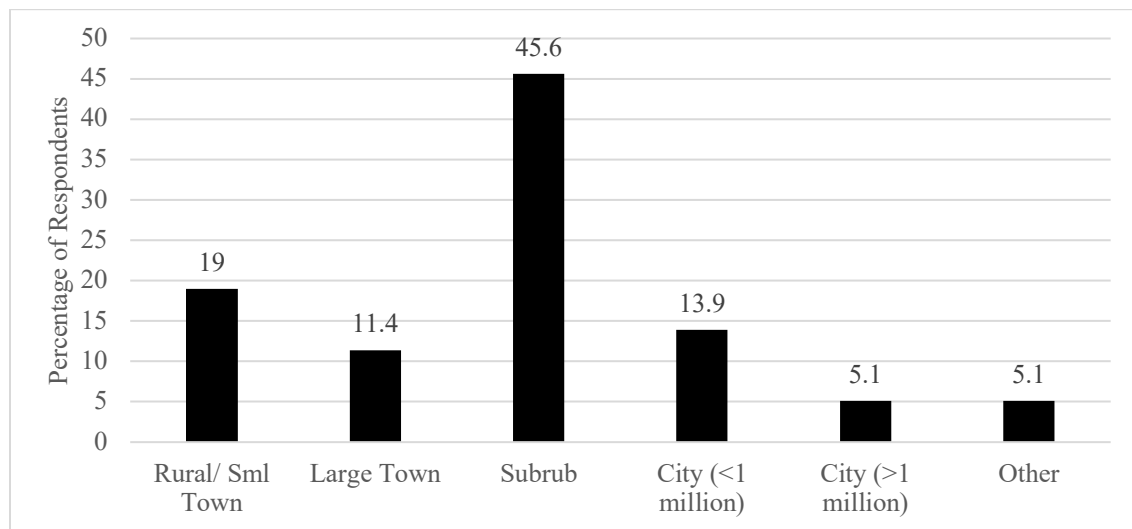
Nearly half reported traditional certification pathways, and a substantial proportion completed a master's in education, though it is unclear whether the master's degree was undertaken as a primary route to certification or as part of continuing education or recertifying credits. A smaller segment reported alternate certification, while other pathways accounted for only five percent. Most respondents entered the profession through conventional programs and/or graduate-level educator training, with fewer indicating non-traditional routes. The distribution in these results offers a context for interpreting findings about types of coursework and professional learning related to culturally responsive practices.

Question 6 asked respondents in which state they currently reside. Seventy-seven respondents provided their state. Leading in numbers was Michigan at forty-seven respondents. Secondly, Florida accounted for twenty-four and other states accounted for far less. Two respondents were from Georgia, while one respondent each was from the following states: California, Colorado, New York, and Wisconsin. While I sent the survey out to various schools in these and other states, and it remained open for a month, it did not achieve the number of respondents nor as much geographic diversity as I would have liked.

Question 7 asked respondents to identify the type of community in which they currently teach. Results are shown for each community description in the figure below.

Figure 3.5

Community Type of Respondents

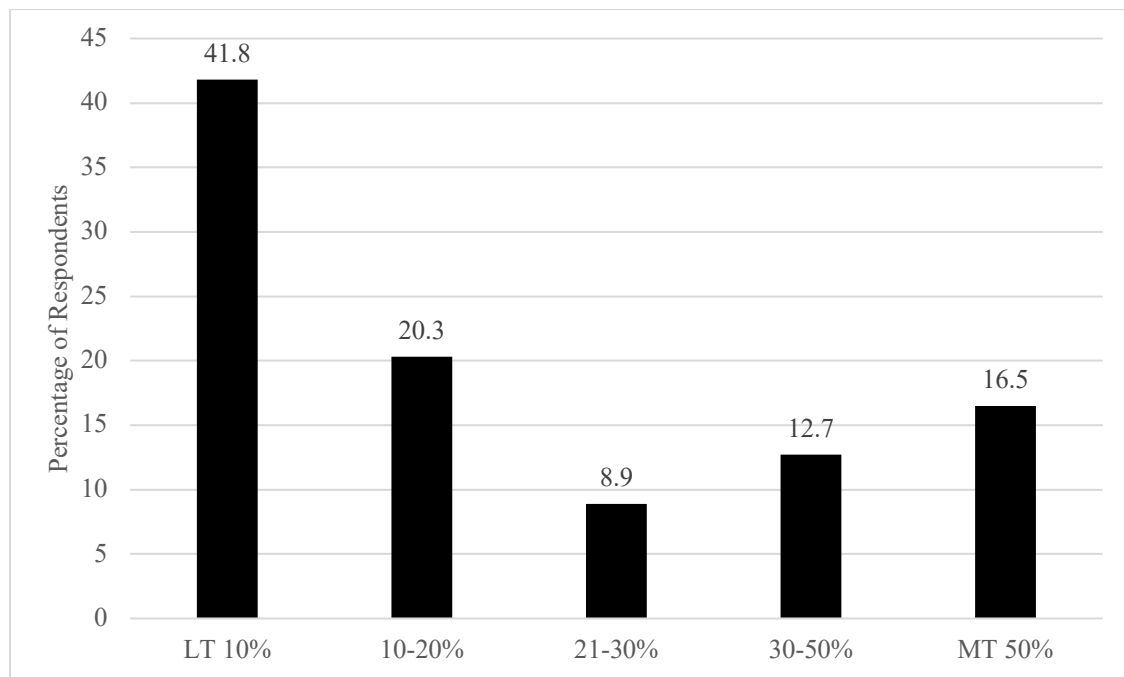


Suburban area accounted for the largest group of respondents. Smaller proportions reported teaching in rural/small town settings and cities with fewer than 1,000,000 people, followed by larger towns (not suburban). Teaching in cities with 1,000,000 or more people and other contexts each represented 5.06%. Overall, the sample reflects a strong suburban presence with meaningful representation from rural and mid-sized urban contexts, providing a varied backdrop for understanding how community features shape opportunities and challenges for culturally responsive practice with multilingual learners and the community assets available to them.

Question 8 asked respondents to indicate what percentage of their students are designated as English Language Learners. Figure 3.6 illustrates findings.

Figure 3.6

Percentage of Students Designated ELL in Respondents' Classrooms

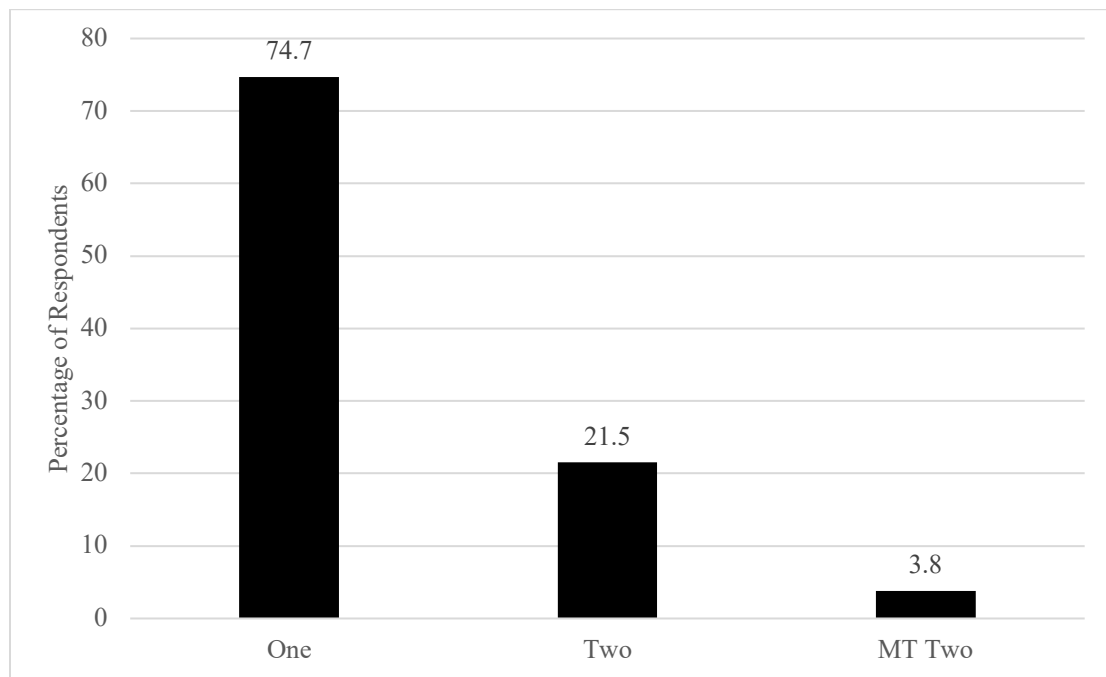


Teachers reported a wide variation in the percentage of students designated as English Language Learners (ELL) in their classrooms. Overall, the distribution indicates that most respondents teach in settings with relatively low ELL concentrations, and a minority work in classrooms where ELLs make up a substantial portion—at least 30%, and for many, more than half. This spread highlights the importance of differentiated support in the classroom. While many teachers encounter ELL needs sporadically, others operate in high-density multilingual contexts that demand sustainable approaches to culturally and linguistically responsive instruction.

In question nine, respondents were asked to indicate how many languages they speak. The figure below illustrates results.

Figure 3.7

Number of Languages Spoken by Respondents



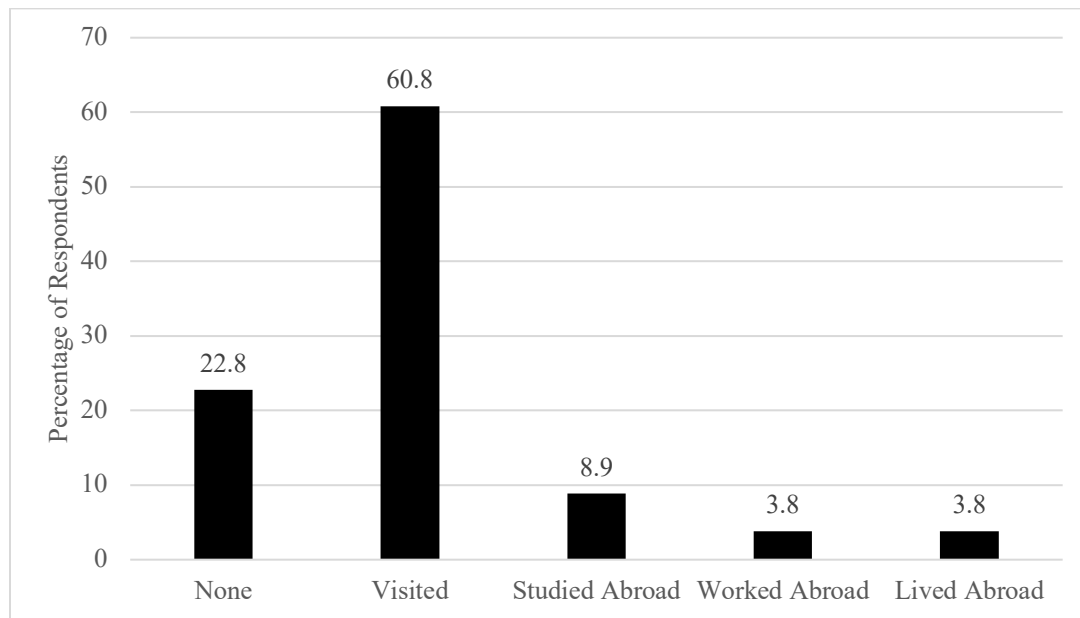
Respondents' reported multilingualism resulted in a majority stating they spoke one language. The distribution shown above suggests that many teachers in the sample are working with multilingual learners from primarily monolingual vantage points, which may influence how they perceive language development, translanguaging, and the role of home languages in instruction. At the same, meaningful number of bilingual and multilingual educators brings additional linguistic resources that may inform asset-oriented practices and family engagement with multilingual communities.

Question ten asked respondents how much time they have spent in a country that speaks another language. The goal of this question was to gauge how much exposure (as well as engagement with the community) teachers have had to another culture and

language via immersion rather than the exposure within the comfort zone of their home culture. Results are shown in the figure below.

Figure 3.8

Time Spent in Non-English-Speaking Countries among Respondents



Teachers reported varied levels of international experience in countries where English is not the primary language. Most respondents indicated they had visited such countries, while about a quarter reported no time abroad. Smaller shares had deeper immersion experiences. This pattern suggests that while short-term exposure is common, extended time, such as study, work, or residency are comparatively uncommon within the sample. Differences in experiential depth may shape teachers' navigation of multilingual environments and perspectives on culturally and linguistically responsive practices in their own classrooms.

Data Source

This quantitative study used a survey to gather comprehensive data on practicing teachers' cultural experiences, attitudes, cultural competence, and the challenges they faced when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. I designed the survey to collect measurable data through structured and categorized questions that explored teachers' personal and professional experiences with diversity. Respondents reflected on their interactions with immigrant and refugee populations, indicate their level of cultural competence in a variety of areas, and identify specific challenges encountered in adapting to meet the needs of diverse learners. By focusing on these key dimensions, the study aimed to provide insight to the current state of teacher preparedness in multicultural classroom settings. The survey addressed the critical issue of how to make connections between current teacher preparation and the ongoing need for quality professional development as classrooms change due to human migration and the displacement of international populations.

Questions on this survey explored teacher readiness and self-assuredness in the management of complex tasks in a linguistically diverse classroom. Likewise, questions sought information as to whether teachers felt their pre-service training provided them with sufficient skills, strategies, and theoretical foundations to meet the potential challenges presented in classrooms where students speak languages other than English. In addition to exploring reflections on their feelings of preparedness in pre-service training, I investigated whether teacher attitudes were toward teaching multi-cultural/multilingual students, engaging with international families, and their perceptions of school support and professional development aimed at improving skills in these areas.

I composed the survey with the idea that experience and attitudes would be measured in the eight categories shown in Table 3.1 (survey can be found in Appendix I):

Table 3.1

Description of Categories of Experiences and Attitudes

Section	Description
Demographics	Respondents indicated race, ethnicity, cultural identity, years teaching, grade level, teacher training program, teaching level, location, and contact with English language learners.
Knowledge and awareness	Respondents indicated on a scale of 1-10 whether they agreed with statements regarding the role of cultural competence in education.
Attitudes and Beliefs	Respondents indicated on a scale of 1-10 whether they agreed with statements about the value of cultural diversity and inclusivity in education.
Teaching Practices	Respondents received a list of statements that have been made about education and indicated their agreement on a scale of 1-10. These questions aimed at items that educators “should” do to implement culturally relevant practices.
Training and Professional Development	Teachers indicated awareness of resources and opportunities for training as well as their willingness or interest in participating in professional development. Teachers also indicate the degree to which they took initiative to inform themselves on the issues multicultural or multilingual students face in the classroom.
Classroom Environment	Respondents indicated on a scale of 1-10 whether they had been trained in creating culturally relevant classroom practices, whether they had been trained in encouraging students from different backgrounds to work together and how to problem solve inter-cultural challenges.
Challenges	Participants indicated their level of agreement with statements regarding the challenges of incorporating cultural awareness with curriculum, the needs of students, the availability of resources, and the attitudes of colleagues regarding engaging culturally diverse students and their families.
Pre-service Preparation	Respondents indicated their agreement with several statement regarding pre-service program training on cultural competence, multilingual learners, and strategies for supporting these student groups.

Data Collection

I initiated survey distribution by contacting school principals within districts with high numbers of English Language Learners. I asked school principals to facilitate the process by sharing the survey with their faculty. I used this approach to enhance the validity of the study and encourage participation from teachers who were directly engaged with linguistically diverse student populations.

Once I sent the survey out to principals and assistant principals, I also shared it in teacher groups on social media (Facebook) and posted and shared on LinkedIn. I gave respondents a one-month window for submission per round of distribution. Of 91 total respondents, two elected not to complete the survey, leaving 89 recorded responses.

Participants indicated their willingness to take the survey, they completed the questions and submitted results automatically via the Qualtrics survey tool. If participants did not want to complete the survey, they were automatically exited from the survey and responses were not further required. The survey was open for six weeks in total, giving a month from the last distribution to collect responses.

Data Analysis

I collected data from the survey and analyzed it using statistical software to perform both descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive statistics summarized key findings, such as the average level of self-reported cultural competence and common challenges identified by teachers. I applied inferential statistical techniques, including regression analyses and correlation studies, to examine the relationships between variables such as teachers' cultural backgrounds, their attitudes toward diversity, and the challenges they face in the classroom. This analytical approach aimed to identify significant patterns and potential gaps in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. Ultimately, the study sought to inform educational stakeholders on effective strategies for enhancing teacher readiness and success in culturally and linguistically diverse educational settings.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

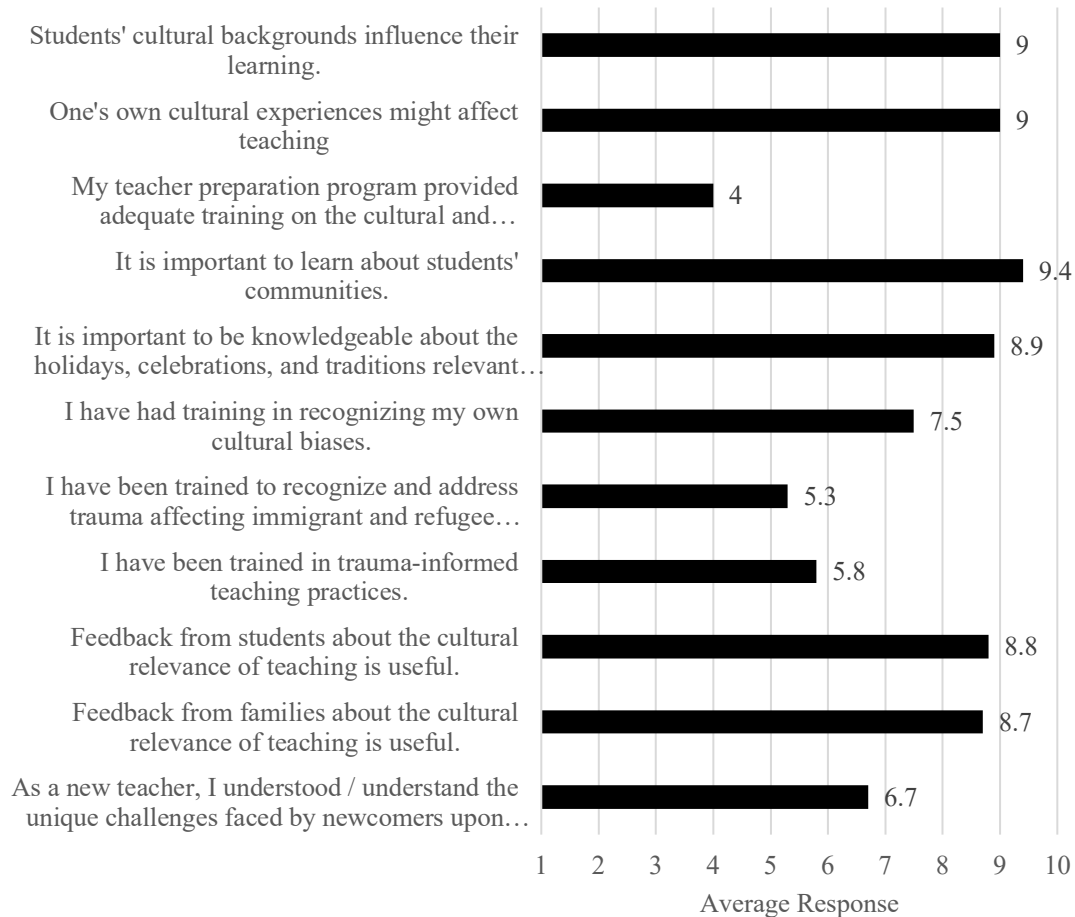
This chapter reports findings from a cross-sectional survey examining how PreK–12 teachers understand and implement culturally responsive education in schools serving higher-than-average numbers of multilingual learners (MLLs). To reach educators working most closely with linguistically diverse students, the survey was distributed indirectly: principals in targeted communities were asked to share the instrument with their teaching staff. Eighty-nine teachers completed the survey. Chapter Four presents descriptive results organized by research question, highlighting patterns across the sample and identifying areas of alignment and tension between beliefs, preparation, and implementation. The chapter concludes by pointing to implications for teacher education and ongoing professional development in multilingual school contexts. Questions 1-6 (participant characteristics) have been explored in the previous chapter, so I will begin here with question 7 of the survey.

Teachers' Beliefs About the Role of Cultural Competence in Education / the Classroom

Beginning with question 11, respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with given statements based on their experiences (scale of 1-10). The series of statements within question 11 focused on the role of culture as a component of pedagogy and its perceived level of importance as an asset in the classroom. Figure 4.1 shows the results on this set of beliefs.

Figure 4.1

Role of Culture in Pedagogy



Teachers expressed high agreement with statements emphasizing the importance of cultural competence in daily practice. Agreement was strongest for learning about students' communities and for the idea that cultural backgrounds influence student learning. Also, there was strong agreement with the notion that one's own cultural experiences can affect teaching. Respondents also rated student and family feedback on cultural relevance as useful. In contrast, items regarding formal preparation and trauma education were lower; trauma-informed teaching, training to recognize/address trauma among immigrant and refugee students, and adequate teacher training for

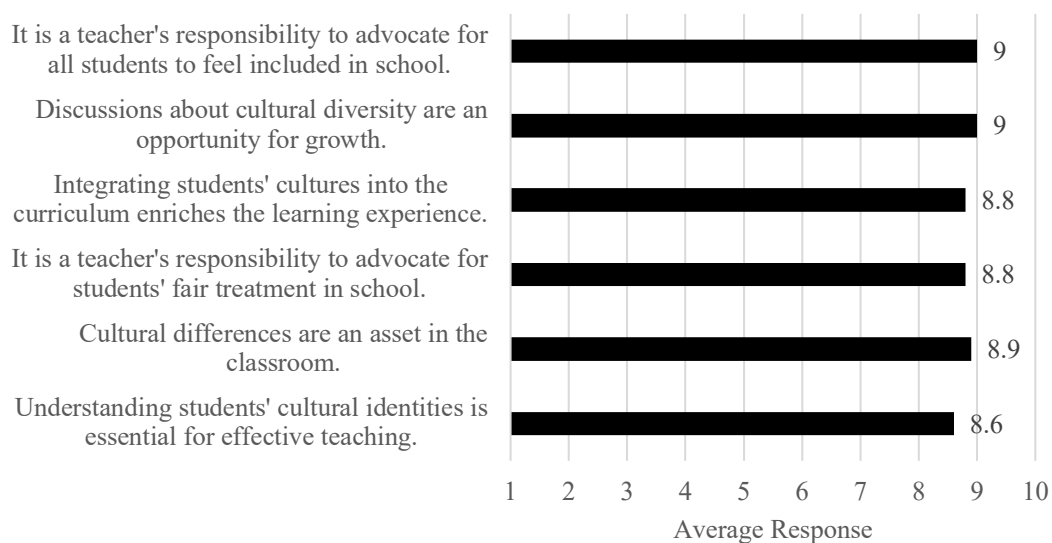
immigrant/refugee challenges. These results suggest that these teachers recognized the role of culture in the classroom as important and valued culturally responsive practices but may have been lacking in more nuanced trainings or support for items such as trauma-informed practices.

Teachers Beliefs about the Value of Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity

The next set of items in question 12 of the survey asked teachers to indicate their feelings of agreement (on a scale of 1-10) about the responsibility of incorporating cultural backgrounds and measures asset- versus deficit-based attitudes in the classroom regarding the presence of cultural differences. The figure below illustrates the results.

Figure 4.2

Incorporating Cultural Backgrounds



Across all six belief statements, respondents endorsed culturally relevant and inclusive teaching. Agreement was highest for cultural diversity as an opportunity for growth and for advocating for students, so they feel included. Viewing cultural differences as assets and integrating students' cultures into the classroom also scored

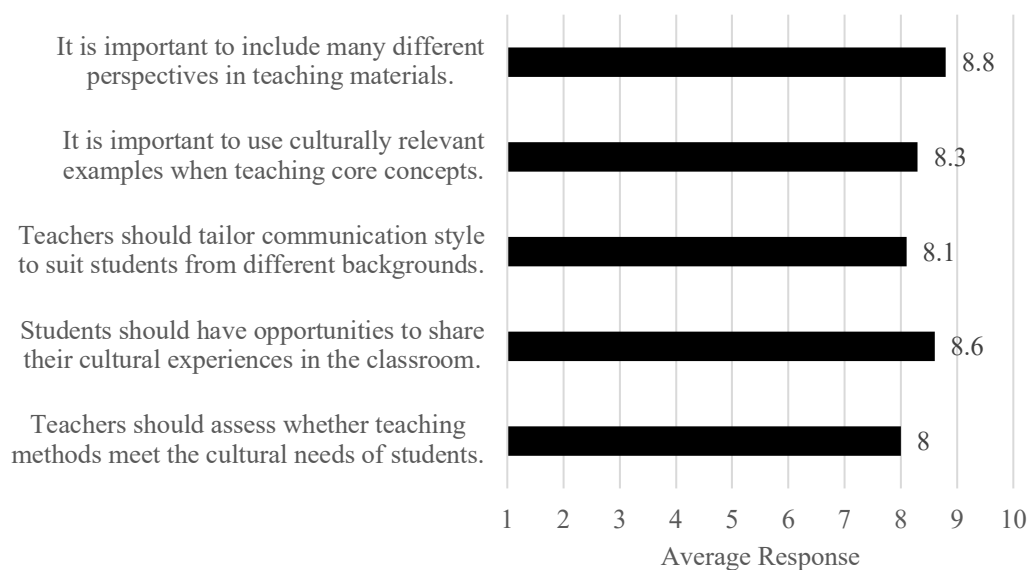
high. Understanding students' cultural identities also had a high level of agreement.

These results point to a consensus among respondents that culturally sustaining mindsets, advocacy, and pedagogies were central features of effective teaching in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom.

Question 13 asked respondents to reflect on their feelings around using student experiences in the classroom, and the use of culture as a teaching tool. The figure below indicates results.

Figure 4.3

Using Culturally Responsive Methods



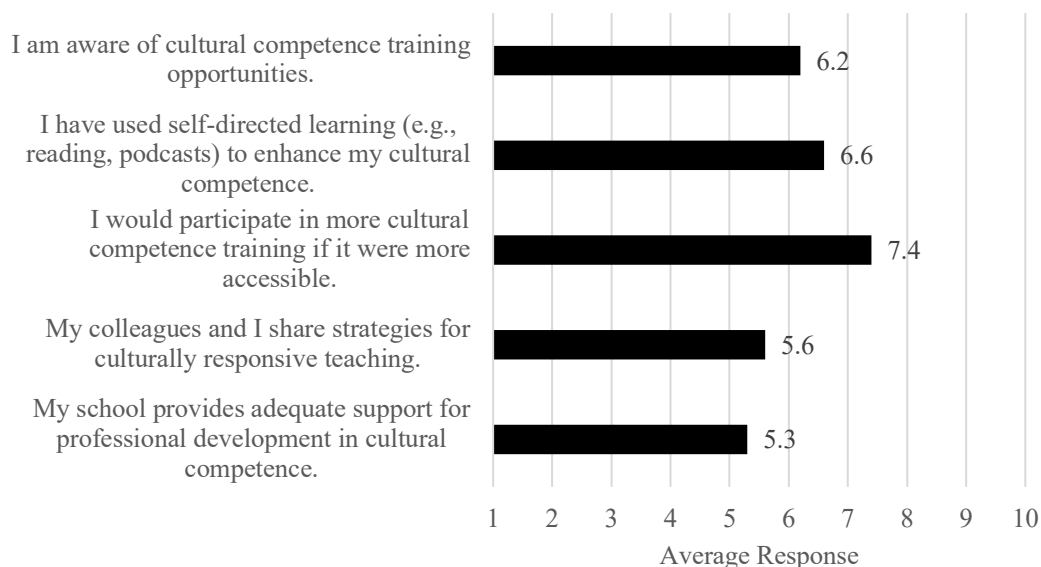
Respondents reported strong support of culturally responsive instructional practices. Highest agreement appeared for including many different perspectives in teaching materials and giving students opportunities to share their cultural experiences. Teachers also favored using culturally relevant examples when teaching core concepts and tailoring communication styles to students from different backgrounds. Slightly

lower, but still positive, agreement was given for regularly assessing whether teaching methods meet students' cultural needs. Overall, these responses indicate general support for integrating students' cultures into day-to-day instruction and materials, along with intentional pedagogy and communication geared toward diverse learner backgrounds.

Question 14 sought respondents' feedback regarding cultural competence training and resources. The figure below shows results from line items for question 14.

Figure 4.4

Cultural Competence Training



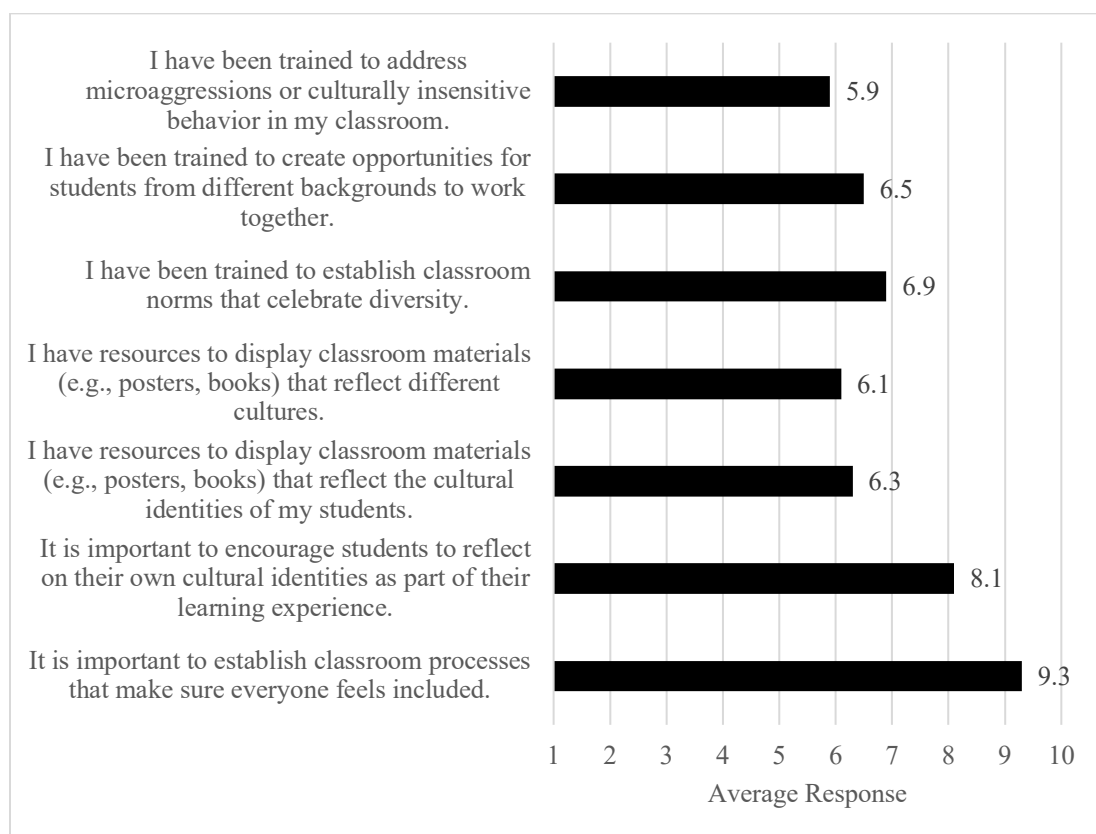
Responses were mixed regarding institutional support even with strong personal motivation for growth on the part of respondents. Agreement was highest for willingness to participate in more cultural competence training if it were more accessible and for using self-directed learning (e.g., reading, podcasts) to build cultural competence. Awareness of opportunities was moderate. In contrast, school-level support and collaboration among peers scored lower numbers. Sharing strategies with colleagues

averaged and adequate school support for professional development in cultural competence were lowest. The results of the items above may point to institutional and district supports not keeping pace with the level of teacher interest in having collaborative and training opportunities afforded to them.

Items in question 15 sought respondents' levels of agreement with preparation and accessibility toward incorporating culturally relevant materials in the classroom as well as implementing culturally responsive pedagogies. See the figure below for results.

Figure 4.5

Inclusive Practice for Culturally Diverse Learners



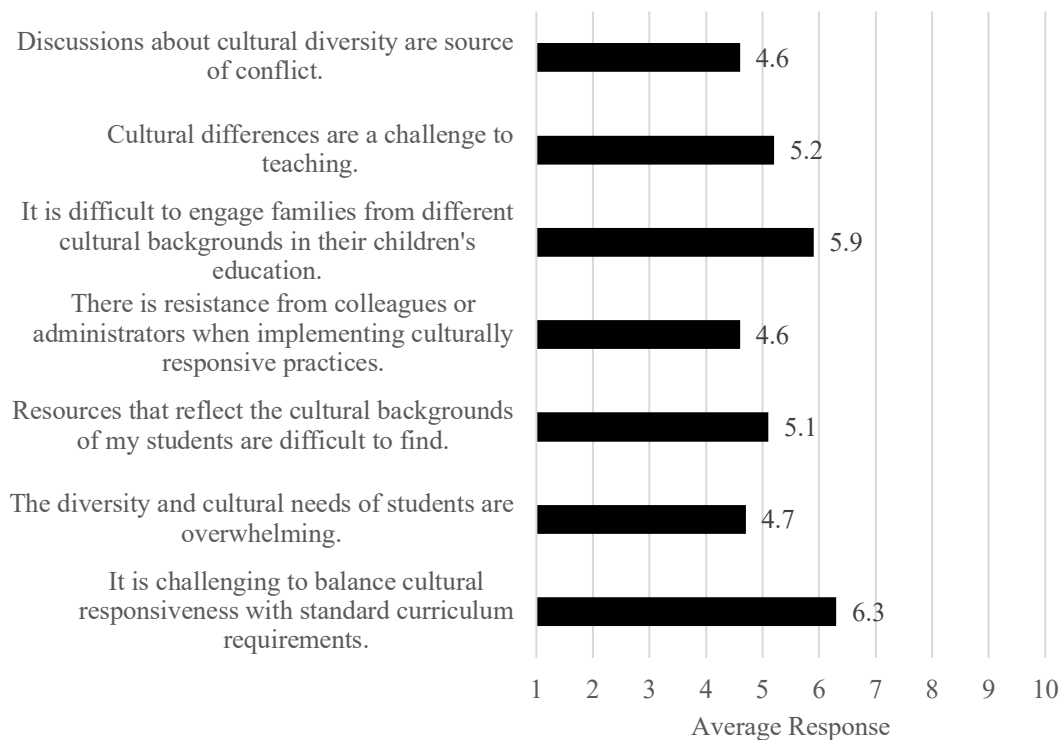
Results for question 15 items show that teachers want to create an inclusive environment for students and are open to more training and resources than they are currently receiving. Agreement was highest for the importance of establishing classroom

processes so everyone feels included and encouraging students to reflect on their own cultural identities. Training- and resource-focused items landed in the middle. The lowest mean appeared for training to address microaggressions or culturally insensitive behavior. Mostly, respondents strongly value inclusive practices and reflective practices, but report less adequate preparation, materials, and supports for implementing these items, especially regarding addressing microaggressions.

Question 16 of the survey focused on items that indicated challenges in the multicultural / multilingual classroom. Respondents were asked to offer their level of agreement with statements around their feelings of overwhelm or difficulty in their roles as cultural facilitators in the classroom.

Figure 4.6

Challenges to Culturally Sustaining Practice

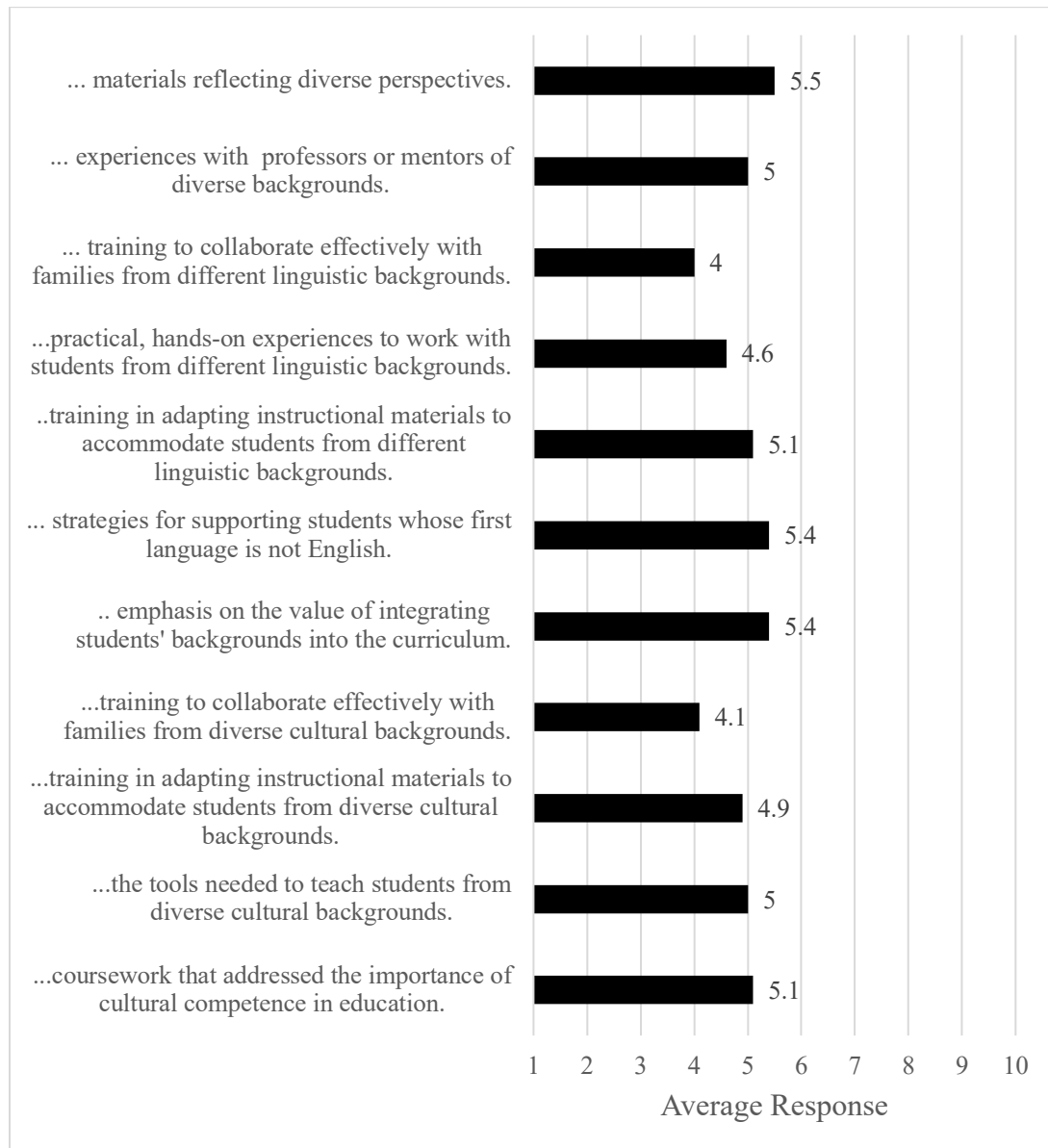


Respondents identified several complications to incorporating culturally responsive practice, led by balancing cultural responsiveness with standard curriculum requirements. Concerns included difficulty engaging families from different cultural backgrounds, cultural differences as a challenge to teaching, and difficulty finding resources that reflect students' cultural background. Lower means appeared for difficulty in meeting students' cultural needs, resistance from colleagues or administrators, and discussions about diversity being a source of conflict. Respondents indicated that barriers due to curriculum, family engagement and access to materials outweigh any interpersonal or school climate-based challenges.

Question 17 ended the survey with items measuring perceived effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about their pre-service training and experiences. See the figure below for results.

Figure 4.7

Self-Reported Teacher Preparation Effectiveness



Overall, respondents rated their pre-service preparation for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms as moderate at best, with some gaps. Highest means were around access to materials reflecting diverse perspectives, strategies for supporting English language learners, and emphasis on integrating students' backgrounds into the

curriculum. Coursework on the foundations of cultural competence and training to adapt materials for different linguistic backgrounds were in the mid-range. Preparation perceived as weaker included tools to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences with professors/mentors of diverse backgrounds, and practical, hands-on experiences with linguistically diverse students. The lowest items were in collaboration with families, suggesting limited pre-service emphasis on school–family partnership skills. Taken together, these results indicate partial exposure to culturally and linguistically sustaining strategies, but inconsistent practice at these along with family engagement training.

Taking a broad look at these results, it appears that most respondents were willing and eager to learn better and more effective practices. When it came to items regarding incorporating cultural responsiveness and collaboration with colleagues and community stakeholders (families), these results indicated a general openness and willingness to learn and engage. Where numbers were lower, it seems that they were in categories outside the teachers’ control. I would surmise from these results that districts must make difficult decisions when it comes to budgeting, offering professional development, and gaining materials and resources for classrooms.

Training Effectiveness and Specific Aspects of Culturally Responsive Teaching

To discover relationships between opinions on teacher preparation and their views about culturally responsive teaching, a z-score composite was formed to combine the different attitudes towards training into one measure. For this measure the higher the response, the more effective the teacher felt their training was. Table 4.1 shows the

correlation of this composite on effective training with each of the items assessing culturally responsive teaching.

Table 4.1

Correlation between Effective Training and Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching Constructs	Pearson Correlation with Teaching Effectiveness (2-tailed sig)
Cultural relevance is important for teaching effectively	.022 (.833)
My culture could impact my teaching	.262* (.021)
Integrating culture helps students learn	.215* (.039)
Teachers are responsible for advocating for all students	.139 (.187)
Important to use culturally relevant practices in teaching	.318** (.002)
School /colleagues support culturally relevant practices in teaching	.474** (<.001)
Training is unavailable or has to be done on my own	.225* (.031)
My teaching works to bring together students from many different backgrounds	.616** (<.001)
Important to have all students feel included	.168 (.110)
Cultural differences make teaching difficult	.183 (.081)

From these results, we can see that there are a few items that measured as significant for teachers. Teachers agreed that their own culture could impact their teaching (Q11)) and that integrating culture in classroom instruction helps students learn (Q12). Teachers agreed that including culturally relevant practices was important (culturally relevant to the students in the classroom) and that schools and colleagues supported this strategy overall (Q14). Participating teachers agreed that culturally competent training was either unavailable or had to be done on their own (Q14).

Participants felt that their teaching worked to bring students from various backgrounds together (Q15). Teachers generally did not agree that cultural differences make teaching difficult (Q16). Interestingly, there was not a significant result for feeling it was important to make sure all students feel included. In addition, there was no significant result for teachers being responsible for advocating for all students.

After assessing the role of culture in teaching, I conducted an analysis of whether certification types impacted some of these ideas. The table below indicates results based on whether participants had a traditional teaching certification, a master's degree in education, or an alternative certification type. The table leaves out the results for non-significant differences.

Table 4.2

Summary of Significant Differences in Means for Different Types of Certification

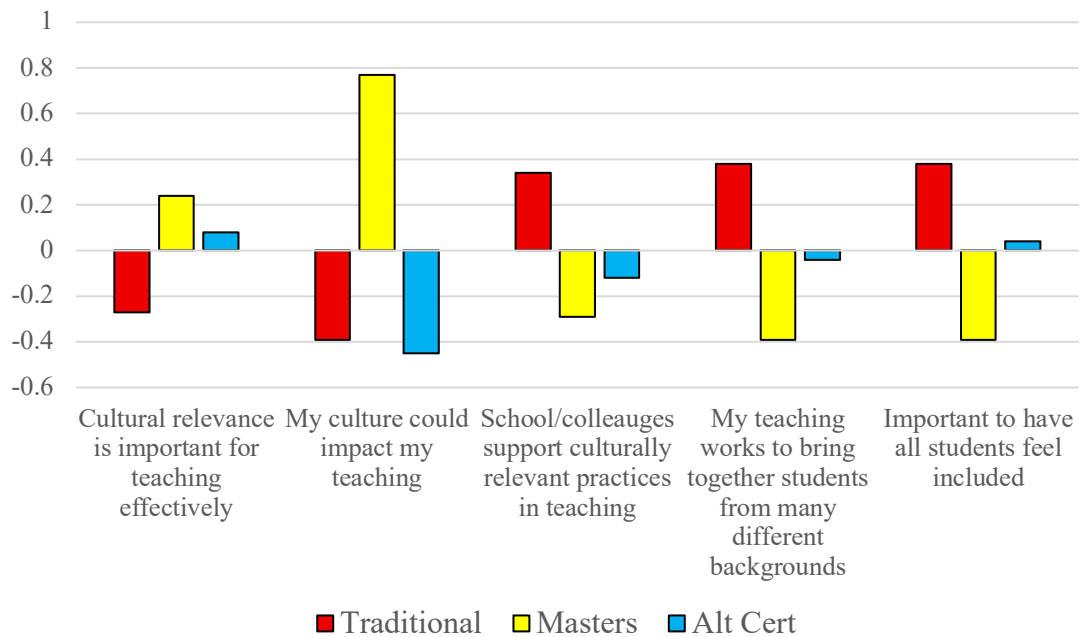
Dependent Variable	Means	Significance
Cultural relevance is important for teaching	Traditional: -.27 M.Ed: .24	.037
My culture could impact my teaching	Traditional: -.39 M.Ed.: .77	<.001
	Traditional: -.39 Alternative: -.45	<.001
School/colleagues support culturally relevant practices in teaching	Traditional: .34 M.Ed: -.29	.009
My teaching works to bring together students from many different backgrounds	Traditional: .28 M.Ed.: -.23	.037
Important to have all students feel included	Traditional: .38 M.Ed.: -.39	.001

In the above table, we can see significant differences in respondents' feelings around the importance of cultural relevance in instruction and its role in effective teaching. Traditionally certified teachers were least concerned about cultural relevance, while those with master's degrees view cultural relevance as very important.

Alternatively certified teachers land in the middle of the spread between traditional certification and master's degree level teachers. See the graph below for visual representation.

Figure 4.8

Comparison of Means on Culturally Relevant Teaching by Certification Type



Respondents also expressed differences regarding the notion of whether their own cultures impact teaching. In this case, those with master's degrees found this to be very important while those with traditional or alternate certifications did not.

Regarding school and colleague support for culturally relevant practices in teaching, those with master's degrees in education responded with the least level of agreement of the three groups with alternatively certified respondents indicating slightly more agreement. Those respondents with traditional certifications indicated the most agreement with school and colleague support for culturally relevant practices.

When asked whether their teaching works to bring together students from many different backgrounds, those respondents with master's degrees in education had the lowest level of agreement with alternatively certified teachers indicating slightly more agreement and traditionally certified teachers with the most agreement of the three.

Lastly, respondents indicated varying levels of agreement regarding the importance of having all students feel included. Traditionally certified teachers responded that this is very important, while those with alternate certifications indicated a much lower level of agreement here. Respondents with master's degrees had the least level of agreement here.

To discover relationships between teacher identity and views on instruction, an analysis was conducted of whether teachers identified as multicultural and whether that impacts perspective on the role of cultural relevance in instruction. Table 4.3 shows Zscores and group statistics.

Table 4.3

Teacher is Multicultural vs. Not

Dependent Variable	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural relevance is important for teaching effectively	Not multicultural	-.10	1.07
	Multicultural	.36	.58
My culture could impact my teaching	Not multicultural	-.14	.96
	Multicultural	.49	1.01
Teachers are responsible for advocating for all students	Not multicultural	-.11	1.05
	Multicultural	.38	.67
Important to have all students feel included	Not multicultural	.12	.85
	Multicultural	-.45	1.35

In the above table across cultural-competence measures, the largest differences between groups centered around beliefs about the importance of cultural relevance and teacher responsibility. Compared to teachers who did not identify as multicultural,

multicultural teachers agreed more with the notion that cultural relevance is important for effective teaching. In addition, multicultural teachers reported that their own culture could impact their teaching. Multicultural teachers also agreed more that teachers are responsible for advocating for all students. In contrast, the teachers who did not identify as multicultural agreed more that integrating culture helps students learn and that all students should feel included in their classrooms.

When measuring possible differences among teachers who were multilingual versus monolingual, we did not find any items of significance among the responses. When measuring the possible differences of those teachers who identified as white versus Non-white, participants differed in their responses to whether they felt it important to have all students feel included. Teachers who identified as white agreed more on inclusion where Non-white teachers scored this as lower in importance. This suggests that perceptions about inclusion may be seen through a different lens based on teacher background.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

As I write this, there are a few serious systems-based issues facing English Language Learners in the educational system of the United States. First, in 2025 the Trump administration took away Title III funding for ELL programming. Funding for English language learners and immigrant students is only a part of Title III funding, but an important part for states and localities with large numbers of ELLs. In August of 2025, Title III funding was restored – just before the beginning of the school year, but not in time for many programs to have not been cut. In fact, due to budgetary considerations under Title III, my position as an ESOL Instructional Coach was eliminated when the funding was taken away. That position was not refilled in time for the 2025-26 school year, so the school I served now has no ESOL mentorship and very little ESOL instructional help. In addition to the elimination of funds, there is the issue of an ESL / ESOL teacher shortage in the United States. Students are not pursuing ESL / ESOL endorsements as part of their educational certifications unless they find themselves in a situation where the need is great enough that they will pursue a professional certificate later.

It is reasonable to expect that almost every teacher will encounter English Language Learners in their classroom. ELLs appear in cities, rural districts, and in suburbia. Due to migration and population displacement worldwide, it is realistic to think that perhaps all teachers will have this experience at one time or another. Since there are

no federal guidelines for training, states must decide what they want to do to serve their immigrant and refugee student populations. At a state level, this could include funding for ESL programs, but many of these decisions are made at the local level by districts depending on their demographics. In other cases, decisions are made at the school level based on the population served in the local area. In each context, there is no guarantee that there will be enough support by a trained ESL teacher or coach. In addition, there is no guarantee that teachers have been trained in cultural responsiveness or second language learning theory and practice. Content area teachers are typically trained in their subject area and no further attention is paid to what adaptations might need to be made to the content to differentiate instruction for ELLs, as for any student with special or additional needs. Much of the time, differentiation is learned on the fly during instruction. For those students who qualify for MTSS (multi-tiered support services, formerly special education), there is a team of people available to assist. When it comes to English language learners, there may be one person in the district who is trying to help many students or there may not be anyone at all to assist this population.

I believe that there are steps that institutions of higher education can take that will better prepare pre-service teachers for the realities of instruction in the United States addressing the issues I have mentioned above. According to census data from 2019, “The number of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home nearly tripled from 23.1 million (about 1 in 10) in 1980 to 67.8 million (almost 1 in 5).” These numbers speak to the likelihood that teachers will encounter students whose linguistic identity is other than English, and families (parents) who may or may not speak English as their first language, if at all.

For this dissertation, I conducted a survey to gain insights into teacher attitudes around multiculturalism and multilingualism in the classroom. In part, I was curious about culturally responsive pedagogy and teacher practice, but my overall interest was in teacher preparation. I asked questions regarding current practices, attitudes, institutional support and then asked targeted questions that got at how prepared teachers were by their training or certification programs to employ culturally responsive techniques. The survey asked about the type of certification teachers received and then I made comparisons among attitudes and certification types to see if certification programs are hitting the mark in preparing culturally competent teachers. In my experience, teachers who are trained in ESL or foreign language instruction have a much easier time handling the needs of ELLs in the classroom because they understand language development. These teachers, though, are not traveling around to various classrooms to help other teachers.

Seeing the needs of multilingual students in content area classrooms in which teachers have not been trained as ESL / ESOL teachers motivated my interest in doing the study of teacher preparation. Part of teaching ESL / ESOL is a background in culturally responsive practice, including trauma informed training, cultural competence, and an understanding of language development and literacy. Adding the various characteristics of teaching multilingual learners onto the already complex demands of teachers is a lot to ask. Much of the time, pre-service teachers can take an elective course in diverse or multilingual learners, but this is not typically a required component in teachers preparation program curricula.

Teacher responsibilities are not limited to the students in their classrooms, either. Teachers must be able to engage with multilingual and multicultural families, community

partners, and make the case for support when they need it. Sometimes, districts are underfunded due to low numbers of MLLs (multilingual learners) but can vary from school to school. Without national standards for MLL instruction, states choose how they approach policy and districts and individual schools must make decisions based on their operational contexts. As educators, we are beholden to federal and state standards, but we are also advocates for our communities. There is a need for equity across student populations, including for English language learners. In order to deliver an equitable education environment, all teachers need to consider themselves as language teachers. Each academic area includes academic language. For content area teachers who are not language specialists, there must be a solution. I believe that one such solution is training during the pre-service phase when we can deliver content to new teachers before they even reach the classroom. We provide tools for all kinds of situations for teachers in training. Language development and instruction should be a part of that for teachers in every subject area.

Summary and Implications of Findings

Teacher Views On the Role of Culture in Pedagogy:

Teachers showed strong agreement with statements highlighting the importance of cultural competence in everyday practice, especially related to learning about students' communities and recognizing that students' cultural backgrounds shape how they learn. Respondents strongly agreed that their own cultural experiences can influence their teaching and viewed feedback from students and families about cultural relevance as valuable.

The findings around culture in pedagogy suggest that teachers understand the importance of culture in the classroom as well as culturally responsive practices. It is possible that teachers have lacked more specialized training and support in areas like trauma-informed instruction. Lower scores on items related to formal preparation and trauma-related trainings or educational opportunities indicate that there has been less availability of preparation in this area, though we know that this is one of the hallmarks of immigrant and refugee experiences. Trauma-informed teachers may be better able to meet the challenges of students who belong to displaced populations.

Transformative learning emphasizes the idea that teachers grow when they critically examine their assumptions and revise their frames of reference. The highest-rated items suggest that participants already recognize culture as central to learning teachers agreed that students' cultural backgrounds influence learning, that their own cultural experiences affect teaching, and that it is important to learn about students' communities. They also valued knowledge of traditions and family/student feedback, indicating openness to taking in new or different perspectives, which is a key condition for transformative learning.

At the same time, the lower scores reveal where teacher preparation may be falling short. Teachers rated their preparation programs lower on training for cultural and emotional challenges, and ratings were also lower for trauma-informed teaching, addressing trauma among immigrant and refugee students, and understanding newcomers' challenges. These gaps suggest that many teachers may value culturally responsive teaching "in theory" but have not experienced the deep reflection and guided practice needed to transform that belief into classroom practice.

Transformative learning opportunities could strengthen teacher preparation by creating structured opportunities for critical self-reflection, dialogue, and experience-based learning (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). For example, teachers could analyze case studies, reflect on their own cultural assumptions, engage with families and communities, and examine moments of discomfort or misunderstanding as learning opportunities. The highest-rated items suggest that participants already recognize culture as central to learning, including the influence of students' cultural backgrounds, the role of teachers' own cultural experiences, and the importance of learning about students' communities. This kind of awareness reflects the beginnings of perspective transformation, in which adults become more open to alternative viewpoints and more reflective about how prior experiences shape professional practice (Mezirow, 1997; Hoggan, 2023). At the same time, the lower scores on preparation for cultural and emotional challenges, trauma-informed teaching, and support for immigrant and refugee students suggest that many teachers value culturally responsive teaching in principle but may not yet have had sufficient opportunities for the deep reflection, dialogue, and practice that foster transformative learning (Taylor, 2008).

Incorporating Cultural Backgrounds

Respondents indicated support for culturally relevant and inclusive teaching practices. Higher levels of agreement were found for viewing cultural diversity as an asset and for the importance of advocating for students so they feel included.

Respondents supported integrating students' cultures into instruction and understanding their students' cultural identities. The support for culturally relevant practice suggests a

mindset for culturally sustaining pedagogies, advocacy, and inclusion as essential components of effective teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

Meaningful professional growth occurs when individuals critically reflect on their beliefs and expand how they understand others. The scores across the cultural items indicate that teachers already believe in inclusion, equity and cultural responsiveness. Teachers reported agreement that it is their responsibility to advocate for their students to promote sense of belonging. Teachers also viewed discussions about cultural diversity as opportunities showing an asset-based mindset around cultural differences in the classroom and as a tool for enrichment.

From a transformative learning perspective, the responses to the cultural items indicate that teachers may already be growing out of a (possible) deficit-based mindset and increasing their belief in more inclusive, equitable practices for MLLs. This shift reflects the beginnings of perspective transformation, in which adults become more open to alternative viewpoints and more reflective about how prior experiences shape professional practice (Mezirow, 1997; Hoggan, 2023). Transformative learning theory emphasizes that adults change when they encounter new perspectives and, upon reflection, reevaluate and restructure their understanding using this new information. In this case, the results imply that teachers are receptive to seeing culture not as a barrier, but as a source of strength, belonging, and deeper learning.

Teacher preparation programs could build on these attitudes by intentionally using transformative learning practices such as critical reflection, dialogue across difference, community-based experiences, and case study analysis (Taylor, 2008; Mezirow, 1997). Critical reflection can help teachers examine unconscious bias, question assumptions

about fairness and belonging, and connect advocacy to daily classroom practice. As teachers engage in this process, they may become more likely to see culturally responsive teaching as an ethical responsibility.

Using Culturally Responsive Methods

Respondents agreed that incorporating multiple perspectives in their teaching materials provided students with opportunities to share their own experiences. The use of culturally relevant examples in teaching was indicated as useful in teaching key concepts and adapting communication for students from diverse backgrounds. This finding may suggest support for embedding student backgrounds into daily practice and materials, along with the intentional practice of acquiring communication strategies that reflect learner diversity.

Participants strongly agreed that it is important to include many different perspectives in teaching materials, that students should have opportunities to share their cultural experiences in the classroom, and that culturally relevant examples should be used when teaching core concepts (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). Participants supported the inclusion of diverse perspectives in teaching materials, culturally relevant examples in instruction, giving students opportunities to share cultural experiences, and adjusting methods to better meet students' needs. Transformative learning theory helps explain how beliefs can be deepened and translated into practice, since it emphasizes that adults learn most powerfully when they critically reflect on assumptions, encounter alternative perspectives, and reconstruct how they understand their role in the world (Mezirow, 1997; Hoggan, 2023). Teachers may begin to move beyond seeing culture as supplemental and instead come to view it as central to planning, communication, and

assessment. Teacher preparation programs could use transformative learning approaches such as case analysis, dialogue, and guided reflection on classroom experiences to help future teachers question “one-size-fits-all” approaches to teaching. Transformative learning may help teachers become more reflective practitioners who intentionally design instruction that affirms students’ identities and improves access to learning (Taylor, 2008).

Cultural Competence Training

Teachers indicated willingness to participate in additional trainings for cultural competence if it were more accessible to them. Also, teachers indicated willingness toward self-directed learning such as reading, podcasts, and the like in order to strengthen their cultural competence. Awareness of these opportunities was mixed. At the same time, teachers indicated lower perception of support and collaboration with peers related to sharing with colleagues or having the right support at school for professional development in cultural competence.

It could be that institutional and district-level administrators are not keeping up with the needs of teachers, or with their learning interests. Also, this may mean that the overall climate in some schools is not as collegial as teachers would like. I would like to add that administrators are not in classrooms all day every day and this may be an area they do not realize needs more support than it is getting.

Teacher preparation and professional development programs could and should address training gaps by making cultural competence learning more accessible, collaborative, and reflective. Schools could provide structured discussion groups (professional learning communities), coaching cycles, case studies, and guided reflection

on classroom experiences. Opportunities to question assumptions with colleagues and connect theory to practice would help teachers move beyond surface-level awareness. Transformational learning practices may help teachers view cultural competence as an ongoing, shared professional responsibility supported by the school community if these trainings were readily available.

Transformative learning theory emphasizes that adult learning is not just about acquiring information but about critically reflecting on assumptions and reshaping one's perspective through experience and dialogue (Mezirow, 1997). Self-directed activities such as reading or podcasts may begin the reflective process, but transformative learning becomes more powerful when reflection is paired with discussion, challenge, and communal support (Taylor, 2008; Hoggan, 2023). Teacher preparation and professional development programs could therefore strengthen cultural competence by making learning more accessible, collaborative, and reflective through discussion groups, coaching, and case-based inquiry. These findings suggest that transformative learning may help teachers shift from viewing cultural competence as a personal interest to seeing it as an ongoing, shared professional responsibility (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008).

Inclusive Practice for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

Teachers are committed to fostering inclusive classroom environments and are receptive to additional training and resources beyond what they currently receive. The highest levels of agreement were related to the importance of establishing classroom practices that help all students feel included and encouraging students to reflect on their own cultural identities. Items focused on training and resources were in the mid-range. Lower scores were reported for training to address microaggressions and culturally

insensitive behavior in the classroom. Since teachers indicated higher agreement with the value of inclusive and reflective practices and also less preparation and support for implementing practices, including around microaggressions, we might surmise that teachers are less prepared to put knowledge into action in this area.

To improve teacher perspectives on microaggressions or cultural insensitivity in the classroom, we may lean toward the importance of establishing inclusive practices, sense of belonging, and cultural reflection as intentional learning goals for students. Access to culturally representative classroom materials was also only scored at a moderate level in the survey. Together, these results suggest that teachers may believe in culturally inclusive classrooms but may not yet feel fully equipped with the skills, resources, or preparation to build them consistently; or to problem solve in these areas when the need arises.

These survey results illustrate an important distinction that transformative learning theory helps explain: teachers may strongly endorse inclusive values while still feeling only moderately prepared to enact them in practice (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008). From a transformative learning perspective, this gap is significant because perspective transformation does not occur simply through exposure to ideas; it develops through critical reflection, dialogue, and experience that challenge existing assumptions and support new ways of acting (Mezirow, 1997; Hoggan, 2023). Teacher preparation and professional development could therefore incorporate reflective discussion, classroom scenarios, and case studies on bias and exclusion so that teachers can connect values of inclusion to concrete pedagogical choices. Based on these findings, transformative learning may influence how teachers see culture in the classroom by

helping them understand that inclusion is not only a belief, but also a daily practice requiring reflection, skill, and culturally responsive decision-making (Taylor, 2008).

Challenges in Culturally Sustaining Practice

Respondents identified several challenges to implementing culturally responsive practices, with the most concern centered on balancing cultural responsiveness with standard curriculum requirements. Other concerns included difficulty engaging families from diverse cultural backgrounds, viewing cultural differences as a challenge in teaching (although in other contexts, cultural differences were not viewed as a challenge), and limited access to resources that reflect students' cultural backgrounds. Teachers did not indicate difficulty in meeting students' cultural needs, which was surprising to me since there was concern about engaging with multicultural families and viewing cultural differences as a challenge. This suggests to me that teachers feel tasked with doing more in addition to the curriculum goals they are trying to meet on a daily basis. Also, this could either indicate over-confidence in being able to meet students' cultural needs or possibly lack of awareness of exactly what those needs could be.

These findings point toward tensions teachers are experiencing in trying to implement culturally responsive teaching in real life classrooms. While it seems that participants understand and recognize that there are cultural needs, they do not seem troubled at their ability to perform adequately at meeting cultural inclusion in their teaching. With resources being hard to access, it seems like teachers would be more concerned about their abilities to create culturally responsive classrooms. Although perhaps none of these is affecting the teachers' ability as much as structural barriers to

support for their classrooms. Knowing what you need and getting what you need are not the same thing.

Transformative learning theory suggests that adult learning often begins with discomfort, ambiguity, or a “disorienting dilemma” that prompts deeper reflection. In this case, challenges such as curriculum pressures, family engagement, and limited culturally relevant resources may push teachers to question traditional assumptions about teaching, fairness, and whose knowledge is centered in schools. Considerations for professional support in schools could include transformative learning principles as a guide for choosing resources for teachers and classrooms.

Teacher preparation may have introduced multicultural concepts without always providing enough applied, reflective, or community-based learning to help teachers fully internalize and enact them. Transformative learning theory is useful here because it emphasizes that adults do not change deeply through exposure to information alone; rather, they transform when they critically reflect on assumptions, encounter unfamiliar perspectives, and test new understandings in authentic contexts (Mezirow, 1997; Hoggan, 2023). In the context of these findings, teachers may have received conceptual messages about diversity without sufficient sustained opportunities to examine bias, engage across difference, or practice culturally responsive decision-making in meaningful settings. Teacher preparation programs could respond by embedding guided reflection, family and community partnerships, and clinical experiences in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. These findings suggest that transformative learning may help teachers understand culture not as an abstract topic in coursework, but as an essential dimension of teaching, learning, and relationship-building (Taylor, 2008).

Self-reported Teacher Preparation Effectiveness

Overall, respondents viewed their pre-service preparation for working in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms as only moderately effective, with several noticeable gaps. The highest scores in this area were related to access to materials representing diverse perspectives, strategies for supporting English language learners, and an emphasis on incorporating students' backgrounds into the curriculum. Coursework addressing cultural competence and training on adapting materials for students with different linguistic backgrounds fell in the middle. Items perceived as weaker included preparation to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds, opportunities to learn from professors or mentors with diverse backgrounds, and practical, hands-on experience with linguistically diverse students. The lowest ratings were related to collaboration with families, suggesting that pre-service programs placed limited emphasis on developing school–family partnership and engagement skills. These findings could mean that pre-service teachers are exposed to the concepts of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, but they are not equally prepared in the application of these concepts, especially in dealing with families from other cultural contexts. This is problematic because it presumes that teachers either will not have to consider multilingual learners and their families, or that there will be adequate support in place for doing so. However, the reality is that there is rarely sufficient support, even in districts and schools that have high numbers of MLLs and teachers will always have to engage with families during the academic year.

Also of concern is that pre-service teacher programs may not be giving new teachers the opportunity to work with multilingual learners in real time as part of their

internships. We cannot rely solely on book learning and hope for the best when so much is at stake for these students. Teacher preparation programs could respond by incorporating transformative learning approaches such as guided reflection, structured dialogue, partnerships with families and communities, and clinical experiences in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. These practices could help future teachers move beyond awareness to perspective transformation. Based on these results, transformative learning may influence how teachers see culture in the classroom by helping them understand it not as an abstract topic covered in coursework, but as a lived, essential dimension of teaching, learning, and relationship-building (Mezirow, 1997; Taylor, 2008).

When grouped by comparisons of certification type, survey results suggested that teachers' preparation pathways may shape how they reflect on culture, inclusion, and their professional role. Several statistically significant differences emerged between teachers with traditional certification and those with a master's in education. Teachers with a master's in education scored higher on the belief that cultural relevance is important for effective teaching and much higher on the belief that their own culture could impact their teaching. These findings suggest that M.Ed. pathways may provide more opportunities for the type of reflection and critical examination of assumptions that transformative learning theory describes. The especially large difference on awareness that one's own culture affects teaching is important because this kind of self-awareness is central to perspective transformation. Teachers who reflect on how their identities, experiences, and assumptions shape practice may be more likely to adopt culturally responsive approaches intentionally. The results also showed that traditionally certified

teachers scored higher on perceptions that school and colleagues support culturally relevant practices, on bringing together students from many backgrounds, and on the importance of ensuring all students feel included. This may suggest that while M.Ed. teachers report stronger reflective awareness, traditionally certified teachers may perceive themselves as more action-oriented or more embedded in supportive school contexts.

Teachers who identified as multicultural scored higher on the belief that cultural relevance is important for effective teaching, on the belief that their own culture could impact their teaching, and on the belief that teachers are responsible for advocating for all students. These findings suggest that multicultural teachers may be more likely to connect personal experience, professional responsibility, and culturally responsive teaching. From a transformative learning perspective, this makes sense because lived experience often serves as a catalyst for reflection on identity, power, and relationships, which are central elements of perspective transformation. Teachers with multicultural identities may have had more direct opportunities to reflect on how culture affects communication, belonging, and fairness in school. As a result, they may be more likely to see culture as central to teaching rather than peripheral to it. Their higher scores on advocacy-related beliefs also suggest a stronger orientation toward equity and responsiveness.

One interesting exception appears in the item about the importance of having all students feel included, where non-multicultural teachers scored. This may suggest that while multicultural teachers reported stronger awareness of culture and advocacy, non-multicultural teachers expressed more agreement with a general inclusion statement. A broad endorsement of inclusion is not always the same as deeper reflection on how

culture shapes teaching practice. These findings suggest that teacher preparation should create reflective opportunities for all teachers to examine identity, cultural perspective, and advocacy so that inclusion is grounded in both belief and critical self-awareness.

Limitations

Items elicited demographic information and probed teachers' beliefs about the role of cultural competence in schooling, the perceived value of cultural diversity and inclusivity, and the actions teachers believe they should take to implement culturally relevant practices. Additional items explored awareness of available resources and professional learning opportunities, the extent and sources of any training already received, strategies used to create culturally responsive classroom environments, and perceived challenges to doing so. Finally, the survey asked whether teachers felt their pre-service preparation equipped them for the linguistic and cultural demands of today's classrooms. Together, these questions were designed to illuminate not only attitudes and knowledge, but also the supports and constraints shaping day-to-day practice with MLLs.

In considering the results of the survey, I noticed a few limitations of the study. First, I did not account for the ways in which instructional models for MLLs might impact the responses I received. Some schools may have bilingual immersion models, or varying types of support that would possibly impact the way teachers feel about how capable they are in meeting the needs of multilingual students.

I kept the survey open for a month hoping to reach a greater number of participants. Most of the participants who completed the survey were distributed across only a few states. The results of the survey could have been more nuanced with more responses from more geographic regions. Also, one item was open to interpretation in the

survey. For the survey question regarding the type of district in which teachers worked, they selected urban, rural, small town, etc. Some of the teachers who worked in the same district as myself declared that they were in an urban area. However, the district is designated as a rural district, and I presumed that this information was known and would be the consistent response from teachers in the area. Upon reading the results, I realized that this item may have needed to be re-worded. It is difficult to know what the accuracy of this item might be since participants may have varying perspectives of their home districts or schools and may be responding out of their assumptions rather than the district's designation. As a result of this, it would be impossible to gain an idea of whether urban or rural district have differences in instructional support, or support based on Title III designations, etc. so I was unable to do any comparative statistics on these items.

An additional limitation, which may bear the greatest weight, is that when asking participants which type of certification they held, included a master's in education. Teachers with a M.Ed. may have a traditional certificate and an M.Ed. or could have completed alternate certifications and an M.Ed. as a matter of taking continuing education credits after the certification process. Due to the significant items indicated by difference in certification type, this could account for some differences that have more to do with having a graduate degree in education rather than the actual certification type. For some teachers, a master's in education is the certifying program, but not for all. If I were to re-write the survey, I would be more specific about whether the M.Ed. was a certifying program or not. Certificate type appears to be a factor in how respondents view some of the survey items, and this may be an opportunity for further investigation into

whether the type of teaching certification program one has taken affects student outcomes.

Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several important directions for future research related to teacher preparedness for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Although the results provided insight into teachers' perceptions of their preparation, beliefs, and reported levels of cultural competence, additional research is needed to deepen understanding of how these perceptions develop and how they influence practice. Future studies should continue examining the ways teacher preparation programs and professional learning experiences shape educators' readiness to work effectively with multilingual learners and students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Future research should use larger and more diverse samples across multiple geographic regions, school settings, and certification pathways. Because teacher preparation is influenced by institutional context, community demographics, and local policy, broader studies could determine whether the patterns identified in this study are consistent across settings or whether they vary according to school type, grade level, or regional context. Including additional information would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of culturally responsive and linguistically responsive teacher development across educational contexts (Gay, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Research should move beyond self-reported perceptions and examine how teacher preparedness is enacted in classroom practice. In the present study, respondents generally reported moderate preparation, with stronger alignment in areas such as access to diverse materials, support for English language learners, and the importance of integrating

students' backgrounds into instruction. At the same time, areas such as family collaboration, practical experience with linguistically diverse students, and preparation to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds appeared weaker. Observational studies, case studies, and analysis of instructional artifacts would help clarify whether these reported strengths and gaps are reflected in actual teaching practice. Since teachers self-reported regarding their cultural competence readiness, it is difficult to know whether they are implementing such knowledge in practice. Additionally, we cannot know whether the background knowledge of respondents is comparable in this area since teacher preparation programs are not all the same. Culturally responsive teaching requires not only positive beliefs, but also the consistent use of pedagogical practices that affirm students' identities and support equitable learning opportunities (Gay, 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2013). If we were able to go into active classrooms and observe the habits of teachers and the student outcomes they elicit, we could further the conversation as to whether teachers are getting what they need in training and whether their pre-service program prepared them for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Future research should investigate the relationship between teacher preparedness and student outcomes. While this study focused on teacher perceptions (and self-perception), future study could explore whether higher levels of perceived preparedness are associated with improved multilingual learner achievement, engagement, belonging, language development, or family-school communication. Establishing such relationships would strengthen the practical significance of research on teacher preparation and provide stronger evidence for the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive

pedagogy in supporting multilingual learners (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Villegas, 2008).

It would be useful to measure student outcomes and determine whether teacher preparation in cultural responsiveness influences student achievement in the classroom. For multilingual learners, it would be helpful to know whether a teacher's understanding of their students' backgrounds and culture has an impact on how content is delivered. It would be interesting to conduct a comparison between groups of students who have teachers trained in cultural competence and those students whose teachers do not have this background knowledge. Results of such a study could influence professional development choices, how students are assigned to teachers, and indicate gaps in instructional methods that schools and districts can and should address.

Future research should include which teacher characteristics and experiences are most influential toward preparedness for supporting English language learners. Variables such as multilingualism, cross-cultural experiences, time abroad, and participation in professional development may play an important role in shaping teachers' beliefs about culture, language, and advocacy. The findings of this study suggest that teachers may enter the profession with variable preparation, giving us reasons to identify the experiences that promote transformative learning. Cultural awareness, reflective practices, and linguistically responsive teaching are all skills that can be gained in teacher preparation programs. Longitudinal research would be valuable in observing how these beliefs and practices evolve over time, from pre-service preparation into later stages of practice (Bennett, 1993; Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Continued research into school and district administration is also essential to improving the academic success of multilingual learners because leadership decisions shape access to coursework, instructional quality, staffing, professional learning, and family engagement. Multilingual learners represent a substantial and growing portion of U.S. public school enrollment with about 5.3 million students recorded in fall 2021, which means administrative capacity is a central concern for multilingual learners (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2024). School leadership has an important influence on student achievement and school outcomes, making leadership research relevant to multilingual learner success (Grissom et al., 2021). Studies focused specifically on multilingual education indicate that administrators often have limited knowledge of second-language programs and may put too much responsibility on teachers without fully understanding what effective implementation looks like (Padron & Waxman, 2016). Kirss et al. conducted a review of multilingual education and found that school effectiveness research and multilingual education research have been developed separately, leaving important questions unanswered about which factors most consistently support student success at both the school and district levels (Kirss et al., 2021). More research could be done to examine how principals and district leaders allocate resources, structure and choose professional development, use data, support programming, and build systems that address language development and academic achievement. Stronger research recommendations in this area can help districts move beyond classroom interventions toward leadership practices and policies that make multilingual learner success more likely across entire schools and districts.

Lastly, future research should explore interventions designed to address the specific gaps identified in this study. Because teacher preparation appeared weaker in family engagement, hands-on experiences, and some dimensions of practical cultural responsiveness, studies could examine the effects of revised coursework, clinical placements (student teaching), coaching models, or sustained professional development in these areas. Research in these areas would help determine which types of preparation structures are most effective in developing teachers who are not only aware of cultural and linguistic diversity, but those who can also respond to it in meaningful and equitable ways (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

The above directions for research suggest that future research should continue moving beyond awareness of cultural competence toward a more practice-centered, developmental, and outcome-oriented understanding of teacher preparedness. The scholarship and practical application of research related to culturally and linguistically responsive teaching for multilingual learners could be improved. The future of the conversation around the survey items and teacher preparation should revolve around content area teachers who are tasked with language goals being incorporated into their classrooms. The additional layer of language learning with content knowledge creates a challenge for teachers who are not trained in the features of language learning and language development. They are unable to anticipate “what’s next” or what is “normal” for beginning language learners. This can create a situation in which the teacher is overwhelmed and the students are under-supported. Research toward how we can improve teacher preparation programs can result in valuable tools for pre-service and in-service teachers.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the ongoing conversation surrounding teacher preparedness for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms by highlighting both areas of strength and areas of concern in how educators perceive their preparation to teach multilingual learners and students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The findings suggest that although many teachers recognize the importance of cultural relevance, inclusion, and advocacy, their preparation to enact these commitments in practice has often been uneven. This has important implications for both current practicing teachers and the teacher training programs responsible for preparing future educators.

For practicing teachers, the results of this study uncover a need for continued reflection and professional growth in the areas of cultural competence and linguistically responsive instruction. Teachers are increasingly working in classrooms shaped by linguistic diversity, varied cultural perspectives, and differing educational experiences. As a result, effective teaching can no longer be understood solely as mastery of content and general pedagogy. Rather, teachers must also be prepared to recognize how culture, language, identity, and power influence learning opportunities and classroom interactions. The findings of this study suggest that many teachers value these ideas yet may not feel fully equipped with the practical strategies, experiences, or support needed to respond effectively to student diversity. In this way, the study reinforces the importance of ongoing professional learning that moves beyond awareness and into application, including family engagement, scaffolding for multilingual learners, and instructional decision making that affirms students' cultural and linguistic assets.

Teacher education cannot assume that limited coursework or broad discussions of diversity are sufficient to prepare candidates for today's classrooms. Preparation programs must move beyond abstract commitments to equity and instead provide structured, practice-based opportunities for teacher candidates to develop the knowledge, dispositions, and skills needed to teach multilingual learners effectively. There must be stronger attention to culturally responsive pedagogy, language development, adaptation of instructional materials, and meaningful field experiences with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teacher candidates must be prepared to collaborate with families and communities, an area that appeared less strongly represented in teachers' reported preparation.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the social nature of learning when he stated that "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level" (p. 57). This idea is especially important for multilingual learners because language develops through interaction with others. In a classroom for MLLs, the teacher plays a central role in creating the conditions and interactions that make language growth possible. Teachers support language development by modeling academic language, scaffolding conversations, encouraging collaboration, and connecting new language to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The teacher is not simply delivering content but shaping a learning community where multilingual learners can participate, take risks, and build confidence and proficiency through guided interactions. Teachers must be trained in methods that will help them implement community building and culturally relevant and responsive social interactions.

Preparedness for culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms should not be treated as an optional or peripheral aspect of teacher education. It should be understood as central to effective teaching. In increasingly diverse school settings, the ability to build inclusive classrooms, support multilingual learners, and engage students' cultural backgrounds as resources for learning is fundamental to educational equity. When teachers are insufficiently prepared in these areas, the consequences extend beyond individual discomfort or uncertainty; they can affect students' access to instruction, their sense of belonging, and their academic success.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the field by identifying the continuing need for teacher development that is intentional, practice-centered, and responsive to the realities of diverse classrooms. Its findings serve as a call to both practicing educators and teacher preparation institutions to strengthen the connection between beliefs about equity and the concrete practices required to enact it. In doing so, this research supports the broader goal of preparing teachers who are not only aware of diversity, but capable of teaching in ways that are equitable, inclusive, and sustaining for all learners.

Most teacher education programs do not include much time dedicated to cultural and linguistic diversity and how to adapt to a constantly changing demographic landscape. Some institutions have begun to offer more classes in teaching multilingual students, but these courses are largely part of ESOL certificate or endorsement programs of study. Even less common is the requirement that all education majors take a course on teaching multilingual learners. I am currently teaching one such course. My students represent every possible content area and arrived the first day with no idea what the course was going to be able to offer them. Students were unable to see a connection

between their content areas and the course material I was putting in front of them. As time goes on, however, each time I teach this course the realization happens that there is some type of language education in every class. Each content area has its own academic language, and students must all learn it. In addition, content area teachers need to understand that many students arrive to school in the U.S. at grade level or above academically, but with English as a barrier, they can lose traction quickly. It is up to each of us who are in a classroom to do what we can to preserve student momentum.

Language learning has its own specific characteristics and trajectory. The more teachers know, the easier it will be for them to meet the challenge of working with students who are adjusting to a new school, a new language, and a new environment. Without additional supports in the form of ESL teachers, many content area teachers will be the only source of language instruction multilingual students will be able to access.

Knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy, language development, and the ability to truly get to know our students cannot be understated in importance for the classrooms we have now and those we will inhabit in the future.

APPENDIX A

IRB LETTER



Institutional Review Board

Date: April 21, 2025

Study #: IRB-FY2025-332

Study Title: Building Cultural Agility in Future Teachers

Submission Type: Initial

IRB Decision: Exempt

Research Team:

Holly Walker

Julia Smith

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to be Exempt, with the following categories:

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Notes for Researcher(s):

This submission includes the following approved documents:

- Recruitment Materials
- Date-Stamped Information Sheet V 4/21/2025
- Survey

Letter and Consent Document:

This letter along with the IRB approved (date-stamped) consent document can be found in Cayuse in the Submission Details page under Letters and Attachments, respectively. Please make sure to use the most recent IRB approved version of the consent form in consenting participants.

Permission from Research Site(s):

Please note the following:

- This IRB exemption determination letter means that this research has met one or more of the federal criteria for exemption per 45 CFR 46.104- Exempt Research.
- Before the research is initiated, permission to conduct research at a given site must be obtained from all research locations listed in the IRB submission. You must keep copies of all such permission letters for your files.
- It is the responsibility of each researcher to follow all applicable policies and procedures of any outside institution where the research will be conducted.

Modifications:

Any changes to this exempt project must be reviewed by the IRB prior to initiation by submitting a MODIFICATION request. Do not collect data while the changes are being reviewed. Data collected during this time cannot be used in research.

Record Retention:

Exempt projects will be retained by the IRB office for three years after the last action on the project.

You are approved to start the research. Please retain a copy of this notification for your records. If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office.

Thank you.
The Oakland University IRB

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