

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Language in the Classroom: Examining Teacher Perspectives and Experiences Regarding  
Multilingual Learning

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SPRING 2024

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree  
in Elementary and Early Childhood Education  
with honors in CEAED

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## ABSTRACT

The rise of negative rhetoric surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion in the United States has begun to enter classrooms through policies and perspectives. This impacts multilingual learners and curricula as their foundations are under attack. Demonstrated in book bans and more, topics outside of a narrow realm are being censored. Previous literature has found teacher beliefs to influence practices used in the classroom, amongst other literature that has found teacher beliefs to influence student success. Literature also suggests an unpreparedness of pre-service teachers for working with multilingual learners. We use interviews with current teaching professionals to examine the perspectives of educators on multilingual learners and incorporating multilingual curricula. This research finds lack of preparation for teachers to work with multilingual learners, along with little to no use of languages beyond English in the classroom. Simultaneously, teachers interviewed also demonstrated attempts for inclusion of multilingual learners that had been parts of their classroom communities. This information primarily presents a need for better preparation both before and during an educational career for teaching multilingual learners.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank anyone who has offered support or kind words to me throughout this process. In a college experience that started off with a great deal of uncertainty, these positive relationships and interactions with people have been invaluable.

To Dr. Allison Henward, for inspiring me to take a leap and research an area I am passionate about.

To Dr. Ashley Patterson, for being a kind and familiar mentor willing to read my work.

To my family, for pushing me and encouraging me every step of the way.

To my friends, for meeting me where I am at, even during a busy final year.

To my mentor teacher, for discussing my questions about education with me, each and every day.

Thank you all.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In my time studying elementary and early childhood education as an undergraduate student, I have become more attuned to news surrounding education. Changes in policies, in teacher perspectives, in student experiences and expectations, are ever-evolving components of the educational realm. I have felt like an informed outsider looking in. As I near the end of my undergraduate degree, my certification, and experience in the field, these factors have become all the more evident.

One of the most notable and ongoing occurrences I have witnessed as an aspiring educator is the ‘war’ on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, which I will refer to as DIEB. This divisive issue has taken its hold on the United States, reaching into our classrooms. For example, Cuevas (2022) explains that conservative groups have taken a stand against the Critical Race Theory, or (CRT), that they allege is taking place in K-12 classrooms, which has led to parental and political uproar and action (p. 1). However, such action is motivated by misinformation, as CRT is at too high a level to be taught in such settings, really being present in law schools or other areas of higher education (pp. 1-2.) For this reason, this outrage based on misinformation, Cuevas claims that “...they mean they object to a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and to social justice in general,” (p. 2).

One action that contradicts diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging has been the notable increase in book banning. This occurs at the highest rates in states like Texas and Florida, where 751-1,000 bans and 501-750 bans, respectively, took place in the summer of 2021

through the summer of 2022 (Ates and Brooks, 2023, p. 173). Amongst these books, 40% contain “protagonists or prominent secondary characters of color,” (p. 174). Ates and Brooks (2023) explain that weaponized language, which includes censorship, propaganda, disinformation, and mundane discourse, is how such groups in favor of bans work to accomplish their agendas (p. 177).

Teacher beliefs may have the power to corroborate or counter these narratives played out in policies and social movements.

I find this idea extremely pertinent when it comes to conversations about multilingual learners, curriculum, and classrooms. In my pre-service experiences, I have seen classrooms made up of children who bring many language backgrounds to school. I have been able to see strategies used in schools when one classroom teacher is working with a class that speaks several languages. At the same time, the classrooms I have worked in are in predominantly English-speaking area, with English-speaking educators and instruction. This disconnect has prompted me to reflect on and in turn investigate what emergent bilingual students experience in classrooms, and what contributes to these experiences. To help answer some of my questions, I have decided to look deeper into the perspectives of the educators themselves. I center my thesis and inquiry around the following questions. How are current classroom teachers being prepared to work with multilingual students and classrooms? What do classroom teachers know about language, and similarly, what sort of asset-based or deficit-based mindsets may they fall into? How do classroom teachers feel about things like translanguaging and bilingual literature? How do these perspectives influence these educators’ classrooms, and subsequently, their students’ experiences?

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Exploration into the topic of language in schools demonstrated various pieces of relevant literature. In the United States, there is no official language, but the languages used are still impactful in education. A study closely related to my inquiry is that of Garrity and Guerra (2015), titled, “A cultural communities approach to understanding Head Start teachers’ beliefs about language use with dual language learners: Implications for practice.” In this research article, the established problem is that early childhood classrooms have not received the same level of inquiry into practices for English language learners as older classrooms have. Another study found that Head Start programs faced uncertainty in how to aid children’s language learning for both English and the home language. These previous findings set the scene for an exploration into one particular Head Start center located near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Using a ‘cultural communities’ lens, Garrity and Guerra (2015) research cultural processes and other factors that will influence teacher and student interactions in this specific type of early childhood classroom. One of the questions asked is, “But what should be done when beliefs and practices developed via participation in cultural communities do not reflect what the research tells us is best for children and families?” This exemplifies the researchers’ interest in implications for practice.

This article is part of a larger, qualitative study, using teacher interviews and observational classroom data. Various tools were used for data collection. First, interviews were conducted with the teachers, following the “Cultural Change Interview” process. Next, the interviewers watched videos of literacy lessons with the selected teacher interviewees. Next,



researchers used the “Treatment of Native Languages” to further measure the beliefs and experiences in these classrooms. Lastly, to study the children’s perspectives, the “Emergent Academics Snapshot Scale” was utilized, examining social interactions and language use.

Not a lot of professional development is offered to teachers, but the curriculum outlines the objective to “have children understand, speak, read, and write in both their primary language and English, and teachers should support children’s first language while helping them acquire oral proficiency in English” (Garrity and Guerra, 2015). To organize data from the teacher’s interviews about their own beliefs, statements made were sorted by theme: beliefs about language use in the classroom, value of home language in school setting, goals for kindergarten, and understanding of language development. “...our findings challenge the common assumption that culture is equivalent to one’s ethnic or linguistic background.” According to Garrity and Guerra (2015), this is due to similarities the interviewees had such as language, birthplace, and ethnicity, but differences in beliefs and practices. The teachers were described to have “similar goals,” but different ways to meet these. Garrity and Guerra (2015) explain that additionally, the findings demonstrate how “beliefs can impede the implementation of evidence-based practices.”

There has been more research to support the idea that teacher beliefs may be connected to student learning and classroom environment, such as Sabarwal et al. (2021), “Teacher Beliefs: Why They Matter and What They Are.” In this study, the outlined problem is that improved teacher effectiveness and student outcomes is often sought after, but teacher beliefs are not being factored into the methods for doing so (pp. 73-75). Sabarwal et al. (2021) explains that impact evaluations are additionally not taking these beliefs into account (p. 76). This leads to various

questions, including, “Do teachers believe they are held responsible for student learning” (p. 87) and “How do teachers want to be assessed?” (p. 88).

To collect data in pursuit of answers, a literature review of previous research was first conducted. Following this, 20,000 teachers were surveyed from various ‘developing countries’ including Afghanistan, Argentina, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Tajikistan, and Zanzibar (Sabarwal et al., 2021, p. 88).

Multiple findings, or teacher beliefs, were reported. Sabarwal et al. report that if parents have financial or personal problems preventing them from having concern about children’s performance in school, about 47% of teachers believe they cannot do much to support their learning (2021, p. 89). A similar belief was found 48% of teachers in regard to students leaving the previous grade unprepared (p. 91). Other findings include ‘normalized teacher absenteeism’ (p. 93) along with a split in teachers regarding which students are deserving of ‘extra attention,’ the described ‘lagging’ students, or the well-performing ones (p. 95). These expressed beliefs or findings were then connected to the research goal, and what these expressed beliefs meant about teacher effectiveness in general. The study concludes that the solution is to incorporate teacher beliefs into designing the solutions that would then help learners (p. 100).

The idea that teacher beliefs are connected with student education is then transmissible to beliefs surrounding English Language Learners. This is investigated by Lucas et al. (2014), titled, “Teachers’ Beliefs About English Language Learners.” In this research, the problem to address is that teacher beliefs may contradict the ‘foundations’ for teaching English language learners; teachers could misinterpret behaviors and language based on their beliefs, or more (p. 454). Lucas et al., elaborates, “Given the influence teachers’ beliefs exert on the success in school and future life chances of all students, especially students from marginalized groups, and

the growing presence of ELLs in U.S. schools, teachers' beliefs about ELLs demand serious scrutiny" (2014, p. 455)

Data collection for this study once again included reviewing studies on the topic, using similar words to search for these teacher 'beliefs,' which included terms like *attitudes*, *judgments*, and *perspectives* (Lucas et al., 2014, p. 455). Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed data allowed Lucas et al. to organize based on three common themes: the beliefs teachers held about teaching English language learners, the variables related to said beliefs, and how their beliefs related to their practices (p. 456).

Common themes were then found within these teacher beliefs. One belief, in nine out of eleven studies reviewed for beliefs, was that teachers felt under prepared to teach English language learners (Lucas et al., 2014, 456). Negative beliefs about students' academic ability were also noted (p. 457). Another finding was a difference in teacher's positive value of 'linguistic diversity' and their actual classroom practices (p. 458.)

The preparedness of pre-service teachers regarding multilingual learners is measured in "Pan-Diversity Integration as an Equity Trap: Lessons From Preservice Teachers' Preparation for Teaching English Language Learners in a Predominantly White Institution in the United States" by Li and Jee (2021). The problem that prompted such research is described as, "...systemwide under preparedness of both pre- and in-service teachers who are predominantly White and monolingual for teaching English language learners (ELLs) throughout the United States." There is a described 'pan-diversity' approach that teacher preparation programs utilize, which Li and Jee (2021) define as including all diversity, so as to not address specific differences, like those of English language learners.

With this problem in mind, this study seeks to learn more about how preparation programs explore knowledge and practices related to English language learners. Questions explored: “What are preservice teachers’ perceptions of learning to teach ELLs in a predominantly White teacher education program that utilizes a pan-diversity framework? How do their opportunities to learn ELL-related content differ across subprogram groups?”

Data was collected from 433 students in a preparation program that is described as predominantly white with a pan-diversity framework. The study uses quantitative and qualitative data and analysis. Data was first collected via three-part online survey. The survey gathered background information; knowledge relating to teaching English language learners, experience with the subject, perceived readiness to teach these learners; and lastly, part of the KASELL, or the Knowledge, Attitude, and Self-Efficacy about English Language Learners survey. This online survey was paired with interviews in an open-ended question format to gain more insight on what the students knew about teaching English language learners.

Li and Jee (2021) found lack of knowledge about teaching English-language learners, supported by lack of content and opportunities. Subjects reported low self-efficacy marked by an unpreparedness to teach English-language learners.

As found in Garrity and Guerra (2015), educators with even similar experiences may have different beliefs and practices. Sabarwal et al. (2021) support the connectedness between teacher beliefs and student success. Lucas et al. (2014) note the various beliefs this body of research has found, including under preparedness, negative beliefs, and dissonance in value and classroom practice. Li and Jee (2021) also found perceived unpreparedness for teaching English language learners in a preservice teacher population. All of these ideas help situate the framework from which I wanted to investigate teacher beliefs and perspectives. In preparing my

next steps, I asked myself, how much may teachers vary in practice despite any objective similarities? What will teacher beliefs look like in terms of conversations regarding the students themselves? Will the educators I speak with report similar experiences to the findings on under preparedness to work with multilingual learners? These ideas overlap in more ways than one, and I wondered if they would be present in our conversations.

## Chapter 3

### Methods

In constructing an approach for this inquiry, I wanted to learn from the words of teachers themselves about their beliefs, experiences, and preparation to work with multilingual learners. To do so, I opted for an interview approach with three different educators. This qualitative data could then support my chosen inquiry and the discussion following.

In these interviews, I spoke with three different first-grade teachers. All of them work at the same school. Each of them identifies as white women and are of different ages. Their classrooms use English instruction for curricula selected by the district. This particular district resides in rural central Pennsylvania. The district's student population is predominantly white.

My selection of these participants was a homogenous sampling, as I chose a group of educators at the same school, representing my research area of interest (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015). These first-grade teachers at a rural school helped provide insight into what this population's understanding of multilingual learning may be. The presentation of my findings is what I find to be a combination of narrative research and phenomenological research (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015). I aimed to reflect the 'interview experience' and humanity found in these conversations, along with exploring any commonalities amongst them. I construct a detailed account of my research through this method, along with what I learned from the experience.

These interviewees will be referred to as the following: Educator A, Educator B, and Educator C.

Educator A has been in the educational field for over thirty years. She has taught in this district for the bulk of her career, and specifically in first grade since 2003. Her educational background includes a dual major in Early Childhood *and* Elementary Education, along with master’s coursework, which she was “one more class and a paper left to write” from obtaining a degree as a reading specialist.

Educator B is in her twenty first year teaching first-grade at this elementary school. She has a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education.

Lastly, Educator C is in her twentieth year in education. Her initial bachelor’s degree was earned in speech and business, and after time in a business profession, she returned to school for two years to complete a degree in education, which she had completed coursework toward.

Each interview was about fifteen to twenty minutes in length, conducted during the school day in the Spring of 2024 semester. I sought to learn about these educators’ experiences, particularly with multilingual learners both in the past and present.

The following talking points were utilized:

How long have you been in education?
What is your educational background?
What are your experiences with multilingual learners?
What do you feel multilingual learners need to be successful?
What have been some challenges in this area?
Tell me about your preparation in college or in your school for working with multilingual learners.
Do you incorporate other languages in the classroom? If so, how?

**Table 1. Interview Talking Points**

The goal of these interviews was to learn about the experiences and beliefs of these educators in a school where this topic may not always be deemed applicable. What do these educators know and what have they learned? How, in this particular population, are their knowledge bases about multilingual learning utilized?



## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### Interview 1

My first interview was conducted with “Educator A.” I was gladly welcomed into the classroom to have this conversation during a planning period. As I walked into the room, I noticed the colorful spots on the floor where students line up, the colorful decorations, and the comfortable reading area with a chair and pillow, bookshelves, and a carpet for student seating. We sat together at a kidney-shaped table that would typically be used for small-group instruction, facing each other. I began by asking Educator A about her time in the field of education, along with her own educational background, post-high school. She shared her experiences, including that she has been in first grade specifically for about twenty years.

Next, I asked about her experiences with multilingual learners. “Not much,” she began. She proceeded to share about a recent student, before reflecting on past experiences:

I have a student this year who is bilingual. But you wouldn't know it. She-- I mean, you would not know it unless she has spoken a few things in Spanish. Somehow it came up the one day about speaking another language and the other kids were like, ‘yeah, I can speak another language.’ And I knew from [student’s] parents that that they speak Spanish at home, strictly Spanish at home, and then she does English here. So I asked, we have a poem that we say. at the end of the day, and before we go home and I asked her, you know, if she wouldn't mind, like, I, well, the kids were talking about, like I said, how, you know, speaking of the language and, you know, a language so that she can speak another language. And I was trying to explain to the students that she is bilingual. She really speaks and then they didn't really fully understand that. So at the end of the day we're walking out. And I said, you know, ‘Would you feel comfortable speaking Spanish, saying some things in Spanish?’ And she said, sure. And so she had-- she came up with the idea of saying our class poem in Spanish. Which is perfect, because the kids know that in English, and so the next day she stands up and she says it in Spanish. And that's when they finally understood that, okay, ‘that’s more than what I know.’

Other stories included similar ideas of students being bilingual, some with the ability to write in both languages, some still working to learn their second language, for example, at ‘Chinese school.’ Another example Educator A highlighted was that of students who were still learning both English and their home language, like Russian, so academics looked different for them compared to their peers. These students were not able to receive ELL/ESL support at this school, so were eventually able to be transported to another school for services by *fourth or fifth grade*.

As for any preparation in college or in this school. Educator A explained, “I don’t think I got anything in college... that I remember.” After a beat, she added, “using a lot of children's literature was suggested, developing like using vocabulary, and beyond that, I don't really remember much with that.” In the two schools in this district she has worked at, “...we didn't have a large population, so it really-- there really wasn't much done.”

As for use of multiple languages in the classroom, Educator A mentioned the occasional use of saying ‘hello’ in different languages during Morning Meeting. She expressed concern about being able to pronounce things correctly.

## **Interview 2**

My second interview began similarly. We found a suitable time to talk, and sat again at the kidney-shaped table, this time, in ‘Educator B’s’ classroom. Behind her I could see student artwork and shelves of books. We began by briefly reviewing her years as a teacher, along with her years of education. She has been teaching first grade for twenty-one years at this very school. She also described little experience with multilingual learners. After I inquired about any of her notices of student’s learning or speaking, she began reflecting on two trilingual siblings she taught in a previous year:

No, they spoke beautiful English, so if you just listen to them speak, you would never know. It wasn't until parent-teacher conferences that I got to hear them say anything in another language. They were very almost aware of speaking English in here. There would be times where, that's when I started to buy, like the Pedro that they say 'Pedro' books and the Katie Woo and Pedro books so that there would be some books in here where they could kind of see themselves more.

Here, Educator B was referring to books by author Fran Manushkin. These include like *Katie Woo and Friends*, which is part of a series about young Chinese American Katie, and in this case, her friends Pedro and JoJo (*Katie Woo and Friends: The Scholastic Teacher Store*). *Pedro: First-Grade Hero* follows Latino first-grader, Pedro, and his adventures, including solving a mystery (Manushkin, 2016).

I proceeded to ask Educator B what she feels multilingual learners need to be successful.

She explained:

I feel like sometimes we take it for granted that all of the vocabulary that we use is just something they know. So I feel like it's more of awareness on my end that I need to be diligent; and this year with our kiddo to make sure that the words that we're saying seem like words that he knows because I could see basic vocabulary things... That could interfere in all subject areas being something that you could just assume that kids know. But maybe don't.

She elaborated that these vocabulary words may include idioms or expressions, directional words, ordinal words, and more. She brought up the new reading curriculum's use of explicit vocabulary instruction, pointing out this difference from years past.

When I asked about any challenges that have arisen in regard to teaching multilingual learners, she responded, "No, not that I can think of. We are not a diverse school."

As I finished asking about preparation in college and beyond for working with multilingual learners, Educator B was able to immediately shake her head and respond, "None." She did not remember any from college, and explained that in this district, there is no in-service on the subject. She elaborated, "[District name] is unique in that we have each elementary school, but each elementary school has its own population. And so we don't actually even have

any ESL teacher that's assigned full time here, because there are such a low number of children.”

Educator B also does not actively use multiple languages in the classroom but mentioned the use of more than one language in occasional stories.

### **Interview 3**

My final interview took place later that day, at the next classroom's kidney-shaped table, which sits a foot or two higher than the others. I noticed the same types of colors as with A and B, just with new uses, places, and this time, amongst completely flexible seating.

Educator C is in her twentieth year of teaching. She, like Educator A, began at a different school, but in the same district. She explained, “My student teaching had been at [school name] which is very similar to [current school] clientele in terms of like everyone, it looks the same.” She then explained then that when she got her class list at her first teaching job, she “could pronounce maybe five or six of them.” She elaborated, “I had kids from all over the world and at [school name] you have kids from Asia, but then you also have Pakistan and we had [student name], who I think was my first year. He was from Russia. Kids from everywhere.” At this school, Educator C's students worked with the ESL teacher at the time for the morning part of the day, where they would practice with calendars and more day-to-day concepts. She elaborated, “...she was really big on making sure that, like everybody was celebrated. So it was like the ESL room was like tons of celebrations and she really did like a lot of like United States holidays too, like a lot of background knowledge on that so that they could understand.” Additionally, conversational English was emphasized, along with playing games, and an “immersive English language” experience. The process of teaching these students to read in English, then, followed the same structure for students whose home language was already

English. Reading and writing were focused on more in the ESL room, whereas Educator C worked with these students for math.

To be successful, Educator C said that multilingual students should receive practice with conversational elements of English and how that would connect to real life. She connected this to her study-abroad experience in Italy.

Lastly, she explained that the main challenge was the language barrier. She quickly learned the importance of routine for her students, along with the knowledge that cultures have different perspectives on things like Christmas and the Tooth Fairy.

These all, in her opinion, "...automatically and just so organically built into our classroom that everyone is different; like here you have to read and show pictures to say people are different than you. There, it was just like it was always different. Yes, it was always different."

Educator C explained that she also did not remember any preparation for working with multilingual learners. Even at her first school with a higher population of multilingual learners, it was up to the ESL teacher to provide the support.

She explained that while she also does not actively use other languages in the classroom, this brings up "a lot of guilt" while she also expressed concern with being respectful toward other languages if she reads them out loud.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

Throughout this interview process of a homogenous sample, I noticed similarities amongst the interviewees. Each teacher has taught in this district for the bulk of, if not the entirety of their teaching career. Because of this, they have worked with very similar populations of students, giving them easily comparable levels of experience with multilingual learners.

In discussing multilingual learners, or emergent bilingual students that they have taught, conversation was pointed toward the students' progress with learning English. Educator A, for example, discussed a bilingual student, saying, "I have a student this year who is bilingual. But you wouldn't know it." Something similar occurred with Educator B: "No, they spoke beautiful English, so if you just listen to them speak, you would never know." I found these phrases interesting, as they made me wonder what the metric would be for "knowing" if a student speaks more than one language. Are there certain expectations teachers have in telling if a student is bilingual? Certain criteria, or potentially stereotypes? These comments did not at all seem ill-intentioned, but made me wonder about the priority, or that expected emphasis on English in the classroom. Educator C brought up the ESL classroom she had experience with, stressing the importance of "conversational English" for students to learn. I wondered, with these students: is the focus on learning the content their classmates are, or learning the language expected in the United States?

Simultaneously, Educators A and B provided anecdotes about building classroom community for their multilingual learners. Educator A had a student recite the daily class poem in Spanish after having a discussion with her. Educator B expanded her classroom library to

contain book characters that spoke the same languages as her students. Educator C also described the presence of diversity in her past classrooms, allowing everyone to learn about a variety of cultures, holidays, and individual experiences. These stories could represent a more student-focused pedagogy.

**Table 2. Incorporating Other Languages**

<b>Do you incorporate other languages in the classroom? If so, how?</b>	
<i>So I guess there's there's been times that I've done like morning meetings where, you know, just different ways of saying hello in different languages. I guess you know, just through children's literature. I would say just overall like I don't myself, I don't. I took French but I don't know enough of it that I would be able to bring it into the classroom and I'd still feel comfortable.</i>	<b>Educator A</b>
<i>Yeah, not on a consistent basis at all. Um, the only time it would come up is if it was in a story and we were reading it. And sometimes if that's the case... then I try to have somebody else read it or professionally because I'm not sure that I'm pronouncing the words correctly.</i>	<b>Educator B</b>
<i>I don't. Which the I see, I'm embarrassed by that too, because that is a lot of guilt. I wish I could read it well, because I think that would be the most respectful. And we ended up like playing it because I didn't want to screw up another language. So it's like, how do you balance?</i>	<b>Educator C</b>

Another shared characteristic of these educators was their use of multiple languages in the classroom. Each teacher reported using little to no language beyond English in the classroom. Educator A explained that she may have used “hellos” in other languages at some point, and Educators B and C said that it would likely only take place in literature read with the class. Concurrently, every single teacher reported discomfort with reading languages other than English aloud. Educators B and C said that when stories with more than one language arise, they often will play a video for the class as an alternative.

Two things seem to be happening here with this discomfort. Firstly, it seems that these educators wish to respect languages and languages they do not speak, so do not want to make mistakes when they present them to the class. This demonstrates a certain level of respect and empathy for languages other than English.

At the same time, this still demonstrates a sense of ‘otherness’ for languages they do not speak. As a student, English-speaking or not, what interpretation may come out of a teacher’s visible hesitancy to speak another language? Does it represent a fixed mindset in favor of English?

These feelings may be attributed to the level of preparation these teachers received. All of them reported little to no preparation to work with multilingual learners in college and at their current district. Educators A and B referenced their schools’ low populations of multilingual learners when they explained that they have not received any guidance or training. Educator C expressed that where there was a population of these students, there was no training provided to her as a general education classroom teacher; it was up to the ESL teacher. If they are not receiving this training before beginning their careers, or even once they have started, it would make sense for them to feel uncomfortable in attempts to incorporate multiple languages into the classroom. How could they be prepared for this kind of support, or even know what type to implement, when they are receiving absolutely no guidance? Can they be trained more both in college and in the field?

**Table 3. Preparation**

	<b>Tell me about your preparation in college or in your school for working with multilingual learners.</b>
<b>Educator A</b>	<i>I don't think I got anything in college... that I remember... using a lot of children's literature was suggested, developing like using vocabulary, and beyond that, I don't really remember much with that. And as a here in the district, the schools that I've been here, which is just [school name] and here, we didn't have a large population, so it really-- there really wasn't much done.</i>
<b>Educator B</b>	<i>None. No, no preparation in college. Well, that was many years ago, but nothing that I can recall in college, and nothing here. There's not in-service on it. [District name] is unique in that we have each elementary school, but each elementary school has its own population. And so we don't actually even have any ESL teacher that's assigned full time here, because there are such a low number of children.</i>
<b>Educator C</b>	<i>Not that I can even remember, I don't think so. Does [Educator B] remember ever</i>



	<p><i>getting training? Yeah, I don't think. Even at [school name], it was all just the ESL teacher and working with her, and she was amazing because she had been teaching forever and ever and she just she was somebody that traveled all over. So, her toolbox was just like overflowing. And she did every single kid individually, so every case was different.</i></p>
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I think this could also provide insight into how districts like this are preparing for a variety of experiences and linguistic backgrounds. Since classroom teachers are the ones interacting with students, they would be the ones implementing these district missions. Are districts executing their goals at the classroom level? Additionally, are they providing teachers with the resources to provide an equitable experience?

From information gathered in these interviews, it is demonstrated that educators currently in the field may not have any preparation from their college education to work with multilingual learners. For these tenured educators who also do not have their masters, it is possible that they have not had the opportunity for more coursework on the topic since their undergraduate education.

Even in these schools with small populations of multilingual students, *children who speak languages beyond English are still going to be present*. Despite lack of preparation or acknowledgement by the district, they still very much exist.

This relates more to the conversation surrounding DIEB than it would seem. When stories about these experiences are censored in things like books, it begs a question of how classroom communities will receive them. If their identities or languages are limited to their homes, not the classroom, not the stories in the classrooms, how will they feel represented? How will other students help create a welcoming environment? How will teachers themselves create an academically challenging and loving environment?

These interviews demonstrated a gap between the variety of languages spoken in the U.S. in 2024, and even in this community in 2024, and the way that schools and classrooms are preparing to welcome and teach these languages.

I also wonder about how curricula could be better catered to the communities in the districts they are taught in, *and* the communities beyond. If they could be more all-encompassing, perhaps teachers could be better prepared for languages, along with having a culturally responsive classroom.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion and Significance

Teachers in this sample were not shown to have much preparation at all for working with multilingual learners. Additionally, on these occasions, multilingual learners are not using their full knowledge bases or variety of language within the classroom. Where there is scripted curriculum and no district support, teachers are unsure and nervous about how to include multiple languages in the classroom.

Teachers should be trained more in college, perhaps by instituting more language course requirements (in addition to or in place of English). This could help alleviate uneasiness with multiple languages in the classroom and make attempting communicating with a variety of languages feel more attainable.

Additionally, teachers in rural, predominantly English-speaking populations such as this one should receive guidance from their districts, regardless of multilingual learner populations. When the occasion arises that an emergent bilingual, bilingual, or multilingual learner is in the classroom, teachers absolutely need to be prepared, responsive, and inclusive.

This research process was enlightening for both myself as a student and a pre-service teacher. I not only got to employ various inquiry skills, but also had a glimpse into an area of interest. After a conversation I witnessed previously, I felt determined to learn about teacher beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge bases regarding working with multilingual learners. I found a small sample to engage with and was welcome to discuss the topic with them. These conversations further reminded me of the many roles a teacher must play in the classroom. They are human, with various life experiences, perspectives, and journeys in the world of education.

In future research, I would foresee expanding my sample size significantly. I would be interested not only in looking at schools across the same district, but schools in other districts in the area, and comparatively, schools in other geographic locations. This increase in sample size could allow for broader claims about both teacher preparation and teacher beliefs.

Knowledge like this is vital to the world of education. Teachers are in the classroom every day, bridging the gap between a district's selected curriculum and the students that must learn from it. When teacher preparedness, voices, concerns, and beliefs are in play, districts should be able to adapt and work to cultivate their ideal classrooms. This can only be done in conjunction with the teachers themselves.

When diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is at stake, especially in classrooms, it seems even more relevant to ensure that language is not targeted. With better preparation and guidance for teachers, more linguistic diversity, and more comfort with this diversity, perhaps a brighter future for DIEB can be achieved.

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