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Culturally Integrating Nuestra Juventud: Understanding Spanish-speaking Multilingual Learners through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Mallie C. Culpepper-Yablonsky
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, mculp434@live.kutztown.edu

Culturally Integrating *Nuestra Juventud*:

Understanding Spanish-speaking Multilingual Learners through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

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By Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky

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By Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Helen Hamlet, Committee Chair

Dr. Catherine McGeehan, Committee Member

Katie Sames, Committee Member

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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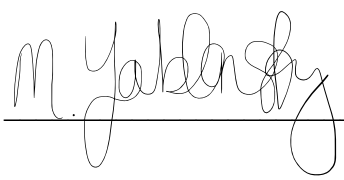
Over the last decade, public schools in the United States have seen an increase in the number of Multilingual Learner (ML) students, a majority of whom speak Spanish as their first language. The academic gap between ML and their English-speaking peers persists due to various factors, including limited professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills in educating ML. This action research study utilized a mixed-methods design to investigate teachers' understanding and perception of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy based on two of Pennslyvania's Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education competencies and the potential impact when teaching Multilingual Learner students. Utilizing a ten-question Likert scale survey and book club discussions, the researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data from eight participants, focusing on lived experiences and cultural awareness. The results showed that all participants' scores increased in at least one competency area. The discussions highlight the importance of understanding students' backgrounds and cultures and the continued need for professional development to best meet the needs of ML students.

Keywords: Multilingual Learners, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Professional Development, Mixed methods, Book club

Signature of Investigator  Date 2/28/2024

Dedication

To my husband–

Thank you for everything you have done to help me along my doctoral journey. You have made so many sacrifices so that I can accomplish a life-long goal. You took care of our family when I needed time to do work and even left work early to grab our daughter every Tuesday so I could go to night class. Though this has been a challenging journey, your help has made this possible. You listened to me when I was struggling and celebrated every small accomplishment along the way. Your positivity and support pushed me to achieve my goals, and I will forever be grateful.

To my daughter–

I started this journey when I was three months pregnant with you. As a first-time mom starting a doctoral program, I was nervous about how it would all work out. Over the last two years, I have watched you grow and have been amazed at how smart and strong you are. I hope you know that all those sacrifices and this accomplishment are for you. I hope this shows you that you can accomplish *anything* you want.

To my parents–

Thank you for all your support. You have helped me tremendously throughout this process, and I could not thank you enough. Whether it was babysitting so that I could do school work/write this dissertation or being a sympathetic ear, this would not have been possible without you.

To my students–

This is for you. The invaluable knowledge I have gained from this journey will help me become a better advocate, supporter, and teacher for you.

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To my participants, thank you for making this research possible. Your voluntary commitment to completing surveys, reading a book, and discussing it with each other has made this possible. I enjoyed learning more about each of you and the sustained relationships from this process. I also want to thank my colleagues for their advice and assistance throughout this program.

Lastly, thank you to my Kutztown University professors. Your thought-provoking coursework and readings have impacted the educator I am today. I will continue to work towards creating an inclusive environment for students and challenge any inequities along the way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a bilingual educator, I have had the opportunity to communicate and connect with many students. I have always empathized with our multilingual learner (ML) students and their daily challenges. Learning a second language comes with many tribulations, and this is one I have experienced. I have lived in two other countries and felt some of the same feelings our students encounter: overwhelmed, distraught, and anxious. Like my students' experiences, I was exposed to a new language and a completely different culture. It is challenging, and many only understand it if they have experienced it themselves.

While in college, I chose to study secondary education and the Spanish language. I took various courses on language acquisition and the Spanish language and culture. Learning a second language in a classroom provides a basic level of understanding while being immersed in the target language twenty-four-seven allows for authentic application and interaction. I decided to study abroad twice to truly understand the language and culture I was studying in college. Both experiences required me to live with a host family and take college courses at a local private university to study the language further.

My first study abroad venture was to Argentina. Not only was it my first time out of the country, it was also my first time on a plane. A twelve-hour red-eye flight from JFK brought me to Buenos Aires, Argentina. I traveled with two peers in my undergraduate program and fifteen students from another state university in Pennsylvania. After a few days of touring the area, we traveled to Rosario, where we remained for the next month. The following day, we navigated through the city to the university we would attend. Upon arriving, they shuffled us into a classroom with our host families. One by one, we met them and left together for our new

temporary homes. An overwhelming feeling of anxiousness overcame my body as I was whisked away from my friends by a virtual stranger and her daughters.

The lifestyle in Argentina is very laid back and their cultural norms are extremely different from those in the United States. Each day was a constant challenge and learning curve as I tried to embrace the lifestyle. I remember sitting in my bedroom the first evening, starving at 6 PM, wondering when dinner would be ready, only to find out they eat at 10:00-11:00 PM. The next day brought more surprises as I learned their breakfast was minimal, with lunch being the day's largest meal. After lunch, it was *siesta* (nap) time, when most businesses close from 1-5 PM. They open again later at night; however, restaurants usually open at 10 PM. I learned quickly that going to a restaurant for dinner at 10:00 PM is like attending the early bird special at 4:00 PM in the United States.

Adjusting to a different lifestyle posed many challenges and brought about feelings of being out of place. Little did I know that the lifestyle change would be easier to overcome than the language barrier. Argentinian Spanish drastically differs from the Spanish I learned in school and grew up hearing. Argentinians speak Castellano Spanish with a mix of Lunfardo slang (Spanish and Italian words combined due to the country's history). The dialect greatly impacted my stay and contributed to many hardships. My brain was on overdrive daily as I constantly translated, learned new words, and tried to piece together the information. I had a headache every day for the first two weeks as I went to bed trying to comprehend the new world around me. My host family did not speak English, my primary language; therefore, I was immersed in their dialect. Trying to navigate my new surroundings was physically and mentally exhausting.

My second study abroad experience lasted an entire semester and brought me to Central America. This trip, however, was even more challenging as I went alone. I embarked on a

five-month journey with no friends, no support system, just myself and twenty-two strangers from the United States. I was apprehensive about the solo journey, and my plane landed early, which caused more confusion. I had no cell phone service to contact anyone to let them know, and none of the directors were there waiting for me. Just me and my two suitcases alone and stranded in another country with unfamiliar faces and buildings. While feeling distraught and helpless, I could not help but think of one of my previous student's experiences. The student immigrated to a southern U.S. state, was put on a bus, and dropped off in a city in Pennsylvania. A week later, they were sent to high school to try to navigate a new world with a new language and new norms. I will never forget my feelings at that moment as they deeply impacted me, and I could not help but think, "This must be similar to what my students feel and experience."

An hour later the travel agency found me. I hopped into a van and was driven to my host family's house. I was dropped off in the middle of Costa Rica and greeted by a family of four. I learned that I would not meet my other group members or advisors until the following day, and I was terrified. The next day, I sat in class all day, listening to the professors. I took a few college courses, one being the History of Latin America, where the class was taught in Spanish. I was at an intermediate level in Spanish but was still anxious heading to this class. It felt like the teacher would call on me often, and all the native students would turn and stare. I felt compelled to provide an answer but found it hard as the vocabulary was much more complex than I knew. I sat there, anxiously awaiting the next time I would be called on, all while trying to pay attention and take notes. It was as if I had double the workload of my native Costa Rican peers as I had to translate from a second language to my primary language and study the information while learning about the nuances of their culture.

After class, I navigated the busy streets filled with pedestrians, motorcycles, cars, and buses, trying to find my way home. Costa Rica does not have street names; they use landmarks to give directions. For example, my host family's house was three blocks north and two blocks west of the mall in Heredia. Each day was a rollercoaster of emotions. Acclimating to a new culture and language is extremely difficult. The nuances of a language, how people interact, and the differences in rules and norms can be cumbersome. Studying abroad brought about many emotions I will never forget and made me more susceptible to recognizing these feelings in others.

While my journey and experiences differ from my students', understanding and appreciation are my driving forces to help them. I have witnessed the same confused looks on their faces as they try to make sense of another language, just as I had when I was abroad. I listen to their stories about their classes and how difficult it is to adjust to new societal norms. I remind myself that I am one of the few people in this building that native Spanish-speaking students can communicate with. I have been in similar situations, and because of this, I want to investigate how teachers can support and reach our Spanish-speaking ML students through culturally relevant practices.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher's background is crucial as it impacts the study design, the study itself, and the results (Holmes, 2020). "The opinions, values, beliefs, and social background of the researcher influence him/her in the research process, shaping each methodological and analytical decision he or she makes" (Manohar et al., 2017, p. 2). The researcher's positionality is an integral component of the study to allow transparency and understanding of the researcher since

their personal experiences, gender, beliefs, race, culture, and other factors should be considered when conducting research (Milner, 2017).

I am a white, bilingual female. English is my primary language, while Spanish is my secondary language, which I acquired through schooling. I grew up in a military family, which led us to move around quite often. Upon leaving the military, we moved to a city in Pennsylvania, where I spent the rest of my childhood. We moved there in third grade, and the area's diversity continued to grow throughout my schooling. My high school was very diverse, with many Spanish-speaking students, as the city is 58% Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

My elementary/middle school was predominantly white students who spoke English as their primary language. High school was my first experience hearing native Spanish speakers and watching their interactions. I remember thinking, "I wish I knew what they were discussing. I would love to be able to talk to them and understand them." The desire to understand my peers led me to take Spanish as an elective course in high school and I took all the levels offered at my school.

Upon graduating high school, I continued my pursuit of becoming fluent in Spanish as I chose to study the language in college. One break, while I was at a local grocery store in my hometown, I had a moment that solidified my studies over the last five years. A lady in front of me spoke Spanish; however, the cashier spoke English. The cashier tried to tell her how to pay with her card; however, the lady did not understand. I assisted the lady in front of me as I translated for the cashier. That moment stuck with me as it was the first time I could use my studies and passion to help others. I realized that by learning a second language, I could communicate with more people, help others, and broaden my understanding of others' experiences and cultures.

Being a non-native Spanish speaker nor Hispanic myself, I can only understand my students' experiences to a certain extent. I have moved around often, traveled to other countries, and been in situations where my language and culture were not the norm. The reasons and intentions behind my studies and my travels may have been vastly different from those of my students; however, all of my experiences have allowed me to have a small *glimpse* into situations that my students encounter and the opportunity to raise awareness.

As a new mother, I plan to teach my child both the English and Spanish language. My child will be able to communicate with more people and better understand others around them. Reflecting on my personal experiences, background, and beliefs allows me to acknowledge differences and take them into consideration when conducting the study.

Statement of Problem

Over the last decade, my school district and many others have seen an influx of Multilingual Learner (ML) students, also known as English Language Learner (ELL) students. The ML student population in public schools in the U.S. has increased from 4.5 million in 2010 to 5.1 million in 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). In my building, 186 out of 204 ML students' primary language is Spanish. The other ML students speak various languages, including Portuguese, Mandarin, Punjabi, and Russian (K. Smith, personal communication, October 13, 2022). This trend is prevalent nationwide as Spanish was the home language of 3.9 million public school students, representing 75.7% of all English Learner students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Although the number of ML students continues to increase, "the academic achievement of English Learners consistently lags behind the achievement of native-English-speaking peers" (Russell, 2015, p. 27). ML students have different needs, and many factors influence their

academic progress. Researchers assert that "teachers lack experience working with this population, and language barriers serve as a significant challenge" (Bosta et al., 2015, p. 5).

In 2020, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education released a new set of competencies called the Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) Competencies (Cole-Malott et al., 2021). These competencies serve as a guideline for educators to provide equitable education for all students. Teachers who follow these competencies take an "anti-racist stance and acknowledge the systemic barriers that impede students from having equitable access, especially those in historically marginalized groups" (Cole-Malott et al., 2021, p. 2). Individuals in this group consist of black people, indigenous people, and individuals of color (BIPOC) "who face specific systems of interlocking oppression" (Cole-Malott et al., 2021, p. 2). Interlocking oppression refers to the intersectionality of factors such as gender, race, class, and others (Tisdell, 1993). "The term highlights difference while honoring and emphasizing the struggles that unify these racial groups" (Cole-Malott et al., 2021, p. 3). These competencies follow Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), a teaching style that promotes an asset-based approach while expanding upon areas such as self-reflection, understanding various cultures, and incorporating real-world experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

The disparities between ML students and their peers continue to emerge at the forefront of education, especially in Pennsylvania. In June of 2022, the Department of Justice announced the implementation of a settlement agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) "to stop the unlawful placement of students with disabilities in PDE’s statewide system of alternative education programs (AEDY), and to ensure equal educational opportunities for English learner students in AEDY" (Department of Justice, 2022). The agreement "ensures English learners receive the legally required support they need to participate equally in schools"

(Department of Justice, 2022). The settlement highlights a large-scale issue throughout the state due to the lack of understanding of how to support and teach our ML students and the inequities ML students face. These findings demonstrate the urgent need to change pedagogical methods for our ML student population. Through reflection and learning, educators can be a catalyst for change and create meaningful content that celebrates diversity and incorporates the students' lived experiences into the classroom.

"In the United States, an increasing number of English Language Learner (ELL) students are being mainstreamed into content area and grade-level classrooms, meaning that *all* teachers, not just those who teach English as a Second Language (ESL), are responsible for the learning of this group of students" (Wassell et al., 2010, p. 600). "More specifically, educators must be willing to explore the lives and experiences of their ELL students and develop empathy for their situations" (Wassell et al., 2010, p. 600). These choices can affect which instructional methods they implement and how they structure their classroom. Teachers can better understand their students through self-reflection, learning about their cultures and linguistic backgrounds, and insight into those connections (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The common misunderstandings about multilingual learner students are due to a lack of experience and training when working with this population, which can create challenges for the teacher and the student (Diaz et al., 2016). "Unfortunately, the rapid growth in the ELL population has not been matched by sufficient growth in teachers' understanding of how to educate these students best" (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 5). The lack of training and professional development opportunities provided to teachers to meet their students' needs and foster academic improvement continues to reinforce the problem in the classroom (Samson & Collins, 2012). The teacher is a crucial component of the classroom and can impact the student's

overall learning and achievement, making continued professional development important (Zamani & Ahangari, 2016). While many factors can affect students' academic success or lack thereof, the teacher's role in the classroom is integral to the academic environment.

Significance of Research

As our nation's diversity increases, "today's teacher must educate students varying in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics" (Richards et al., 2007, p. 64). Ethnicity and race influence "how students respond to instruction and curriculum, and they influence teachers' assumptions about how students learn and how much students are capable of learning" (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). These factors can also affect students' language acquisition and academic success. Educators must be exposed to others' norms and beliefs to better understand their student population, as learning may differ amongst cultures. Ford and Kea (2009) state:

> When we are responsive, we feel an obligation, a sense of urgency, to address a need so that students experience success. When teachers are culturally responsive, they are student-centered; they break down barriers to learning and achievement and, hence, provide keys that open doors to students' success. Thus, to be culturally responsive means that teachers work proactively and assertively to understand, respect, and meet the needs of students from cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. Cultural responsiveness is the recognition that students are similar to, but also different from, each other. (p. 1)

Understanding the students in our classroom and their lived experiences can greatly influence the curriculum and pedagogy. The diversity across the United States continues to increase in most districts, and the educational curriculum should evolve to accommodate students' funds of

knowledge. Funds of knowledge refer to those "historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and well-being" (Gonzalez et al., 1995, p. 446).

While there is limited research specifically on culturally relevant pedagogy and ML students, the techniques of culturally relevant pedagogy benefit students. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is asset-based, student-centered, and utilizes students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to build connections to school and the community (Leonard et al., 2009). Teachers should utilize students' funds of knowledge in the classroom and build upon it to enhance and further their learning ('t Gilde & Volman, 2021).

Culturally relevant pedagogy fosters connections between home and school, which greatly impacts academic achievement. CRP contributes to higher levels of academic engagement, motivation, student participation, and stronger relations with the school and community (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gay, 2000; Peercy, 2011). "CRP strategies are transformational and incorporate teaching mechanisms that promote minority students' success while supporting their heritage, language, and cultural identity. By using these strategies, educators can minimize the achievement gap among minority students" (Hernandez, 2022, p. 3). This pedagogical method is beneficial for all students, especially multilingual learners, to bridge the gap between home and school lives.

Theoretical Overview

Learning occurs when individuals participate in genuine interactions and discussions with others. School districts and educators who partake in this theory may integrate collaborative learning activities into the classroom and utilize professional development sessions to foster collaborative practices among teachers. Collaboration and connection foster a learning

environment in which each individual plays a role in the learning process. "Central to a sociocultural view of learning is the belief that developing understanding is a social and interactive process" (Andrei et al., 2015, p. 3).Vygotsky (1978) asserts that knowledge is facilitated through interactions with others. "Learning and development are reciprocal processes nurtured between and among individuals through exploration, conversation, and problem solving" (Andrei et al., 2015, p. 4).

Social interaction as a means of learning is primarily influenced by the people they interact with regularly. Wenger's *Communities of Practice* theory (2006) states that a Community of Practice is a "group of individuals who share a concern or a passion for a topic can learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Wenger describes three common elements for acquiring such a community: a common interest and commitment, cultivating relationships with others through contribution and engagement, and shared practice (Wenger, 2006). This book-club-based professional development study promotes authentic discourse among colleagues as they engage in a reading and questions that prompt reflection on their lived experiences and cultures. The voluntary participation of those in the book club demonstrates the shared interest and commitment to creating a culturally inclusive environment for ML students.

Teachers who incorporate students' backgrounds into the curriculum in order to make relevant connections between academic content and students' lives/experiences follow a culturally relevant pedagogical approach (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). These teachers take time to learn about their students' cultures, linguistic backgrounds, and funds of knowledge in order to incorporate teaching practices and curricula that are culturally affirming and representative (Gay, 2000). Implementing this teaching practice takes strategic planning, knowledge, and reflection to utilize meaningful and relevant curriculum materials for culturally diverse students.

This action research study will consist of a professional development-based book club developed to provide teachers with an alternative experience and a glimpse into a different culture and lifestyle. The learning process through the book club is two-fold; the initial learning takes place while reading the book, and the second culminates through challenging reflection questions that promote interaction and collaboration among the focus group members. Sharing experiences allows members to challenge personal viewpoints while working towards a common goal. The contribution of each member allows for differing perspectives that can help prompt self-reflection compared to the experience of their peers. The book club allows for a low-risk environment in which participants can analyze the character's experiences in the book, their group members' experiences, and their own. The shared knowledge through group members can potentially help educators better serve and relate to students in their classrooms.

Definition of Terms

Asset-based teaching- "Views such differences in culture, language, ability, socioeconomic status, gender identity, immigration status, and others as valuable additions to the learning community. This mindset allows us to focus on the strengths of our students rather than any perceived deficits (Association of College and University Educators (ACUE), 2021).

Book Club- "A group of individuals who meet often to discuss a book they are reading" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

BIPOC - "The acronym BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Color) is used to distinguish between Black people, Indigenous people, and other individuals of color who face specific systems of interlocking oppression." (Cole-Malott et al., 2021, p. 2).

Community of Practice- "People who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor" (Wenger & Trayner, 2022).

Cultural Awareness - "Being cognizant, observant, and conscious of similarities and differences among and between cultural groups" (Goode, 2006).

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Education - "An anti-racist undertaking that aims to eliminate the systemic and institutional barriers that inhibit the success of all Pennsylvania's students—particularly those who have been historically marginalized" (Cole-Malott et al., 2021, p. 3).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy- "A theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 469).

Equity - "Providing all individuals, regardless of race, gender identity, language, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, a fair and just educational experience" (Cole-Malott et al., 2021, p. 3).

Multilingual Learners - "Multilingual learners are students who are developing proficiency in multiple languages. This includes students learning English as an additional language in school" (*Multilingual Learners | NSTA*, n.d.).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of Language in the United States

Various movements, laws, and terminologies have impacted the country's views on language diversity in the United States. While the English-only movement was popular in the mid-1900s, it can be traced back to the 18th century (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011). The movement aimed to designate English as the official language of the United States and to be used as a means of instruction in all schools throughout the nation as "U.S. founders envisioned a country

with a unified history, with unified traditions, and with a common language" (Ovando, 2003, p. 2).

The ideology of English as the dominant language dates back to the 18th century. One of the first examples of language assimilation was in 1750, when Benjamin Franklin created a missionary group and schools for young members to attend (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011). "In these schools, students were instructed only in English" (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011, p. 45). Most of the members spoke German at this time, and the school's goal was consistent with the English language assimilation goal of the era (Crawford, 2004). "When parents… realized that the real intention of these schools was to impose the use of English and to eliminate the use of any other languages, they withdrew their children from those schools" (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011, p. 45).

In the early 19th century, there was a major influx of people immigrating to the United States, and various languages were spoken at that time. While there were no consistent language policies, locations in the United States adjusted to the new demographics, and some embraced bilingual education, specifically in areas "where ethnic groups had influence" (Crawford, 1987). Towards the end of the 19th century, however, the incorporation of other languages began to decline as states started to ban the use of other languages in school settings. "During this period, the American Protective Association promoted English-only school laws, which Illinois and Wisconsin adopted in 1889" (Ovando, 2003, p. 5). It is important to note that during this time, the United States also sanctioned English in Hawaii, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico (Crawford, 2004).

While some states chose to enforce this proposal, there were no national laws on language until the early twentieth century. In 1906, "the Nationality Act required all immigrants to speak English in order to be eligible to start their process of naturalization" (Nieto, 2009, p.

62). In addition, "the government required that all male immigrants pass a test of fluency in English to become American citizens" (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011, p. 45). These examples highlight the restrictions on naturalization and the increasing pressure for English monolingualism.

A couple of years later, in 1919, a few states, such as Alaska and Nebraska, enacted a strict law prohibiting teaching foreign languages (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011; Ovando, 2003). According to Garrido & Álvarez (2011), there were three main parts of this law:

> a) Nobody is allowed to instruct any subject, whether in a public or private institution, in any other language that is not English.
>
> b) No other language but English can be used to teach any student until that pupil has successfully graduated from the eighth grade.
>
> c) Anybody disobeying the law will be subject to a fine that will vary from $25 to a $100 or could be taken to prison. (p. 46)

A historic case in the United States derived from this 1919 law. An educator, Robert Meyer, went to trial for teaching a ten-year-old student to read in German. The Supreme Court overturned the state's decision and ruled "that a Nebraska state law prohibiting the teaching of a foreign language to elementary students was unconstitutional" (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990, p. 29). The case *Meyer v. Nebraska* found that the law violated the due process clause in the Fourteenth Amendment (*Meyer v. Nebraska,* 1923).

While the reversal of the state's decision by the Supreme Court appeared to be an advancement toward acceptance of other languages in education, the English-only movement continued to grow in popularity. "By the early 1920s, 34 states had English-only requirements in their schools" (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990, p. 29). President Theodore Roosevelt also pushed for

English to become the United States' official language at that time. He stated, "We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language" (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011, p. 46). While some citizens shared the same sentiment as the President, many opposed it. Over the next forty years, there was a persistent push for English monolingualism, often framed as essential for national unity, that clashed with the need to accommodate the growing linguistic diversity of the population. Throughout this period, however, languages other than English were seldom acknowledged in school settings, and students who spoke another language were given little to no help in their academics (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990).

The undermining of bilingual education in the United States made it challenging for students to assimilate into the new culture while embracing their own. The Americanization movement sought to bring common grounds to all United States citizens by highlighting American traditions, in turn devaluing the languages and cultures of others' homelands (Foner, 2001). "The push to "Americanize" the common school were parts a dominant and nationalistic "English-only" language ideology in that persisted in U.S. schooling and society for much of the first half of the twentieth century" (Bybee et al., 2014, p. 139)The English-only sentiment lasted until the late 1960s when the government finally addressed the inequities in education for citizens who spoke another language.

In 1968, the United States Government passed the Bilingual Education Act, where schools with children with limited English-speaking ability (LESA) would receive federal funding to create educational programs to assist them (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990). The bill defines LESA students as "children who come from environments where the dominant language is other than English" (Bilingual Education Act, 1968). The bill sought to address the language

issues in the educational realm, which lasted a few years until political leaders reintroduced an amendment in favor of the English-only movement.

"In 1981, Republican Senator of California, S. I. Hayakawa, introduced the English Language Amendment into the US Congress, proposing English as the official language of the United States" (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011, p. 47). With little support, the *English Language Amendment* failed and became the U.S. English movement two years later. The negative portrayal of speaking a language other than English caused some members of society to continue pushing for English-only in schools nationwide. Years later, in the late 1990s, California proposed banning bilingual education and strictly using English in educational settings (Straubhaar, 2021). Several other states mirrored this proposition by enacting similar legislation.

Opposition to the English-only movement emerged from concerns about educational equity for linguistically diverse students and the preservation of cultural heritage. English Plus, a movement created by the Spanish-American League Against Discrimination, raised awareness of bilingual education and the lack of opportunities and funding for these programs (Garrido & Álvarez, 2011). Movement members campaigned to bring change to the educational system to better support these students.

Awareness and a growing understanding of inequitable practices in the educational system led to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, officially signed into law in 2002 (No Child Left Behind, 2002). NCLB designates funding to schools with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals to incorporate rigorous instruction to learn the English language and meet state standards (No Child Left Behind, 2002). The 2002 act provides LEP students with the resources needed to be successful in their educational careers. Since the implementation of NCLB, research continues to guide and shape bilingual education in the United States.

Terminology

The history of schooling in the United States and bilingual education have been intertwined since the 19th century (Bybee et al., 2014). The increase in immigration to the United States highlighted the urgent need for bilingual education. Despite a recognized need for language support, the mid-20th century witnessed a "sink-or-swim" approach to bilingual education, characterized by minimal resources and limited instructional strategies for fostering English language acquisition among immigrant students (Bybee et al., 2014; Ovando, 2003). It was not until 1968 that the United States, through the enactment of the Bilingual Education Act, officially addressed the educational needs and resource allocation for bilingual students within public school systems (González, 2008).

Before the mid-1960s, students who spoke another language were not referred to by any specific terminology (González, 2008). The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 formally categorized certain student populations as "Limited English Proficient" to provide additional educational resources. The act supplied funding to schools with students who had limited *speaking* ability, as that was thought to be the best way to determine a child's linguistic ability (González, 2008). The United States Government, therefore, utilized the term limited-English-speaking ability (LESA) when writing the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 to identify the criteria of students (Bilingual Education Act, 1968).

The term LESA posed deficit views on students with such a label and disregarded the significance of knowing another language (Bybee et al., 2014; González, 2008). The limited-speaking ability criteria were re-defined six years later to include reading and writing; therefore, the U.S. government switched to a more general term, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) (Boscardin, 1997). Since the release of this act, numerous labels for students who speak a

language other than English have existed in the United States. Other common acronyms in the educational system are English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL) students, or Multilingual Learners.

Understanding how the government distinguishes those in this category is necessary to better comprehend the various labels. The United States Government defines LEP individuals as "those who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English" (US Department of Justice, 2011). As of 2016, 25.1 million LEP individuals lived in the United States (Scamman, 2018).

Though labeling students is not novel to the academic world, scholars have grown to understand the implications of labels. Howard Becker's theory of labeling can be applied to education and the effects of labeling on one's social and emotional well-being. The theory suggests that applying labels to individuals can modify their self-perceptions and alter how others respond to the labeled person (Becker, 1963). Labeling can impact one's views, similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Samkange, 2015). It also impacts how others view and treat those categorized into the group. According to Samkange (2015), "The label is most likely to affect the way the teacher interacts with the learner, and in some cases, the learner may feel discriminated against" (p. 1421). Labeling students as either LEPs or ELLs compares their language and culture to that of the dominant and promotes the notion that their language is inferior. The sentiment contradicts the equity initiatives the nation and school districts are working towards. "When officials and educators ignore the bilingualism that these students can and must develop through schooling in the United States, they perpetuate inequities in the education of these children" (Garcia, 2009, p. 322).

The language used with children, especially in a school setting, sets the culture and context of the environment. The English language learner label is a "deficit-oriented classification—it identifies students by their lack of English proficiency" (Umansky & Dumont, 2021, p. 994). Valenzuela proclaims that "ESL youth, for example, are regarded as "limited English proficient" rather than as "Spanish dominant" and/or as potentially bilingual. Their fluency in Spanish is construed as a "barrier" that needs to be overcome" (Valenzuela, 2005, p. 266).

When referring to a specific group of students, the language utilized can perpetuate deficit thinking by placing more importance on the English language rather than acknowledging another. "Deficit thinking ignores students' cultural strengths, diminishes the value of their lived experiences, and falsely validates negative perceptions of their families or communities" (Heinbach & Mitola, 2021). Deficit thinking can impact a student's academic experience and performance, as research has identified that educational terminologies can promote negative academic perceptions of students (Shapiro, 2014).

To understand the implications of deficit thinking concerning labeling students, it is necessary to understand the term deficit thinking. Heinbach & Mitola (2021) state that

> Deficit thinking is the belief that there is a prescribed “correct” way of being — also known as the norm — and anyone who operates outside of that norm is operating at a deficit. They are perceived to be lacking something and therefore need to be “fixed" and brought into the norm in order to be successful. Unfortunately, the burden of the prescribed “fix” usually falls entirely on the individual by suggesting that they “try harder” and ultimately conform to the practices of the dominant culture. Historically, if

there is support available, it is entirely focused on bringing others into the norm rather than changing the norm to accommodate others.

The norm in the United States education system is to learn English and assimilate into the culture. The process of emphasizing the dominant culture and language while taking away from the non-dominant culture is known as subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 2005). Valenzuela states that "schooling either adds a second culture and language or takes away one's original culture and language, while the ideal relationship would be bilingualism and biculturalism" (Valenzuela, 2005, p. 88).

To challenge the monoglossic lens used in the U.S. educational system, students learning English as a second language are referred to as multilingual learners (ML) in this study. It promotes an asset-based view of the linguistic backgrounds of students while they work towards learning English (Souto-Mannying, 2016). Instead of using terms like "Limited English Proficient" (LEP) or "English Language Learner" (ELL), educational institutions can use an asset-based term such as multilingual learner. This shift in focus emphasizes the potential of students' diverse language skills rather than their perceived lack thereof. While the terms used in the past have had a negative connotation, changing the terminology we use can create a paradigm shift and affect how we teach and view the capabilities of these students.

Teacher Mindsets/Perceptions and the Classroom

Teachers' mindsets greatly influence their teaching style and beliefs about student ability and success (Zilka et al., 2019). "Mindsets or assumptions that teachers possess about themselves and their students play a significant role in determining their expectations, teaching practices, and how students perceive their own mindset" (Seaton, 2018, p. 43). The teacher's views of the

world around them and how they treat those in their classroom can greatly impact students' experiences and education.

Nadelson et al. (2019) state that a mindset is "a combination of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions, that are applied to guide professional (or personal) actions or choices" (p. 26). According to Dweck's implicit theories of intelligence (2006), there are two overarching frameworks of mindsets: growth and fixed. A fixed mindset is when people "regard abilities, skills, and intelligence as having a stable, innate, and inflexible essence" (Zilka et al., 2019, p. 150). A growth mindset, on the other hand, believes that "intellectual abilities can be cultivated and developed through application and instruction. They do not deny that people may differ in their current skill levels; however, they believe that everyone can improve their underlying ability" (Dweck, 2014, p. 2).

Teachers' mindsets can be influential factors since "teacher mindsets can be explicitly or implicitly communicated to students in classrooms, which can then influence students' mindsets and, in turn, student achievement" (Padilla et al., 2022, p. 3). Teacher mindset refers to the "assumptions, beliefs and expectations that teachers have for themselves and others, which guide their teaching practices and interactions with students and in turn affect students' academic outcomes" (Padilla et al., 2022, p. 3). The two distinct mindsets can greatly impact pedagogy, student expectations, achievement, and curriculum choices. Table 1 illustrates the differences between fixed and growth mindsets relating to students and education.

Table 1

Fixed vs. Growth Mindset in Education

	Fixed Mindset Approach	**Growth Mindset Approach**
Overall	-View intelligence as mostly innate and unchangeable.	-Tend to think of intelligence as malleable and something that can be improved upon through effort.
Pedagogy	-Teachers with fixed mindsets more often use performance-oriented pedagogical practices, such as separating students by ability or grading students in comparison to each other	-Teachers with higher levels of growth mindset are more likely to use mastery-oriented pedagogical practices, such as using mistakes as learning opportunities and allowing students to resubmit work for a higher grade.
Classroom Performance	-A study found that when teachers had fixed mindsets about their students' abilities, students with low achievement at the beginning of the year tended to remain underachievers.	-A study found that when teachers possessed a higher growth mindset regarding students' abilities and emphasized the role of effort in learning, originally low-achieving students were able to end the year as moderate to high-achievers.

Note. Table adapted with permission from Padilla, A. M., Chen, X., Song, D., Swanson, E., & Peterson, M. (2022). Mindset, stereotype threat and the academic achievement gap between Chinese and Latinx English Learners (ELs). *International Journal of Educational Research*, *112*, 101916. (see Appendix C)

Teachers with a growth mindset approach support all students by identifying and encouraging the potential in each individual (Seaton, 2018). The principles of a growth mindset

closely align with the asset-based teaching approach, which draws on converting these principles into practice (Drago & Setnikar, 2023). "Asset-based teaching views such differences in culture, language, ability, socioeconomic status, gender identity, immigration status, and others as valuable additions to the learning community" (ACUE, 2021, p. 1). Teachers who use this approach "focus on the strengths of our students rather than any perceived deficits" (ACUE, 2021, p. 1). Rather than framing student differences as obstacles, this approach acknowledges and leverages them as opportunities for intellectual growth, fostering mutual learning and appreciation for diversity.

The asset-based approach in education is crucial as the diversity of students continues to increase. Research predicts that in 2024, "54% of K-12 students will identify as non-white" (Hayslip, 2020, p. 13). Statistics for teachers, however, show that 80% of the teaching force identifies as white (NYU Steinhardt, 2022). While the diversity of the student body across the nation continues to increase, most teaching staff remains homogenous regarding race (Howard, 2019). "The disconnect between teachers' and students' backgrounds may inadvertently lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and misconceptions and bias" (Hayslip, 2020, p. 13). "The contrast in the demographic composition of educators and their students is cause for concern because research shows that students' race, ethnicity, and cultural background significantly influence their achievement" (Krasnoff, 2016, p. 1).

The differences highlight the need for teachers to implement culturally affirming strategies and recognize and embed students' funds of knowledge, languages, and beliefs into the curriculum (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Research has shown that understanding each student's potential, providing encouragement, and using asset-based approaches such as culturally relevant pedagogy is "critical to effective teaching and learning" (Flint & Jaggers,

2021, p. 254). As Dweck (2006) states, "With the right mindset and the right teaching, people are capable of a lot more than we think" (p. 64).

English Language Learners and Special Education

The overrepresentation of minoritized and disadvantaged students in special education has been a concern in the United States educational system for decades (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006). "In the late 1960s and early 1970s, members of the special education research community began publicly noting the overrepresentation of minorities and disadvantaged students in special education" (Keller-Allen, 2006, p. 3). Students were misidentified as having special needs and were placed in special education classrooms or alternative schools. Sanatullova-Allison and Robinson-Young (2016) identify three factors that cause students to be misidentified as having a learning disability: "inconsistencies in approaches to identification, biases in assessment, and variety of instructional practices and learning environments" (p. 7). ML students, for example, are twenty-seven percent more likely to be identified as having special needs in elementary school and two times as likely in secondary settings (Rueda & Windmueller, 2006).

Specific Learning disabilities (SLD), as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), states that it is “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations." While there is limited research on ML students and overrepresentation in special education programs, ML students are a rising group in the SLD and intellectual disabilities (ID) categories (Sullivan, 2011).

To determine one's abilities and test for potential placement in special education, SLD and ID utilize intellectual quotient (IQ) tests to determine eligibility. The SLD assessment,

however, has a second component in which the IQ score and a standardized assessment are compared. The IQ test itself compares the relative intelligence of a person to multiple factors; "the ratio of the mental age to the chronological age multiplied by 100, and the score determined by one's performance on a standardized intelligence test relative to the average performance of others of the same age" (Sanatullova-Allison & Robinson-Young, 2016, p. 7). The IQ test is an unfair assessment of multilingual learners' abilities as the test is based upon sociocultural and English proficiency bias (Sanatullova-Allison & Robinson-Young, 2016). The tests are designed for native English speakers and those of the dominant culture in the United States. The standardized tests utilized to determine a student's ability in mathematics and language comprehension/production "may lack reliability and validity" since they require background knowledge and English proficiency (Sullivan, 2011, p. 320). The test scores are also compared to their non-limited English proficiency peers, placing them at a disadvantage.

Although standardized tests are now offered in the student's primary language, it was not always the norm. In 1970 the landmark special education case, Diana v. State Board of Education, the plaintiff "argued that intelligence tests administered in English to Spanish-speaking children were the principal reason for overrepresentation" (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 725). Though this case did not go to trial, Reynolds et al. (2014) state that

> The consent decree certified by the court required an assessment of each child's primary language competence; if the primary language was found to be other than English, tests used in the assessment had to be nonverbal, translated, or administered using an interpreter. The decree also required that unfair portions of the English language tests were to be deleted and more influence accorded to the results of the nonverbal intelligence tests when placement decisions were being made. (p.725)

The ruling also impacted the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) provisions in 2004. The provision acknowledged the discrepancies stating "a child shall not be determined to be a child with a disability if the determinant factor for such determination is.. Limited English proficiency" (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004).

Identifying limited-English proficiency students can be difficult as their educational needs and language acquisition characteristics may overlap with one with a disability. A professional trained in both linguistic and cultural differences is necessary to administer and evaluate students; however, most schools lack staff members who are trained and knowledgeable (Keller-Allen, 2006). Klinger (2014) provides examples of the subtle behavioral differences between language acquisition and learning disabilities in Table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics of Learning Disabilities and Second Language Acquisition

Behaviors Associated With Learning Disabilities	Associated Behaviors With Acquiring a Second Language
Difficulty carrying out a series of directions, generally because of poor short-term memory or a lack of attention.	Difficulty carrying out a series of directions because • directions are not well understood • it can be harder to remember directions in a second language (Service, E., Simola, Metsänheimo, & Maury, 2002).
Difficulty with phonological awareness (i.e., distinguishing between or manipulating sounds auditorily), even though the student knows the sounds.	Difficulty distinguishing auditorily between unfamiliar sounds not in one's first language, or that are in a different order than in the first language.
Slow to learn sound-symbol correspondence; may seem to know letters' sounds one day but not the next.	Confusion with sound-symbol correspondence when it is different than in one's first language. Difficulty pronouncing sounds not in the first language.
Difficulty remembering sight words; may know word one day but not the next.	Difficulty remembering sight words when word meanings are not understood or when irregular patterns are used (e.g., *ea* can have both the long e and short e sounds).

Table 2 Continued

Behaviors Associated With Learning Disabilities	Associated Behaviors With Acquiring a Second Language
Difficulty retelling a story in sequence. This may be because of poor short-term memory or retrieval skills.	Difficulty retelling a story in English without the expressive skills to do so. Yet the student might understand more than he or she can convey (i.e., receptive skills in English may be stronger than expressive skills).
Confusion with figurative language, idioms, and words with multiple meanings; students with LD might be very literal.	Confusion with figurative language, idioms, pronouns, conjunctions, and words with multiple meanings.
Slow to process challenging language.	Slow to process challenging language because it is not well understood.
May have poor auditory memory and not be able to repeat a string of sounds or words accurately.	May seem to have poor auditory memory if sounds or words are unfamiliar or not well understood.
May have difficulty concentrating.	Learning in a second language is mentally exhausting; therefore, ELLs may seem to have difficulty concentrating at times.
May seem easily frustrated and/or discouraged.	Learning in a second language can be frustrating.

Note. Table with permission (see Appendix D) from Klingner, J., & Eppollito, A. (2014). *English Language Learners: Differentiating between language acquisition and learning disabilities*. Council for Exceptional Children.

The comparison of the behaviors demonstrates how imperative it is to know the language acquisition process to understand the student's needs. Multilingual learner students are more

susceptible to being misidentified as having special needs than their peers, as their behaviors often portray similar struggles (Sullivan, 2011). "Both students identified as ELLs and students identified with an LD perform poorly on academic tasks with high language demands, which may make ELLs even more vulnerable to misclassification as having a disability" (Sullivan, 2011, p. 320). The overrepresentation of ML students can be attributed to the misunderstandings of their needs and biased language assessments (Sullivan, 2011).

The label's stigma remains with students throughout their academic careers and can perpetuate certain perceptions (Sanatullova-Allison & Robinson-Young, 2016). Those with special needs and those acquiring a second language require tailored teaching strategies and have different needs than their regular education peers. These needs can be misconstrued, resulting in inequitable practices against students with special needs and multilingual learners.

In 2019, Pennsylvania entered an agreement with the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) due to "complaints involving Pennsylvania Department of Education's (PDE) policies and practices related to its approval and general oversight of Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (“AEDY”) Programs" (United States Department of Justice (US DOJ), 2022). The complaints warranted an investigation into PA's AEDY programs as Local Education Associations (LEAs) were violating the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA) by referring students to the program due to their disabilities, as well as not providing English Learners in the program with equal learning opportunities (US DOJ, 2022).

Pennsylvania's Department of Education defines the AEDY program as a "temporary setting for sixth through twelfth-grade disruptive students" (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PA), n.d.). To be determined a disruptive student, one must fall into one of the following categories; "one who poses a clear threat to the safety and welfare of other students or the school

staff; or who creates an unsafe school environment; or whose behavior materially interferes with the learning of other students or disrupts the overall educational process" (Commonwealth of PA, n.d.). The program aims to help students through counseling and other interventions as they continue to work towards graduating and eliminating disruptive behavior (Commonwealth of PA, n.d.). To further note, AEDY programs should be the last resource if no other interventions have corrected the behavior (Commonwealth of PA, n.d.).

While the definition clearly states that all interventions should be implemented before enrolling students into AEDY programs and that they must provide equal opportunities for those enrolled, the latter occurred throughout these programs in PA. Students with disabilities were unlawfully placed in AEDY programs due to their disabilities, and English learner students were not receiving adequate education or support during their temporary placement. Both situations violate federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits discrimination based on one's abilities, and the EEOA, which mandates that districts address language barriers that may "impede equal participation" in their educational programs (US DOJ, 2022). The unlawful enrollment and treatment of the students in AEDY programs demonstrate the urgent need for training and professional development to better understand students.

U.S. Attorney Jennifer Arbittier Williams stated, "Federal law does not allow schools to discipline students because of their disability, or to deprive them of an opportunity to learn English" (US DOJ, 2022). The settlement between PDE and the US DOJ addressed these concerns in three different ways: additional training was provided to LEAs and AEDY staff members to ensure the enrollment is not due to disability-related behaviors, implementing new monitoring tools and evidence-based approaches, as well as ensuring LEP students receive

language support (US DOJ, 2022). Upon implementing the changes and providing training, PDE was found compliant in July 2022 after being monitored since 2019 (US DOJ, 2022).

The settlement agreement provides evidence of the disparities between these students and their peers in the educational system. The misidentification of students, unlawful enrollment, and discriminatory educational opportunities highlight the lack of understanding throughout LEAs in Pennsylvania. To genuinely reach students, educational staff members and stakeholders must prioritize learning about the barriers that students face and educational approaches that can deter these events from transpiring.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical underpinnings of the United States educational system emphasize the importance of discourse and interaction in the learning process. Each member plays an integral role in the learning process, and the discourse among group members provides valuable insight. Educational institutions have utilized this social practice for centuries to create an interactive way to foster learning.

Educators often discuss teaching practices, educational problems, and trends with colleagues. These meetings are both formal and informal. Etienne Wenger refers to such a group as a Community of Practice (CoP). Individuals can belong to multiple communities, such as at school, work, and in hobbies, as CoPs are grouped by a common interest (Wenger, 1998). Community members co-construct valuable knowledge through interactions, drawing upon individual expertise and perspectives. To be considered a CoP, Wenger outlines three crucial components: an understanding of the common interest, mutual interactions amongst members

that promote a social environment, and the "shared repertoire" of resources that have come from the interactions (Wenger, 1998, p. 2).

Utilizing a CoP as a framework regarding teacher professional development opportunities reinforces the importance of socialization as a means of learning. Participation can greatly enhance the experience of the individual and the group members. The involvement of members can generate ideas, promote solutions to problems, and allow for integral discussion about shared topics of interest. CoP's create a space where educators can learn from and with each other, promoting professional growth (Patton & Parker, 2017). The learning process from such a community is "meaningful and relevant" to the members and their work environment (Patton & Parker, 2017, p. 353).

To understand the implications of social interaction on one's potential learning growth, Lev Vygotsky proposed the sociocultural theory (SCT). SCT analyzes the correlations between collaborative interactions and the influence of culture and society on cognitive development (Dasen, 2022). The theory posits that many factors influence learning, mainly that individuals learn through social interactions with others, especially with those who are more knowledgeable (Vygotsky, 1978). The learning process is enriched by collaboration, as individuals exchange knowledge and understanding through dialogue and interactive problem-solving efforts (Andrei et al., 2015).

Investing in professional development opportunities that foster a collaborative learning environment among teachers can lead to increased development and growth (Kennedy, 2016). Professional development is "about teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth" (Avalos, 2011, p. 10). Professional Development opportunities can provide educators with the necessary skills and

knowledge to appreciate their students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, allowing them to better understand their students (Palmer & Martinez, 2013). Mellom et al. (2018) assert that "Studies have shown that educator attitudes can be significantly affected by appropriate training in working with ELLs" (p. 100). These studies underscore the importance of teachers receiving specific training to learn how to best support ML students and incorporate their cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the classroom. "If the teacher views the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of each student as a resource and an advantage in the educational setting, students may find the curriculum more accessible" (Mellom et al., 2018, p. 100). With an increasingly diverse student body, teachers must have the knowledge and skills to teach students with different cultural backgrounds and language abilities.

A strategy for engaging the diverse identities of our learners is to integrate their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences into the curriculum. This approach, which has been researched and built upon pre-existing frameworks, is known as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), as conceptualized by Gloria Ladson-Billings in the mid-1990s. According to Ladson-Billings (1995b), Culturally relevant pedagogy is

> a pedagogy of oppression not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current status quo of the social order (p. 160).

This approach uses "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective

for students" (Gay, 2000, p. 29). Acknowledging and learning about students' backgrounds allows teachers to create "relevant and meaningful content to students' social and cultural realities" (Howard, 2003, p. 195). The teaching practice builds on students' lived experiences, funds of knowledge, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds to make connections to educational content (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers who use this teaching practice are inclusive as they choose materials that represent those in their classroom, critically reflective of their own experiences and biases as well as that of society, and culturally competent as they have students learning about their culture and that of other students in the classroom (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

A component of culturally relevant pedagogy practices derives from the teachers' perceptions and viewpoints of different cultures, societal norms, and students' backgrounds (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Bilings, 1995). Teacher mindset plays an important role in culturally relevant teaching as teachers must "believe that all students can succeed, maintain an affirming student–teacher relationship, and see excellence as a complex standard that takes student diversity and individual difference into account" (Durden & Turscott, 2013, p. 74). One must have an asset-based view of students' differences to implement strategic practices and promote culturally affirming content (Krasnoff, 2016). Incorporating culturally diverse students' funds of knowledge demonstrates teachers' understanding and appreciation of their students. Hogg (2011) asserts that "with accurate knowledge of students, teachers can draw on student experiences and priorities in schooling, thus validating student knowledge and life values, and enabling them to scaffold student learning from the familiar" (p. 667). Professional development opportunities that focus on cultural awareness and students' funds of knowledge can serve as a catalyst for educators to engage in critical self-reflection, enabling them to examine their own beliefs and

biases in relation to those of their diverse student body.

Recognizing that learning is a lifelong process for both educators and students, ongoing and engaging PD opportunities provide a vital opportunity for continuous growth, reflection, and improvement within the educational setting. This integral work is often done during in-service days when staff can interact with their peers. Professional development is a required component of an educator's job so that they can continue building their knowledge and skills to implement in their teaching practices (Kennedy, 2016). While many strategies exist to create conducive professional development settings, training is commonly based on small group work. Small groups work well in training scenarios as the intimate setting allows colleagues to discuss pertinent topics with each other. The environment created in such a group will directly impact what knowledge is obtained and shared in a setting. Members' reciprocity and participation are among the most valuable assets to the learning process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This action research study investigated teachers' understanding and perception of culturally relevant pedagogy based on two of Pennslyvania's Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education competencies and the potential impact when teaching multilingual learner students. The study consisted of a book club-based professional development. This study utilized a mixed methods approach to provide a comprehensive overview of each educator's perception throughout the study.

Setting

The study took place in a public high school in Pennsylvania. The school district is a mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings. The school district has seven elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The district consists of roughly 9,900 students in grades

K-12. There is a broad range across the district regarding socio-economic status. The district ranges from low to upper class, with roughly 44% qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The student population is racial and culturally diverse, with 43.4% Caucasian, 14.7% African-American, 24.3% Hispanic, and 5.0% Asian (School Fast Facts, n.d.).

The high school has 3,017 students, over 200 teachers, and 28 support staff (A. Jenkins, personal communication, January 6, 2023). Four of the teachers teach English as a Second Language. The demographic breakdown by race and ethnicity of high school students consists of 44.6% White, 29.2% Hispanic, 16.8% Black, 5.0% Asian, and 4.2% two or more races (School Fast Facts, n.d.). There are 188 multilingual learner (ML) students, and 91% speak Spanish as the primary language. The other languages include Portuguese, Mandarin, Punjabi, and Russian (K. Smith, personal communication, October 13, 2022).

Research Participants

Participants included a range of ninth to twelfth-grade teachers in varying content areas. This study utilized convenience sampling as participants were available and accessible to the researcher as they worked in the same setting (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). An initial interest survey was sent to all teachers in the high school building to ensure equal opportunity to participate in the study. Other staff members, such as guidance counselors, administrators, and paraprofessionals, were not included in the email as the study aims to analyze culturally relevant *teaching* practices in the classroom relating to ML students.

Eight teachers responded to the initial interest survey, therefore all eight were selected to participate in the study. Table 3 provides an overview of the demographic makeup of the participants, including gender, grade level taught, subject area, years of experience, native language, racial/ethnic background, and whether they have taught ML students.

Table 3

Participant Overview

	Gender	Grade Level	Subject Taught	Years	Native Language	Racial/Ethnic Background	Taught ML
Participant 1	F	9-12	ESL	22	English	White/Not Hispanic	Yes
Participant 2	F	9-12	French/English	27	English	White/Not Hispanic	Yes
Participant 3	F	9-12	Math	12	English	White/Not Hispanic	Yes
Participant 4	M	9-12	German	1	English	White/Not Hispanic	Yes
Participant 5	F	11,12	Math	24	English	White/Not Hispanic	Yes
Participant 6	F	9-12	Spanish	15	Spanish	Black/ Hispanic	Yes
Participant 7	M	9-12	Computer Sci.	6	English	White/Not Hispanic	Yes
Participant 8	F	9-12	Spanish	1	English	White/Not Hispanic	Yes

Research Design

For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined teacher perceptions and knowledge concerning culturally relevant pedagogy through PA's CR-SE competencies as it applies to ML students.The CR-SE competencies aim to create equity in education for all students, starting with help from the frontline workers; teachers. This study seeks to investigate the following questions.

1. Overall, how are teachers' perceptions of ML students affected by a book club focused on lived experiences and cultural awareness?
2. Does engaging in collaborative discussions about culture and lived experiences promote understanding of others' experiences?

3. Does participation in a professional development book club increase teachers' understanding/perception of asset-based teaching?

The study analyzed educators' understanding and perception of culturally relevant pedagogy related to multilingual learner students through a book club-based professional development. This study utilized a mixed methods approach to provide a comprehensive overview of each teacher's perception and understanding throughout the study. The mixed methods approach consisted of a pre and post-survey with an intervention in between that consisted of two phases. The first phase of the intervention had participants read a selected book, and the second phase consisted of two group discussions about the book. The researcher utilized a ten-question Likert survey for the pre and post-test.

Mixed methods research combines quantitative and qualitative data, allowing in-depth insight into information by combining methods rather than one method by itself (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori et al., 1998). Utilizing qualitative and quantitative data provides an extensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). The collection and analysis of the group discussion responses served as the main source of qualitative data for this study, with the survey providing the quantitative data.

Creswell (2009) defines mixed methods as "an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms" (p. 23). Creswell (2009) also asserts that mixed method studies are "more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research" (p. 23). In this study, the Likert scale survey constituted the quantitative portion of the research. Participants completed the same Likert scale

survey before and after reading the book to compare their self-reflection, knowledge, and understanding of others' cultures as it relates to teacher professional development.

The researcher created the Likert scale survey utilizing Pennsylvania's Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education competencies. The study focuses on two out of the nine competencies. The competencies utilized are Competency 1-Reflect on One's Cultural Lens, and Competency 5- Promote Asset-based Perspectives about Differences. The first five questions on the survey are based on Competency 1, while the last five are based on Competency 5.

The survey utilized a 7-point Likert scale as opposed to a 5-point scale. The 7-point scale provides more descriptions of the topic in question and more options to choose from, increasing the survey's validity (Joshi et al., 2015). Analyzation of the Likert scale responses provided valuable statistical data on the participants' understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy prior to reading the book and participating in a group discussion, and after.

Phases 1 and 2 of the intervention occurred between completing the Likert surveys. Participants participated in two one-hour-long group discussions, serving as the qualitative portion of the data. The discourse and interactions among group members lends itself to qualitative research. The language and perspectives on the topic made the qualitative data as important as the statistical data. Analyzing one's lived experiences and the potential impact on their educational strategies will come from understanding their experiences through their words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Utilizing both types of data inquiry allows the researcher to fully understand the research problem and results (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The qualitative data gained from the group discussion and observational notes, coupled with the quantitative data from the survey, provided

information on each teacher's understanding of other cultures, lived experiences, and their relation to the classroom.

The collaborative nature of utilizing a focus group for the research study allowed educators a space to work with their colleagues and share experiences. Barbour and Kitzinger (1998) define a focus group as a "group discussion exploring a specific set of issues" (p. 4). There were eight teachers who volunteered to participate in this focus group, and all eight were selected. The number of responses worked well as research shows that focus groups should consist of "six to ten participants; large enough to gain a variety of perspectives and small enough not to become disorderly or fragmented" (Rabiee, 2004, p. 656).

The researcher's role in a focus group is that of a moderator who proposes questions to the group. The group members contribute their unique perspectives and experiences in response to the posed questions, creating an engaging discussion and nuanced understanding (Acocella, 2012). "The essential purpose of focus group research is to identify a range of perspectives on a research topic and to gain an understanding of the issues from the perspective of the participants themselves" (Hennink, 2014, p. 2). The shared background of the participants, being teachers and working in the same school, provides a common level of understanding and promotes a comfortable environment to share thoughts and opinions (Acocella, 2012; Hennink, 2014).

Action Research

This action research study focused on teachers' knowledge and perceptions concerning CRP as a key pedagogical tool for fostering cultural awareness to help support multilingual learners. Action research is a "systematic approach to investigation and reflective practice that enables people to find solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). This study was created to address the concerns and highlight the potential

experiences of Spanish-speaking multilingual learners to help their teachers better understand them. Building upon prior research and recognizing the specific needs of ML students in the school setting, the researcher conducted this study to identify and evaluate interventions to address the achievement gap. This research aims to enhance student success by fostering cultural awareness and inclusive teaching practices among teachers through a book club-based professional development opportunity.

The reflective nature of teaching lends itself to action research to enhance strategies, curriculum materials, and overall student achievement (Abukari & Abubaka, 2018; Barcelona, 2020). Teachers engage in action research often as they identify a problem, collect data, analyze it, and make informed decisions based on the results. Barcelona (2020) asserts that

> It is not only a scientific way of producing knowledge but a systematic way of solving problems. The advantage of this kind of research compared to the other kinds of traditional researches, aside from its simplicity, is its potential to create meaningful and authentic change for those involved, whether in a classroom or community. (p. 517)

Action research combined with a mixed methods approach provides valuable benefits for creating change. Utilizing mixed methods within action research proves particularly valuable as this approach allows researchers to incorporate participants' diverse perspectives and experiences alongside numerical data. "When combined with mixed methods, action research can produce more scientifically sound and more transferable results by synergistically integrating qualitative stakeholder engagement methods with quantitative outcome-based oriented approaches" (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018, p. 979). While this research focused on teachers rather than students directly, the acquired knowledge has the potential to significantly influence teachers' pedagogical approaches, ultimately impacting student learning.

Procedure

The researcher met with the head and deputy principal to discuss facilitating the action research study and utilizing school resources. Both principals supported the study, though it ultimately needed approval from central administration per district policy. The researcher emailed the research study outline and consent form to the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and director of secondary education for review. Upon reviewing the study, central admin gave temporary approval, pending IRB approval from the university. While waiting for feedback, the researcher collaborated with the school librarian to obtain copies of the book to provide the resources needed for the study.

Once IRB approved the study, the researcher sent the approval and necessary documents to the director of secondary education to add to the school board minutes. The school board approved the study at the following meeting, and the researcher began recruiting participants. As indicated in the participant recruitment section, the researcher sent an email to all teachers at the high school building, which included an outline of the study and the consent form (see Appendix A). Teachers had five days to review the necessary documents and voluntarily sign up. At the end of the sign-up window, eight teachers had signed up and completed the consent form; therefore, the researcher selected all eight volunteers to participate in the study.

As indicated in the data collection section, participants were then emailed the 10-question pre-survey to complete. The following day, participants received a copy of the book in their school mailbox and an email instructing them to read the prologue through chapter 8. Participants had two weeks to read the designated portion of the book and then participate in a one-hour online discussion. The first discussion focused on questions one and four, as indicated in the group discussion questions.

At the end of the discussion, the researcher instructed participants to begin reading chapter 9 until the end of the book. Participants had two weeks to read the book's second half before participating in a second online discussion. Participant 3 could not attend the second discussion due to unforeseen circumstances. The researcher contacted Participant 3 to notify them that they had a choice regarding the previously collected data since this scenario was not outlined in the consent form. According to MIT (n.d.), the participant could elect that the data remain and be analyzed or that the data be deleted and, therefore, not be utilized in the study. The participant elected to have the data remain.

The second discussion focused on questions two, three, and five, as indicated in the group discussion questions. The video conferencing platform Zoom was utilized to conduct both meetings as well as record them for later review. During the meetings, the researcher utilized an application called Otter.ai to transcribe the discussion. Otter.ai (n.d.) states, "Otter.ai uses AI to write automatic meeting notes with real-time transcription, recorded audio, and automated meeting summaries."

The following day, participants received the initial survey to retake as a post-test. The researcher also instructed participants to return the copy of the book to the researcher. The researcher then returned the eight copies of *When I Was Puerto Rican* to the school librarian to return from being interlibrary loaned from schools throughout Pennsylvania.

Upon completing the study, the researcher began organizing the qualitative and quantitative data. The raw quantitative data was stored on a Google Sheets spreadsheet and then converted to an Excel Sheet. The qualitative response choices were then converted to numbers on a scale from 1-7, as it is a 7-point Likert scale survey. The functions on Microsoft Excel then ran the descriptive statistics based on the data. As stated in the data collection analysis section,

the descriptive statistics included the mean and standard deviation. Each participant received an overall score for each competency based on the Likert scale responses.

The discussion transcripts and observational notes served as the qualitative data. The transcripts were exported from Otter.ai to Microsoft documents. The researcher and two fellow coders analyzed the qualitative data using the inductive coding method. The two other coders received the documents via email to code independently. Once the researcher and fellow coders coded the data, the group members met to discuss their findings. Upon meeting, the researcher and coding group members shared their codes for the qualitative data. The results indicated that the researcher and fellow coders had coded the data similarly; therefore, a second meeting was unnecessary.

The researcher conducted two more rounds of coding independently after meeting with the group. The final two rounds of coding utilized a deductive method as the researcher looked for key theoretical components in the data. The final coding round re-examined the codes and themes that emerged. Once the researcher finalized the themes, they were categorized to answer research questions two and three.

Upon completing the coding process, the researcher rewatched the two Zoom discussions and wrote down observational notes. The researcher monitored participants' behavior while others spoke and wrote notes regarding the interactions. These interactions were then used to support other participants' responses related to the research questions and emerging themes.

Book Club as a Means of Professional Development

Professional Development (PD) is integral to educators' jobs in the United States. However, "traditional professional development workshops lack relevancy and leave teachers on their own to implement what was learned" (White, 2016, p. 28). Workshops are frequently

formatted in a lecture style, where a leader disseminates information. This format allows for a surface-level understanding of the concept compared to those who can discuss, reflect, and build their knowledge (White, 2016). PD training rarely incorporates teachers' experiences, expertise, and concerns, and educators are passive in the learning process (Blanton & Brommel, 2019; White, 2016).

Book clubs as a means of professional development are a relatively new opportunity that allows teachers to be active participants as the goal is to "examine their knowledge, beliefs, and practices through reading about alternative perspectives" (Burbank et al., 2010, p. 58). In this study, book clubs are referred to as "a small group of teachers coming together to discuss a common text" (White, 2016, p. 28). Book clubs serve as a two-step learning process: individual learning occurs through reflection and analysis of one's experiences, while group discussion allows for alternative perspectives and discourse that may challenge others' thinking (White, 2016). Participants share their experiences and perspectives as they read through the text, allowing each individual's experience to contribute to group knowledge (Smith & Galbraith, 2011; White, 2016).

The researcher designed the book club discussions to follow a specific format. The researcher posed a question, provided a few minutes for reflection, and allowed members to respond voluntarily. There were two book discussions overall, each an hour in length. The first discussion occurred after reading the first eight chapters; the second occurred after reading the remaining six. The selected book, *When I Was Puerto Rican,* by Esmeralda Santiago, was released in 1993. This memoir recounts Esmeralda's experiences throughout her childhood. The main themes of this book include identity, cultural norms, immigration, and gender roles. The researcher selected this book to highlight cultural differences and the character's challenges when

moving to the United States. The book club aimed to provide teachers an opportunity to converse and share perspectives after reading about someone else's alternative experience (Burbank et al., 2010).

Professional development workshops can impact one's practice and the school's learning environment. The subject matter and format of the training should be collaborative, voluntary, reflective, and relevant to the job in order to be effective (Blanton & Broemmel, 2019; Hunzicker, 2010; Vu, 2019). Book clubs encompass all of those components and are based on voluntary participation, with individuals coming together to learn about a common interest. The social learning aspect of book clubs promotes an engaging and reflective learning experience for those involved.

Participant Recruitment

In this study, there were four main phases to the data collection process. Upon the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval, the first phase consisted of an email sent out to all teachers in the high school building to obtain voluntary participants. Faculty members had five days to sign up. The Email provided an overview of the research study, the procedures, the consent form, a Google Form to sign up to participate, and a calendar of meeting dates. The Google Form was attached to the email and requested demographic questions about each individual. The demographic information included the grade level taught, content area, prior experience teaching ML students, years of experience, their native language, gender, and ethnic/racial background. At the end of the five days, eight participants had signed up to partake in the study; therefore, all eight participants were selected. Participants were then notified and sent the consent form to sign and return.

Data Collection

Phase two of data collection began the following day as the researcher emailed participants a Google Form survey to complete prior to beginning the book. The survey assessed their knowledge and incorporation of culturally relevant and sustaining education practices to determine their understanding before participating in the book club. Upon completing the survey, participants received the book in their school mailbox the following day. The researcher instructed participants to read the prologue through chapter eight of the book, *When I Was Puerto Rican*, in two weeks.

At the end of the two-week deadline, part of phase three began. Phase three consisted of two group discussions via an online video conference platform, Zoom. The one-hour Zoom meeting consisted of all eight participants and the researcher. The discussion focused on questions one and four of the group discussion questions. The group discussion was semi-structured, allowing members to provide their experiences and perspectives on the questions related to the book and culturally relevant pedagogy. After asking each question, the group members had a few minutes to think about the prompt and reflect before answering. Group members did not receive the questions before the discussion to allow for authentic responses. Responses were voluntary, and participants decided the order in which they answered. Participants were encouraged to answer each question, though they were not obligated to.

After the first group discussion was completed, the researcher instructed participants to read chapter 9 through the epilogue. Participants had a two-week deadline to complete the remaining chapters before the last group discussion. The second group discussion focused on questions two, three, and five of the group discussion questions below.

The researcher recorded both discussions to re-watch and write down observational notes. The app Otter.ai, transcribed the discussions while they were occurring. The researcher created the group discussion questions to relate experiences from the book to each competency. The discussion questions are listed below.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Throughout the book, Esmeralda struggles with her identity as she moves from place to place and encounters new experiences. Through reflecting on your own life experiences, how have these shaped your identity and understanding of the world? How might that differ from your colleagues and students? (Competency 1)
2. Esmeralda shares many experiences in the U.S. education system. In her experiences, the teachers emphasized book knowledge and rules rather than lived experiences and life learning. How can we, as educators, use students' backgrounds and knowledge to help enhance the curriculum? (Competency 5)
3. The book highlights the difficulties of speaking a language other than English in the educational setting in the United States at that time. Esmeralda has to make a deal with the teacher to let her be in the appropriate grade (eighth) since she does not speak English well, and the school rule is that non-English speaking students go to the previous grade (7th grade) to "catch up." Instead of Mr. Grant valuing her first language, he enforces school rules that promote the notion that her linguistic ability is a barrier and has consequences. How did this interaction make you feel? As an educator, how can we encourage and embrace the learner's primary language in the classroom and see it as an asset? (Competency 5)

4. *When I was Puerto Rican* demonstrated the challenges that children and young adults face when trying to adjust to another culture. The book contains cultural aspects such as gender roles, educational views, food, and others that vary from one culture to another. As you read the book, did any cultural norms stick out to you? Why? How are they different from what you have experienced in your culture? How might these impact how our students experience our classroom? What can we do as educators to focus on the strengths and diversity in our classroom? (Competency 5)
5. Esmeralda focuses on her immigration experience and feelings of being treated as "other" since she is from another country and does not speak the dominant language. Think back to a time when you felt you were being treated differently and describe how that experience has impacted you. How does that compare to Esmeralda's experience and potentially that of our students? (Competency 1)

The last phase of the data collection process, phase four, occurred the day after the last group discussion. Participants retook the initial Google Form survey focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy. Retaking the same survey provided a comparison tool to understand how teachers' perspectives may have changed throughout the study. The Google Form survey was based on the extent to which they understood or utilized this teaching strategy and provided statistical data on the start and end points of each participant.

Data Collection Analysis

The study utilized a mixed methods approach; therefore, quantitative and qualitative data analysis was conducted. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, whereas the qualitative data was analyzed using inductive and deductive coding methods with two additional coding team members to ensure reliability.

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze and present the pre and post-Likert scale survey findings. The statistics provided the mean, standard deviation, and range of scores among participants. The survey consists of 10 questions based on two CR-SE competencies, with five questions aligned to each competency in the survey. The data was collected and grouped to receive an overall score based on each competency. The participants answered the same Likert survey before and after the reading and book club discussions to compare the scores for each competency. The quantitative data was analyzed using a one-tailed, repeated measures t-test to look for statistical significance. The hypothesis was that the participants' survey scores would increase after participating in the intervention.

The book club discussion transcripts and observational notes constituted the qualitative data in the study. The researcher utilized the coding method to analyze this qualitative data. Coding refers to the "process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way" (Elliott, 2018, p. 2850). Codes are single words or phrases that "symbolically assign a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4).

The researcher utilized the inductive coding approach for the first round of coding. This method allows the researcher to "read through the data and let the codes emerge" rather than predetermining the codes and choosing data that fits into each category (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021, p. 134). Inductive coding is an open-minded approach that allows those analyzing the data to discover new information (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021; Saldaña, 2021).

Coding provides an overview of the relevant data and a way to understand the recurring themes that emerge in the transcripts (Creswell, 2015; Elliot, 2018). The researcher and two

fellow coders independently coded the discussion transcripts, as utilizing multiple members to code the same data helps provide reliability (Church et al., 2019). The two fellow coders are colleagues enrolled in the same doctoral program. One colleague is a ninth through twelfth-grade visual art teacher in a suburban public school in Pennsylvania. The team member is a white, female educator who has taught for eight years. The other member is a science teacher at an urban public high school in Pennsylvania. The team member is a white, female educator who has taught for 22 years. Both team members conducted mixed methods action research studies and utilized the coding method for their qualitative portions. These fellow coders are well-versed in the coding method and inter-coder reliability.

Upon meeting and reviewing each other's designated codes, the researcher and fellow coders determined that the codes were similar, and a second meeting was unnecessary. The researcher conducted two more rounds of coding after meeting with the other coders. The following two rounds of coding utilized a deductive approach. "In the practice of deductive coding, codes are developed prior to analysis, and the researcher reads through the data to determine whether and how the data fit within those codes" (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021, p. 135). The researcher used the codes from the first round and compared them with the CRP theoretical framework. Deductive coding helps "organize data, identify relevant data, and maintain focus on the research questions" (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021, p. 135). The hybrid coding approach "helps to ensure that the voices of the participants are valued while simultaneously allowing for more theory-led analysis" (Proudfoot, 2023, p. 309). Upon completing the coding process, the researcher grouped the codes that emerged from the data analysis into themes.

Validity

Validity is an essential aspect of quantitative and qualitative research. The validity components of each type of research are different; however, both ensure that the study "measures what it purports to measure" (Shepard, 1993, p. 410). Validity is critical to an effective research study and must be intentional. The validity of quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study lies in the research design, procedures, trustworthiness, and academic literature (Maxwell, 2017). While the researcher and the study can never be 100 percent valid, the study design was intentional and well thought out to ensure maximum validity (Cohen et al., 2003). The various types of validity factor into the intentionality of the action research study. The researcher utilized face validity, content validity, and criterion validity throughout the research design process and implementation.

Face validity refers to the "degree to which a measure appears to be related to a specific construct, in the judgment of non-experts" (Taherdoost, 2016, p. 29). This aspect of validity is crucial to research as other individuals provide feedback on the relevance between the measuring tool and its intended purpose. Face validity ensures that the measuring instrument is "relevant, reasonable, unambiguous and clear," in turn addressing the content's validity (Oluwatayo, 2012, p. 392).

The research design and measurement tools were peer-reviewed by two members of the doctoral cohort program throughout the entire process to ensure face validity in the research study. The members consistently evaluated each criterion to address any discrepancies. The continuous collaboration between the researcher and colleagues allowed for critical feedback on the appropriateness of each component in the study.

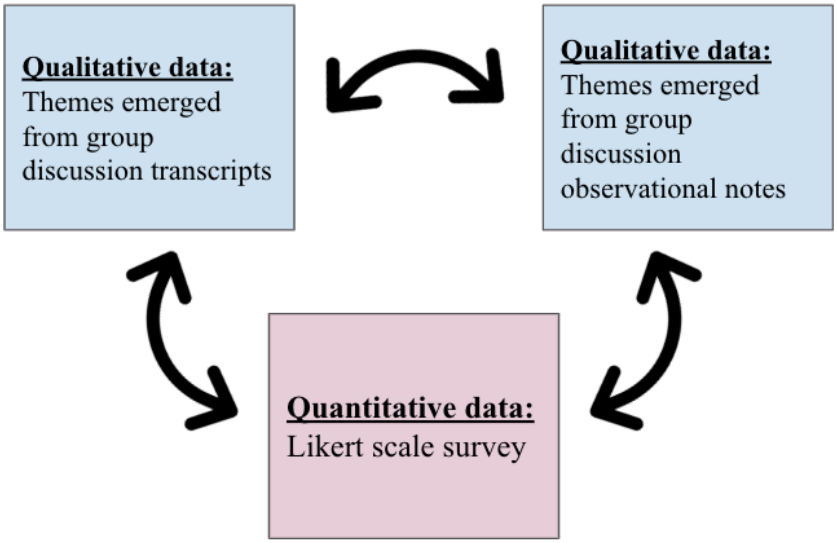
The two assessment instruments, the group discussion and survey, were examined for content validity and compared to demonstrate criterion validity. Criterion validity utilizes correlations to "determine the extent to which the different instruments measure the same variable" (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p. 66). The nature of mixed methods designs works well with criterion validity as the two measurement tools are used to show the relationship between the two data points. The statistical data from the quantitative Likert scale surveys reinforced the qualitative data obtained from the group discussions and observational notes.

The trustworthiness of a study refers to "the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). Critical components of trustworthiness include the transparency of the research design, the researchers themselves, and data triangulation (Adler, 2022). The research design, surveys, and structure of the book club are all grounded in academic literature. The research of previous studies, theories, and methodologies were utilized throughout the study design process to ensure credibility. The research techniques, theoretical frameworks, and procedures are explicitly defined in the study to ensure transparency in the design.

Data triangulation is a critical component of an action research study. The data triangulation in this study refers to the use of multiple sources to cross-examine the research and data analysis to ensure credibility (Adler, 2022; Curry et al., 2009). Triangulation occurred using three data sources to answer the research questions. Figure 1 demonstrates the triangulation of the data sources that were compared to interpret the findings.

Figure 1

Data Triangulation



In qualitative research, the researcher is another essential component as they are usually the "principal research instrument," making the positionality of the researcher an integral component of credibility and trustworthiness (Adler, 2022, p. 599). Transparency of the researcher's experiences allows the researcher to understand and address potential biases. In chapter one, the researcher recounted their experiences through the personal stories and the positionality section. The researcher also utilized two fellow colleagues to counter discrepancies and limit biases in the study.

Security

To ensure the security of the participants, each participant was labeled "participant #" for the research process. Additionally, these labels were utilized when participants provided demographic information and during data analysis. The researcher had a key to the label of each participant. All of the information collected throughout the research process was stored on a

password-protected computer, and all files were permanently deleted a year after the study was completed.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the amount of time in which the research was conducted and the sample size. Mixed methods approaches require more time as there is qualitative and quantitative data to collect and analyze (Brady et al., 2009). Due to the time constraint, the sample size was small to permit enough time to sort and analyze data. A larger sample size would allow an in-depth understanding of various teachers' viewpoints on culturally relevant pedagogy and ML students. Another limitation of the study is the lack of student voices. Ideally, ML students would contribute to the conversation, allow their experiences to be heard, and explain the practices that best help them in the classroom.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter contains the results of the mixed method action research study conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Overall, how are teachers' perceptions of ML students affected by a book club focused on lived experiences and cultural awareness?
2. Does engaging in collaborative discussions about culture and lived experiences promote understanding of others' experiences?
3. Does participation in a professional development book club increase teachers' understanding/perception of asset-based teaching?

This study utilized a mixed-method research design that investigated teachers' understanding and perception of culturally relevant pedagogy based on two of Pennsylvania's Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education competencies (Competency 1: Reflect on One's

Cultural Lens and Competency 5: Promote Asset-based Perspectives about Differences) and the potential impact when teaching Multilingual Learner students. The study included qualitative and quantitative components to provide an in-depth understanding of teacher perceptions. The quantitative data consisted of a 10-question Likert scale survey, while the two group discussions and observational notes served as the qualitative data.

Research Question 1

Overall, how are teachers' perceptions of ML students affected by a book club focused on lived experiences and cultural awareness?

Based on the quantitative data analysis, the comparison of the pre and post-book club survey scores shows an increase in the mean score in both competencies and a decrease in the standard deviation. The overall mean score of participants for the Competency 1 pre-survey was 5.1 (sd=1.2), while the mean score for the post-survey was 5.7 (sd=0.8). The overall mean score for the Competency 5 pre-survey was 4.8 (sd=1), while the mean score for the post-survey was 5.9 (sd=0.9).

The seven-point Likert scale survey (see Appendix B) was given to participants before and after participating in the book club. The first five survey questions were related to *Competency 1-Reflect on One's Cultural Lens*, and the last five survey questions were related to *Competency 5- Promote Asset-based Perspectives about Differences.* The scale ranged from 1, indicating a lack of culturally relevant focus, to 7, indicating a strong culturally relevant focus. Table 4 provides the overall average scores for Competency 1 and Competency 5.

Table 4

Overall Average Scores

	Pre-Test Mean/SD		Post-Test Mean/SD		Mean Difference (Post-Test - Pre-Test)	*t*	P
Competency 1	5.1	1.2	5.7	0.8	0.6	3.21	.007
Competency 5	4.8	1	5.9	0.9	1.3	5.2	.001

The pre and post-book club survey scores were analyzed using a one-tailed, repeated measures t-test. The one-tailed test looks for the possibility of the relationship in one direction, while the repeated measures t-test is utilized to analyze change over a period of time, based on repeated assessments of the same subjects (Sullivan, 2008; UCLA Statistical Methods and Data Analytics, n.d.). According to the American Psychological Association (n.d.), statistical significance refers to "the degree to which a research outcome cannot reasonably be attributed to the operation of chance or random factors." Cooper (2007) further explains significance as "using $p<0.05$ as the significance level means that there is a 5% or lower probability that the difference (…) found is attributable to sampling error." For further clarification, LaMorte (2019) states that "a p-value of ≤ 0.05 suggests that there is a 5% probability or less that the observed differences were the result of sampling error (chance)."

The overall means of participants' post scores were higher, indicating growth regarding self-reflection (Competency 1) and promoting asset-based perspectives (Competency 5). The difference in the means for Competency 1 was statistically significant when comparing pre-survey ($m=5.1$, $sd=1.2$) and post-survey ($m=5.7$, $sd=0.8$) means $t(7)= 3.21$, $p<.007$. Competency 5 means were also statistically significantly different ($m=5.9$, $sd=0.9$) than pre-survey means ($m=4.8$, $sd=1$) $t(7)= 5.2$, $p<.001$.

The data overall shows growth as a whole. Additionally, each participant's score increased in at least one competency area. All eight participants' scores increased relating to Competency 1, and seven out of eight participants' scores increased relating to Competency 5, with one participant's scores remaining the same. Table 5 provides each participant's pre- and post-survey scores associated with each competency.

Table 5

Individual Average Pre and Post-Survey Scores

	Competency 1		Competency 5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Participant 1	6	6.2	5.4	7
Participant 2	6.4	6.8	5.8	7
Participant 3	4	4.6	2.8	4
Participant 4	3.8	5	5	5.6
Participant 5	3.6	5.4	3.8	5.6
Participant 6	6.4	6.6	5.4	6.2
Participant 7	5.4	6	4.8	6.2
Participant 8	5	5.2	5.4	5.4

Research Question 2/ Themes

Does engaging in collaborative discussions about culture and lived experiences promote understanding of others' experiences?

The researcher analyzed the mean score of the participants' survey responses to measure growth. Five of the ten questions were directly connected to culture and lived experiences. The survey questions included: (1) "How aware am I of my own biases and experiences.", (2) "How often do I think about my race, ethnicity, beliefs, and values.", (3) "How often does my race, ethnicity, beliefs, and values impact my behavior in daily life.", (4) "How important do you think it is to consider a learner's cultural background in the classroom.", and (5) "To what extent do I incorporate my students' unique cultural identities to build a better student-to-teacher connection."

Table five indicates that all eight participants' scores increased from the pre-survey to the post-survey after participating in the two-phase book club intervention. The average increase

amongst participants' scores was .5. These results indicate that the intervention produced statistically significant changes in the overall scores of participants relating to culture and lived experiences.

The quantitative data is supported by the themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Two of the five group discussion questions were directly connected to Competency 1 and the book. The questions included: (1)"Throughout the book, Esmeralda struggles with her identity as she moves from place to place and encounters new experiences. Through reflecting on your own life experiences, how have these shaped your identity and understanding of the world? How might that differ from your colleagues and students?" and (5) "Esmeralda focuses on her immigration experience and feelings of being treated as "other" since she is from another country and does not speak the dominant language. Think back to a time when you felt you were being treated differently and describe how that experience has impacted you. How does that compare to Esmeralda's experience and potentially that of our students?" Participants' discussions during the book club revealed four main themes: lived experiences, identity, self-reflection, and culturally affirming education.

Theme 1: Lived Experiences

A common theme of lived experiences emerged as all eight participants provided examples of personal experiences throughout the two discussions. Lived experiences are "the things that someone has experienced themselves, especially when these give the person a knowledge or understanding that people who have only heard about such experiences do not have" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). While the lived experiences of each participant may not have occurred in the classroom, they have impacted who they are as a person and teacher.

Participant 8 shared her experience moving between the United States and Puerto Rico, similar to that of some students and the main character in the book. Participant 8 said:

> I moved to Puerto Rico when I was seven years old. You know, moving from here to Puerto Rico, I was considered la gringa, and I was not, you know, but that's what they would call me. And it was because I knew how to speak Spanish, but I didn't know how to write it and read it. And going over there, you know, I was bullied and all that stuff because I was from here. You're an outsider coming in, and this is also what she [Esmeralda] experiences, which is why I love this book because I kind of like can relate to the book completely. And then, coming back here, I forgot my English. I came here, and I was an ESL student. So it is a lot. It was just like bouncing back and forth.

Participant 1 provided a similar experience to Participant 8 and the main character in the book as she spoke about moving throughout her childhood. Participant 1 spoke about the difficult experience and how that has made her more sensitive to students who have moved before.

> I can certainly relate to you know, all of a sudden somebody's coming home one night and saying, Okay, you're moving. Where am I moving? So to move from, you know, X to X. I didn't get a say and nobody cared and then you get you get to the new school. And I totally get the whole idea of, no, I can't cry. Because if I cry and experience and feel, or at least exhibit a sense of loss but, you know, that was something I really related to in the novel.

Participants acknowledged each others' experiences throughout the discussion by replying to one another and nodding in recognition of their stories. Participant 4's recount of a

high school experience brought admiration as a coach showed value in a new team member's native language and culture. Participant 4 stated:

> When I was in high school, I played volleyball and my sophomore year a freshman came in. His name was Dario. He's actually from Puerto Rico. It was his first time being in the United States. He was a really good volleyball player but never spoke like ever. So when we all came into practice for like, the second week, everything like the doors, the nets, the poll, the balls, the cards, like everything had a sticky note that said, what that word was in Spanish. So he's like, Dario has to learn English, so if you're coming in, you have to learn Spanish.. and after that, Dario opened up like crazy and became really good friends with everybody. Because he showed that you know, I care about you, we care about you, so that has stuck with me.

Overall, the participants in the study spoke to the importance of lived experiences and the impact they have had on their lives.

Theme 2: Identity

Four out of eight participants directly spoke to components that make up their identity throughout the discussions. Some participants related aspects of their identity to that of the students, while others related theirs to the character in the book. Identity is referred to as "an individual’s organized constellation of traits; attitudes; self-knowledge; (. . .) social roles; relationships; and group affiliations" (Guenther et al., 2020). The theme of identity revealed itself as participants spoke about life experiences ranging from moving to family roles.

Participant 7 commented on his realization of how much moving can affect one's identity. He pointed out students' difficulty with balancing their previous identity in their home country and their new experiences in the United States. Participant 7 said:

> I can see how for our students, the relationship between maybe where they are currently and where they come from, how they navigate that aspect of their identity, and either embrace one or the other or kind of a conglomeration of both, I can definitely see how that [losing their previous identity] would happen.

Participant 1 also addressed identity development related to family roles and Esmeralda's childhood experiences in the book. Participant 1 stated:

> Just like the girl in that story, she had to take on so many different roles, right? And, like, you know, she was a daughter and she had to adapt to the different locations that she was. She kind of constantly had to adapt to different places that she was and follow these rules and like it just like really struck a chord with me because I felt like and I still feel like I'm constantly code and role switching, right? You know, I'm teacher and coach. Growing up I had a handicapped brother, so I was a caretaker, you know what I mean? Like I felt like I was constantly changing roles and just switching all the time to meet whatever environment I was in and it's exhausting.. And from what we've read so far, and thinking about how many roles and how many codes we constantly are switching between on a daily basis and just trying to fit in and like feel some kind of comfort.

Overall, participants spoke about their lived experiences and how those experiences have played a role in their identity today.

Theme 3: Self-reflection

A third recurrent theme in the group discussions was self-reflection. Participants reflected upon previous experiences and their feelings associated with those experiences, many of which have affected their teaching style today. Self-reflection is defined as "the activity of thinking about your own feelings and behavior, and the reasons that may lie behind them" (Cambridge

Dictionary, n.d.). The discussions about the experiences in the book and group members' personal experiences provided a safe space for participants to reflect on challenges they have gone through and how that has affected who they are today.

Participant 1 recalled aspects of her childhood that have deeply impacted how she viewed herself. She spoke about a teacher who acknowledged her differences and became the reason she finally embraced who she was. Reflecting on that experience has prompted her to recognize and celebrate the differences in others. Participant 1 said:

> When I was growing up, I felt like everything that made me different, made me feel weird. Like an outcast. Miss X is one of the first teachers who is still near and dear and one of the most influential people in my life because she saw all the differences in me and she made me feel special about it. And she was one of the first teachers I ever had that made me feel special because my life was different. And I think that that's one of the themes that I am hearing from everybody in the group is that we are making kids feel different. We are celebrating their differences. And I think that that's such a huge shift from you know… how it was.

Participant 8 also spoke about an experience that has impacted her beginning-of-the-year routine and building relationships with the students. She reflected upon her childhood experiences and how it relates to the students in her classroom today. Participant 8 stated:

> The one thing I can say is from experience myself, is that a lot of our students that come from Latin America many of them think own culture as being less than, you know, the culture here. And they already come with that mindset that they're not worth as much as the culture here. Right. And I'm talking from experience myself and also some of our students that I've seen. For example, about pronouncing the name. I do the same thing

> because I've had that same experience with my name. It's really hard to pronounce my name. And so many of my kids when I'm asking for their names, I say please tell me how to pronounce your name, and a lot of the times, the Latinos and other students from other cultures will be like, no, it's okay. And I know it's not okay. You tell me how to say your name. Because I want to say correctly, you know, it's not okay. It's your name and I want to be able to say it correctly and they get embarrassed and I used to get embarrassed when I was young myself as well to a point where I didn't like my name. I didn't like using it because it was different. I love it now, but my name, but at the time, I didn't feel like you know, I was worth my name being said correctly, you understand what I'm saying? I felt that way. I felt like it was not worth your trouble to try to say my name correctly.

Overall, the discussions prompted participants to reflect on previous experiences, their feelings, and behaviors resulting from that experience.

Theme 4: Culturally Affirming Education

The fourth theme, culturally affirming education, reoccurred throughout the two discussions. Participants provided examples of integrating student cultures into the classroom, fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging. According to Allen et al. (2013), culturally affirming education means that "one's background, culture, and experiences are viewed with high regard and esteem. Moreover, the educational process is committed to the positive self-concept and racial identity development of students . . ." (p. 124). Motivated by our diverse student body, numerous participants in the study shared culturally affirming practices implemented in their classrooms, recognizing the importance of acknowledging and embracing a variety of cultural backgrounds.

For example, Participant 2 commented on a culturally affirming practice she implemented starting on day 1: learning to pronounce student names. Since our student body is diverse, many of their names reflect their culture and background, often with different pronunciations. Understanding and pronouncing students' names accurately is an important culturally affirming practice, allowing them to feel seen, heard, and valued within the classroom. Participant 2 said:

> One thing that literally starts at day one is knowing how to pronounce their names. That's that's just huge. I always make sure that I embarrass myself and say, "you need to correct me, I am old, I forget. I'm going to try. But you have every right to get your get me to say your name correctly."

Participant 1 commented on her experience as an ESL teacher and emphasized her continuous desire to learn about all the cultures in her classroom. Once she understands her students' backgrounds, she incorporates aspects of their culture to create a familiar feeling in her classroom. Participant 1 stated:

> I embarrass myself every day because I try to understand and learn their culture and say the words, no matter what language or culture it's from. Depending on the kid and stuff, sometimes I'll do things like talk to the whole group or I'll talk to them individually, but really trying to learn their culture and understanding and allow for those conversations to facilitate in my classroom.

Overall, the discourse among participants acknowledged the importance of bridging the gap between students' culture and the classroom, while positively reinforcing their heritage.

Research Question 3/Themes

Does participation in a professional development book club increase teachers' understanding/perception of asset-based teaching?

In order to determine if participation in a book club increased teachers' understanding and perception of asset-based teaching, the researcher analyzed the average score of the participants' survey responses to measure growth. The last five survey questions were directly related to asset-based teaching and Competency 5. The survey questions included: (6) "To what extent do I use an asset-based approach to view learners' cultural backgrounds.", (7) "How aware am I of the knowledge, ideas, and opinions of learners from diverse identity groups.", (8) "My classroom operates in ways that promote equity, diversity, and respect for all learners.", (9) "To what extent do I recognize and value students' home dialects and languages.", and (10) "When working with a multilingual student, how often do I make a cognitive effort to view their language differences as an asset."

The results in Table five show that seven out of eight participants' scores increased regarding Competency 5, with one participant's scores remaining the same. The statistically significant results indicate that participation in a book club-based professional development opportunity increased teachers' understanding/perception of asset-based teaching.

Findings from the quantitative data are supported by the themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Three of the five group discussion questions directly connected to Competency 5 and the book. The questions included: (2) "Esmeralda shares many experiences in the U.S. education system. In her experiences, the teachers emphasized book knowledge and rules rather than lived experiences and life learning. How can we, as educators, use students' backgrounds and knowledge to help enhance the curriculum?", (3) "The book highlights the difficulties of

speaking a language other than English in the educational setting in the United States at that time. Esmeralda has to make a deal with the teacher to let her be in the appropriate grade (eighth) since she does not speak English well, and the school rule is that non-English speaking students go to the previous grade (7th grade) to "catch up." Instead of Mr. Grant valuing her first language, he enforces school rules that promote the notion that her linguistic ability is a barrier and has consequences. How did this interaction make you feel? As an educator, how can we encourage and embrace the learner's primary language in the classroom and see it as an asset?", and (4) "*When I was Puerto Rican* demonstrated the challenges that children and young adults face when trying to adjust to another culture. The book contains cultural aspects such as gender roles, educational views, food, and others that vary from one culture to another. As you read the book, did any cultural norms stick out to you? Why? How are they different from what you have experienced in your culture? How might these impact how our students experience our classroom? What can we do as educators to focus on the strengths and diversity in our classroom?". The book club discussions revealed three main themes concerning the third research question: cultural appreciation, sensitivity, and asset-based mindset.

Theme 1: Cultural Appreciation

Participants appreciated their students' cultures and backgrounds through the stories and experiences they provided in the group discussions. Cultural appreciation means "honoring and respecting another culture and its practices as a way to gain knowledge and understanding" (Phillips, 2017). Through the personal narratives, participants gave us a glimpse into their classrooms, shedding light on their perspectives on student diversity and revealing the ongoing journey towards cultural relevance at the district level.

By incorporating elements of students' cultures, Participant 1 creates understanding and

shows respect within her classroom. This approach demonstrates her appreciation for their diverse heritages and empowers students to share their unique perspectives to enhance the learning experience for all. Participant 1 stated:

> The biggest thing that I feel is most important is and one thing that I think I understand pretty well about the Latino culture is that idea of like family, right and like community, and we really try to build that within the ESL students so they have that safe spot, and then we just make it a very familial feeling.

Participant 2 raised a crucial concern regarding the district's failure to acknowledge and accommodate portions of students' names, a crucial aspect of the identities of a significant portion of our student body. This discontinuity undermines cultural competence. Participant 2 said:

> One of the things I think our district as a whole does not do very well is making sure when children are registered to maintain the accents on kids' names. You know, particularly for Latin American kids, right? Because they have got this really cool tradition of holding on to their mother's last name, too. I love that. I mean, you know, do we, how do we delineate? You know, let's make it consistent. Are they hyphenated or not? Or, you know, let's let you know we have got dad's name and then mom's name. You know, how do we make all of that happen? So that we can all be more culturally relevant at a district level?

Overall, the discourse among participants recounted how they valued and acknowledged students' diverse backgrounds and integrated cultural aspects into the classroom.

Theme 2: Sensitivity

A strong theme of sensitivity emerged through the group discussion transcripts and

observational notes. Participants' personal experiences and stories resonated with one another as they related to portions of the book and each other's stories. Sensitivity is the "awareness of the needs and emotions of others" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Participants' stories fostered a shared space of empathy and understanding. The participants described how their experiences have transformed their role as teachers and cultivated sensitivity towards certain information that students divulge.

During the group discussion, Participant 2 related a personal story of moving to Esmeralda's move in the book. She recounts her experience moving and the emotions of switching to a new school. The experience has made her more sensitive to students who join during the school year or those who have moved previously. The impact of this event has prompted this teacher to be cognizant of her students' backgrounds so that she can build connections with them through relating to their experiences. Most participants nodded in agreement with her statement, as many had experienced something similar. Participant 2 said:

> It has made me very sensitive to kids who transfer into new schools; in general, kids transfer in the middle of the year, which is what I had to do. So I think it's made me more aware of nuances when kids volunteer information that does not sound like a typical kid from X township or even a typical kid from downtown. You know, it is one of those plant that seed in my mind and then watch how things manifest in the classroom, and find a way to either tie the kid into somebody else in the classroom or find a tie between the two of us.

Participant 1 also recounted an experience with former students, prompting ongoing introspection and examination of her identity. She commented that this experience has made her more sensitive to her students' race, culture, and ethnicity and how that plays a role in their lives.

Participant 1 stated:

> It made me check myself and like, start understanding that they [minoritized students] feel less than sometimes. It gave me a really interesting perspective and made me look at myself and how, you know, my race, my heritage is viewed and all that other stuff... So it made me really, really think about myself and other's backgrounds and how they influence how, you know, we see each other.

Participant 3 then provided an eye-opening example of how students' lived experiences affect how they see the world around them. She has to remind herself about the various places our students come from and has become more aware of tailoring assignments based on students' lived experiences. Participant 3 stated:

> I know in woodworking, they use Revit, and they design a house, but what they see in an apartment building is not necessarily something you are going to see in a house. So when they design the house, they are throwing in aspects that do not typically exist in a single home or even a townhome because they do not have that experience, that kind of thing. So it is always interesting to see like, not even so much the culture, just like the location that you live in, things like that, that affects some of the kids when they are doing projects like that.

Overall, participants expressed their sensitivity towards others' lived experiences and cultures as they related to one another and the character in the book.

Theme 3: Asset-based Mindset

An asset-based perspective permeated participant responses, as evidenced by repeated emphasis on the strengths and potential of students. Participants' narratives demonstrated their recognition of differences in their students and viewing them in a positive manner. This mindset

is critical for all students, especially those who speak a different language and have varying cultural backgrounds. Johnson and Attwell (2022) state that an asset-based mindset is when you are "looking at your students and what they bring with them as strengths, embracing these strengths and experiences, and helping them to move forward with high expectations."

Participant 4 spoke about his time abroad and realizing the different cultural expectations regarding learning additional languages in other countries vs. the United States. In his experience in the United States, people often view broken English as a weakness rather than acknowledging that they know another language and are working towards becoming multilingual. Participant 4 said:

> Regardless, there is value in other languages, other cultures, and other countries. So, as I said, it has become a little bit of a weakness like, oh, you don't speak perfect English when instead maybe they speak perfect Spanish and then English pretty well. They may speak multiple languages, but if they don't speak English perfectly, then it is like not good, when in reality, having the ability to know multiple languages is an incredible, incredible asset.

Participant 8 then provided an experience she faced as a child and a teacher. She has a unique point of view as her childhood closely aligned with the book and many of our ML students. She pointed out the identity problem many newcomers to the United States face. Often, students try to fit in and assimilate into the new culture and disregard aspects of their home culture. As teachers, we should encourage students to become bicultural rather than just assimilate into the culture of the United States. She emphasized the fact that if teachers see their

native culture as an asset, they can then help students see the benefits of maintaining their native culture and traditions. Participant 8 stated:

> As educators [to our kids coming from other cultures into the United States and getting acclimated here], what we can do is help them understand that their culture is just as valuable here as it is and to help them understand that. Embrace the culture here, not leave yours where it was, and come here and say your culture is gone. Because they struggle coming here. They are thinking about that. They are not only thinking about the family they lost over there, but they are thinking about the identity they are losing, that they're leaving behind, and they think that they cannot bring that identity with them into this new world. So it's like, okay, I'm done with that identity. That old me is gone. You know, and they have to become this new person when they don't have to. They can embrace their culture here and become who they want to be here.

Overall, participants' stories demonstrated the impact an asset-based mindset can have on how we view our students' native language and cultures and how we can continue to foster them in the classroom.

Additional Findings: Book Club/Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The findings of this book club-based professional development opportunity revealed three key insights. First, peer interactions focused on lived experiences and cultural awareness, emerged as crucial learning factors. Second, engaged critical dialogues surrounding the book fostered participant development and understanding. Finally, the study revealed a challenge resulting from the differing experiences of teachers in subjects with standardized testing compared to their elective counterparts.

The collaborative discussions among participants were evident in each book club discussion. Overall, participants directly responded to one another 46 out of 95 times, which correlates to 48% interaction. In the first group discussion, participants responded more to their peers with 38 direct responses out of 64 total, equaling 59% of the time. In discussion two, peers responded to each other 26% of the time due to lengthy, self-reflective responses. The interactions among participants were a crucial component of the study as participants listened to each other's experiences and learned from one another.

The participants' engagement in the book club process was evident based on their specific references to the story. There were nineteen direct book references in which participants provided an example from the book and related it to one of their own experiences. The direct relation between the characters' lived experiences and participants made it easier to broach the topics of cultural awareness, self-reflection, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Participants could use Esmeralda's experiences in the book to bridge their thoughts and feelings and recount similar stories.

The third finding that emerged through data analysis was the challenge of implementing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy based on course content. Participants in state-tested subjects noted a difficult time implementing CRP due to time constraints and pressure to teach to the standardized tests. The uniformity of the curriculum and the materials used in those classes in our disctrict are not culturally inclusive leaving any CRP implementation up to the teacher. All of the tested-subject area teachers agreed on this and commented on each other's frustration as well as the issues in the educational system.

Participant 5 spoke about the pressure to fit in all the content, leaving little time to get to know students and integrate other cultural activities. Participant 5 stated:

> How do I do that, you know, how do I do this [culturally relevant pedagogy] in a math classroom? When I have to teach for those keystones and I have to get my curriculum in and you have a certain person up above you that says, "You have got to do this."

Participant 3 responded to her comment and said:

> First thing I'm going to say is... Can we stop flying kites in our trigonometry unit? Because I asked the kids "How many of you've flown a kite? And they're like….."

To which Participant 5 responded:

> I have asked that and maybe three people, that is about it.

Participant 3 then stated:

> But, we have a curriculum to get through, unfortunately. We are pressured to get through it and yeah, that makes it a tough one.

Elective teachers, on the other hand, spoke to the flexibility in their curriculum and empathized with tested-subject area teachers. Participant 1 responded to Participant 3:

> I never really think about it because we are in our own little bubble upstairs. It's like we have things to get through; I have to cover curriculum, but I'm not under that pressure. The thing is, I can adjust, and I can do what we know is best practices, right? If I know that kids are struggling with a concept, I can slow down or I can push it forward or I can move it back. We have that ability that we can do that but yeah, I never really thought about it like the math and science, especially the Keystone test, like what you guys are up against. I guess maybe that's a luxury that I didn't really realize that I had. I've never really fully thought about that, that you guys don't have that luxury. And I'm sorry for you.

Participant 4, another elective teacher, replied to her comment:

> I agree. I think we're really lucky with language because whenever you introduce anything new, it's always about them first. So it's like, what's your name?, when you're just starting out. With the past tense its like.. what did you do last weekend? And then it's subjunctive.. what would you do if you were the president? What would you do if you were this/ that? So it always starts off with oh, I would do this.... you get to hear a lot about like student creativity and about the student, whereas in other subjects you don't maybe have that luxury.

Participant 2's and Participant 7's teaching experience brought an unanticipated dynamic to the group. Both previously taught tested-subject areas and have switched to elective courses. Both participants empathized with their colleagues and spoke about the differences in teaching the two subjects. They noted the lack of time that tested-subject area teachers face and how much more pressure was placed on them when they taught a tested-subject area due to the administration wanting proficient or high scores.

Participant 2 commented on her experience of being closely monitored due to standardized tests, to her newfound relief in an elective class. Participant 2 stated:

> Well, I have often said when I made the move from teaching English, that I went from the center of the bullseye because I had the AP exam at the end of a class, and I had taught American literature, so I had the Keystone at the end of that one. So I went from the center of the bullseye to no longer even being on the target. It is a blessing, unlike anything else.

Participant 7 replied:

> I can attest to the fact that I had no time as a math teacher to get into any of that really good stuff. I find I have much more time for relationship-building in a full-time elective. So I feel your pain.

Overall, the engaging discourse among participants of different teaching backgrounds provided opportunities to raise awareness of our colleagues' challenges in the educational system.

Summary of Findings

This chapter outlined the research findings from this mixed-method, action research study. The data was collected from eight high school teachers participating in a book club-based professional development that investigated their perceptions of Multilingual Learner students relating to cultural awareness and lived experiences. Overall, seven themes emerged to answer the research questions.

Data collected provided valuable insight into teachers' perceptions of Multilingual Learner Students and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. According to the survey data, there was an increase in all eight participants' scores in Competency 1. Regarding Competency 5, seven out of eight participants' scores increased, with one participant's score remaining the same. The overall means of participants' post scores were higher, indicating growth regarding self-reflection and promoting asset-based perspectives. The seven emerging themes from the qualitative data supported the results from the quantitative analysis.

In addition, an unexpected theme emerged through the group discussions among elective and tested-subject area teachers. The lack of culturally inclusive educational materials and the pressure that test-subject area teachers face compared to their elective colleagues was an eye-opening discussion. Overall, participants could reflect, share, and interact with one another

throughout the book club discussions, leading to valuable conversations. The results in this chapter indicate that this book-club-based professional development positively impacted participants' perceptions through culturally relevant pedagogy.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this action research study was to investigate teachers' understanding and perception of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) based on two of Pennsylvania's Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) competencies (Competency 1: Reflect on One's Cultural Lens and Competency 5: Promote Asset-based Perspectives about Differences) and the potential impact when teaching Multilingual Learner students. Grounded in three theoretical frameworks, this study delved into the participants' interactions and their experiences. Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory and Wenger's Communities of Practice theory provided a lens to explore participants' interactions and their influence on the learning process. Additionally, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy served as a foundation for selecting the book and creating the research/group discussion questions.

The disparity in academic outcomes between ML students and their English-speaking peers underscores the importance of providing teachers with opportunities to enhance their cultural competence and engage in dialogues with colleagues. Embracing a book club format, this professional development opportunity fostered an interactive environment for teachers to engage in discussions on cultural awareness and lived experiences. This study investigated the following questions.

1. Overall, how are teachers’ perceptions of ML students affected by a book club focused on lived experiences and cultural awareness?

2. Does engaging in collaborative discussions about culture and lived experiences promote understanding of others' experiences?
3. Does participation in a professional development book club increase teachers' understanding/perception of asset-based teaching?

Summary of Findings

Providing a space that promotes cultural awareness is not always readily available within teacher professional development opportunities; however, the importance of providing this time and space is evident in the results of this study. The research findings show that participating in a culturally relevant and reflective learning opportunity can impact teachers' perceptions and deepen their understanding of others' cultures and experiences.

The quantitative findings of this study supported the researcher's hypothesis, indicating an increase in participants' survey scores following their participation in the book club. Additionally, the qualitative data analysis yielded eight distinct themes. Chapter 4 highlights the interactive nature of the first discussion, characterized by frequent responses and exchanges between participants. Conversely, the second discussion was more reflective, allowing for individual thought and processing of perspectives and experiences. This study provides compelling evidence for the efficacy of professional development opportunities centered on culturally relevant practices, offering valuable spaces for peer reflection and discourse.

Implications

This study's findings reveal that professional development opportunities that emphasize active participant engagement can foster cultural understanding and critical self-reflection on personal beliefs and experiences. This study's implications span from the individual to the

systemic structures and resources allocated for teachers' professional development in addressing the diverse needs of multilingual learners.

Awareness of Oneself

Educators' personal beliefs and mindsets largely influence the classroom environment, shaping teachers' interactions with students and pedagogical choices. These factors ultimately impact student learning and well-being. The results of this study suggest that professional development sessions should incorporate genuine reflection opportunities for teachers to examine their biases, beliefs, and backgrounds to cultivate greater self-awareness.

An underlying theoretical component of culturally relevant pedagogy focuses on teachers' beliefs and ideologies (Ladson-Billings, 2021). These convictions shape how we perceive our students and their inherent potential. This study centers on two CR-SE competencies derived from the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Competencies 1 and 5 were strategically chosen for their focus on teacher mindsets and perceptions as they serve as the initial phase before implementing culturally relevant practices. As Lopez (2016) states, "what teachers know and believe is a critical first step to ensuring that culturally responsive teaching can occur in classrooms" (p. 5).

Providing a space for open discussion, such as a group setting, can encourage educators to engage in critical dialogue and introspection regarding their beliefs about student abilities and assets. This setting offers a valuable opportunity for learning from diverse perspectives and promotes self-reflection and growth. Participants in this study spoke about their beliefs on culturally and linguistically diverse students and provided examples of how educators can view their differences as an asset to the classroom. Participant 4 revealed his sentiments towards multilingual learners students when he said:

> The really sad truth about how people coming to America like have to meet the realization that most Americans don't know other languages and they don't find value in other languages… there's still value in other languages like other cultures and other countries. It's honestly like a weakness like, oh, you don't speak perfect English when instead maybe they speak perfect Spanish and English pretty well. They speak multiple languages, but if they don't speak English perfectly, then it's oftentimes like it's not good… when in reality, having the ability to know multiple languages is an incredible, incredible asset, but oftentimes isn't looked at that way for most people.

Participant 4's beliefs influence his perception of others' abilities, effectively illustrating the crucial role self-reflection plays in developing culturally relevant practices. Integrating training that fosters introspection and an asset-based mindset can shift educators' perspectives, leading to a more equitable and affirming classroom environment for diverse learners. By embracing an asset-based approach, teachers gain awareness of the language they use with students, ensuring that the terminology affirms their strengths and promotes positive self-perceptions.

Utilizing an asset-based approach, Participant 2 highlighted the potential of leveraging multilingual learners' diverse experiences and backgrounds as instructional tools within the classroom. Participant 2 stated:

> During the first week or so, I always ask the kids, okay, so who's French is a third language? And it is so sad to me that their hands go up so sheepishly, and then I go on this little tirade about how when you walk into our classes, you have to bring everything you already know with you. You can't leave your knowledge of other languages you've studied out in the hallway. You can't leave personal experiences out in the hallway. You've got to bring it all in and use everything you have got.

This statement elicited responses from all participants, evidenced by their affirmative nods. Participant 2's holistic perspective toward her students acknowledges the immense value of their prior experiences and knowledge. She encourages them to use these assets to bridge old and new materials. This example demonstrates a deep understanding of student backgrounds and a commitment to fostering meaningful connections between prior knowledge and new concepts.

Both participants' perspectives and the open dialogue setting in which these viewpoints were shared present opportunities for other educators to reflect on their perspectives and consider adopting asset-based pedagogies. The results further emphasize the need for more professional development opportunities focusing on CR-SE competencies to promote asset-based mindsets.

Although Pennsylvania is teaching future educators about culturally relevant practices through the revised pre-service curriculum, the lack of similar CR-SE professional development initiatives for in-service teachers presents a barrier to achieving widespread educational equity. There are over 108,000 public school teachers in Pennsylvania, and the training discrepancy leaves thousands of current educators working with traditional practices (*Public Education in Pennsylvania*, n.d.). Ultimately, providing PD opportunities that increase self-awareness and belief in students' potential can impact the terminology teachers use with their student population and foster an asset-based mindset about students' cultures and languages.

Intervention to Understand Multilingual Learners

Current professional development opportunities for educators fail to adequately address the crucial needs of multilingual learners and the integration of culturally relevant practices, presenting a challenge in fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. A major concern in the field of education is the lack of PD opportunities that focus on providing

in-service teachers with best practices for educating the fastest growing student body population, multilingual learners (NEA, 2020). This study highlights the critical need for PD sessions that expose educators to other cultures to better understand and teach the diverse student body. Through engaging in discussions, participants in this study not only gained increased awareness of cultural differences but it also showcased the transformative potential of culturally relevant practices, urging a paradigm shift in continued educator training opportunities.

Unfamiliarity with multilingual learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds can inadvertently lead to misunderstandings of their needs and behaviors, creating barriers to effective intervention and equitable learning opportunities. For example, misconceptions surrounding the language acquisition processes of MLs, which are often rooted in a lack of cultural and linguistic awareness, contribute to the misidentification of students as having learning disabilities. Furthermore, the Department of Justice recently reported that in Pennsylvania's AEDY programs, ML students were not receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, further exacerbating educational inequities and highlighting systemic shortcomings in addressing the diverse needs of this student population. Both examples demonstrate the importance of understanding students and providing them with the same equitable opportunities in the educational system as their native English-speaking peers.

Implementing culturally relevant practices serves as an intervention to better understand multilingual learners' backgrounds and needs. Studies have shown that understanding and incorporating students' cultures in the classroom can positively impact their educational experiences and academic achievements (Byrd, 2016; Kanaʻiaupuni et al., 2010; Lopez, 2016). Utilizing these practices coupled with exposure to other cultures can deepen educators'

understanding and, in turn, could potentially contribute to a reduction in misdiagnosis of learning disabilities and the elimination of inequitable practices.

Given teachers' pivotal role in students' education, prioritizing meaningful professional development opportunities to effectively support culturally and linguistically diverse students is crucial. The participants in this study had the opportunity to partake in a PD focused on cultural awareness and lived experiences. The data indicates that the book club impacted each participant's understanding and perception. The cultural differences between the main character in the book and book club participants provided varying perspectives and prompted reflection. The engaging dialogue among participants showed their commitment to learning about others and provided alternative experiences that gave others a glimpse into their world. The practices from this book club can be transferred to our classrooms as we prioritize learning more about our students' backgrounds and experiences to create a relevant and inclusive classroom. Participants provided a few examples of culturally relevant practices in their classrooms. Participant 7 discussed strategies he uses in his computer science classroom:

> I try to encourage any of my ELL students, like, you use the language you are comfortable with, when you are naming variables when you are working with your code. There's certain things you'll have to use, but like, if you are creating a game and it has whatever character, like use the language you are comfortable with as the code will run either way. And, then I usually practice my Spanish like ¿Cómo se dice… this…. ? and then they get to teach me, and that has been fun. They usually laugh at me.

Participant 6 replied with how she acknowledges students' backgrounds in her language classroom:

> When we talk about cultural things that happen or cultural activities or festivities and things like that, and let's say I have a Mexican student in the classroom, I ask them, do you guys celebrate this in your household? Or Have you? Even if it is not necessarily somebody who grew up in Mexico, it could be someone who grew up here. I ask, How do you celebrate it here? And they tell me this is how they do it in Mexico or how they celebrate it. or in Venezuela or in Latin America, right. I ask, how did you bring some of those cultural festivities here, and did you change how you celebrate them because you are in a new environment?

The examples highlight effective strategies for integrating students' diverse backgrounds into the learning environment and affirming their cultural identities. These culturally relevant practices hold significant potential for further development through continuous professional development sessions focused on honing these pedagogical approaches and aligning them with the CR-SE (Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education) competencies. Equipping teachers, the frontline workers, with the knowledge and skills necessary to cultivate meaningful connections with culturally and linguistically diverse students presents an intervention strategy to work towards dismantling educational inequities and fostering inclusive learning environments for all.

Collaborative Professional Development Opportunities

One of the most important implications of this study is the need to design professional development opportunities that prioritize staff agency and involvement in the construction of knowledge and skills. Traditional teacher professional development (PD) sessions often lack interactivity, which fails to provide adequate opportunities for peer dialogue and collaborative learning. According to Selway (2003), "Many staff development programs do not work because

they tend to be one-shot workshops conducted by an expert from outside the school who talks at faculty rather than getting them actively involved in the process" (p. 6). Current PD models should account for staff involvement and provide spaces for dialogue rather than put teachers in a passive role.

This study demonstrates that participant interactions are critical in shaping professional development experiences. Collaborative learning environments foster deeper understanding, shift perceptions, and ultimately contribute to the professional growth of educators. This study supports the previous research highlighting the effectiveness of collaborative and group-based professional development (PD) opportunities (Cordingley et al., 2015; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021; Walter & Briggs, 2012). Working with colleagues and engaging in a community of practice can "give teachers the chance to challenge each other and clarify misunderstandings" (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021, p. 49). Participants were engaged in a dialogue of experiences and beliefs, leveraging book scenarios to foster shared understanding. Interacting with each other's narratives demonstrated that participants attentively listened and sought to understand and connect with the perspectives and experiences of their colleagues. The small group setting allowed the participants' voices to be heard and acknowledged. As the results indicated, the first discussion produced 59% responses to one another as the questions prompted participant interaction. The observations and data show that this community of practice learned from one another through their social interactions.

Collaborative learning environments offer teachers invaluable opportunities to refine their pedagogical approaches by cultivating deep understanding and empathy through peer interactions, making engaging PD programs that nurture these interactions critical. Eun (2019) states that "teaching is the key to improved student learning, and professional development is

the key to quality teaching" (p. 85). To support teachers in developing awareness and new practices, professional development opportunities should go beyond passive knowledge transfer and actively engage educators in critical reflection on personal biases, collaborative exploration of other cultures, and peer-to-peer learning through shared experiences.

Book Clubs as a Form of Professional Development

Teacher professional development sessions often take the form of informal book clubs as teachers are instructed to read designated articles followed by facilitated discussions by an administrator. Leveraging the interactive nature of book clubs, this approach disseminates information on various topics to teachers. Traditional methods, such as lectures, often "emphasize procedural learning, resulting in only surface-level implementation of instructional approaches" (Blanton et al., 2020, p. 1016). Unlike traditional one-way communication methods, book club PD sessions foster a participatory environment where teachers can share their expertise, challenge assumptions, and construct knowledge through peer dialogue.

Despite its growing popularity, the utilization of book clubs as professional development for educators is not widely studied. To further limit the research, most book club PD research focuses on pre-service teachers instead of in-service teachers (Blanton et al., 2020). In response to the limited availability of collaborative PD opportunities for educators, the book club model was strategically chosen as a professional development approach to provide an opportunity to engage with other staff members. This study adds to the limited literature on book clubs as a professional development model with in-service teachers. The findings in this study are consistent with the findings of Kooy's study, where participants shared personal experiences that were prompted by the reading (Kooy, 2006). An example of this came from Participant 1 when she said:

> Like the girl in that story just hit me. She had to take on so many different roles, right? She was a daughter, and she had to adapt to the different locations that she was. She kind of constantly had to adapt to different places and follow these rules, and it just really struck a chord with me because I felt like and I still feel like I'm constantly code and role switching, right? You know, I'm teacher and coach. Growing up, I had a handicapped brother, so I was a caretaker, you know what I mean? And then I was a farm girl. I was a tomboy. I had to be more like a man on the farm and act tough and strong and never cry and everything else. But then I would go to school and I would want to be one of the pretty girls that have the nice hair. I felt like I was constantly changing roles and switching all the time to meet whatever environment I was in, and it was exhausting.

The book resonated deeply with Participant 6 as well. She recounts her experience traveling to the United States and being tested for ESL classes. Participant 6 stated:

> When I read that section, this book kind of like, its kind of parallel to my life. When I read through, it kind of reminded me of the time when I came back from Puerto Rico, and I was brought over here to X School, this first city school district, in New Jersey. I was told to get ESL tested, to see if I needed ESL classes. This is way back when, and I remember being tested. I remember going to this huge room with 1000s of people, and here I am, just out of fifth grade, I was ten years old, and I'm in a huge room in a new environment, unknown to me…

The participants' direct quotes demonstrate that the book provided a talking point for participants to bridge their experiences with what the character in the book experienced. Participants then connected the experiences of their colleagues to those of their own. The data

shows that participants in this study quoted the book nineteen times, highlighting the use of the book as a stepping stone to share thoughts and experiences. Administrators can use books to broach complex topics such as the Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education Competencies since these competencies focus on self-reflection, biases, and diversity, which can be uncomfortable topics. These findings suggest that book clubs can be a great professional development tool for educators to engage in collaborative reading, critical reflection, and knowledge sharing with colleagues.

Implications for Future Research

Findings for this study add to the knowledge base on culturally relevant practices and professional development book clubs. Areas to be further investigated range from PD opportunities with CR-SE competencies to utilizing book clubs as a form of professional development.

Book Clubs as Teacher Professional Development

While the potential of book clubs as a means of effective professional development (PD) has been acknowledged, particularly for preservice teachers within teacher preparation programs, existing research remains scarce, especially when focusing on in-service teachers (Blanton et al., 2019). This study contributes to bridging this gap by investigating the use of book clubs as an instructional tool for in-service teacher PD. However, further research is necessary to definitively evaluate the effectiveness of book club-based PD opportunities, particularly their impact on in-service teachers' knowledge, skills, and classroom practices. This book club-based professional development study could also be replicated in different educational settings to see if the same outcomes would occur in districts with different populations of students and faculty.

Professional Development Utilizing CR-SE Competencies

In April of 2022, Pennsylvania's Department of Education amended Chapter 49 to incorporate the nine Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education Competencies (Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) Program Framework Guidelines, 2022). These competencies are being integrated into teacher education programs, induction programs, and continuing professional development programs across the state (Culturally-Relevant and Sustaining Education (CR-SE) Program Framework Guidelines, 2022). Though the competencies are based on tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, the novelty of these competencies and the impact of training require more research. This study focused on two out of the nine competencies and showed positive results in teachers' understanding and perceptions. Future research could focus on pre-service and in-service teachers' understanding of culturally relevant practices after receiving training on CR-SE competencies.

Incorporation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Tested Subject Areas vs. Electives

This study presents an unexpected yet crucial finding: the significant challenges tested subject area teachers face in implementing culturally relevant practices due to pressure from standardized testing. Tight timeframes and a lack of readily available culturally relevant materials hinder these teachers' efforts to integrate students' backgrounds and languages into their curriculum. In contrast, elective teachers, with their flexible schedules and freedom from standardized testing, can incorporate cultural aspects into their instruction easily. This discrepancy warrants further investigation in future research, specifically focusing on the intersection of these two groups and seeking solutions to address the barriers tested subject area teachers face in implementing culturally relevant pedagogies.

Potential Professional Practice Product: Multicultural Book Club

Teachers must engage in reflective practices that acknowledge their identity, culture, biases, and experiences. All of these components have the potential to impact teachers' educational strategies and behaviors in the classroom. Self-reflection and exposure to diverse cultures and experiences are essential to a deeper understanding of oneself and others. Creating a multicultural book club as a potential professional practice product aligns with my goal of fostering a culturally aware and inclusive learning environment for staff and students.

The researcher plans on sharing the results of this study and will provide specific instances and contexts to engage staff members, as staff are more responsive when you can present a student's situation in context. Below is a potential action plan for the multicultural book club.

Action Plan for the Multicultural Book Club

Goal

To allow staff members to engage in meaningful conversations about their lived experiences and learn about other cultures through reading selected culturally focused books.

Action Steps

1. ***Establish a Book Club Committee:*** The committee will plan and facilitate the book club. The researcher will reach out to staff members in the building to gauge interest in becoming a committee member. Once established, the committee will decide upon meeting dates to review CR-SE competencies and potential cultural books. Committee

members will be tasked with researching books that fall into the non-fiction, memoir, or (auto)biography categories rather than educational texts.

2. ***Outline the Structure of the Book Club:*** Committee members will meet to discuss aspects of the book club. The committee members will be responsible for the following components:

    1. Review and select four cultural books for members to read throughout the year.

    2. Create discussion questions that align with the book and CR-SE competencies.

    3. Provide the name of the book and potentially loan copies to group members each quarter.

    4. Set expectations for the book club. (amount of time to finish the book, group norms, requirements, etc.)

    5. Schedule discussion dates and times. (TBD by group members)

    6. Facilitate the book discussion.

    7. Create the end-of-the-year survey. / Share the survey with group members.

    8. Review surveys at the end of the year to determine strengths and weaknesses.

    9. Implement changes the following year based on feedback and data.

3. ***Book Review:*** The book club committee will review the books they have researched and select four to read throughout the year. Each book will highlight a different culture. After solidifying the books, the committee will be split individually or with partners and tasked to read one of the selected books. That person(s) will then create discussion questions related to the CR-SE competencies and the book.

4. ***Establish a Book Loaning System:*** The researcher will connect with the school librarian and provide her with the names of the selected books. The researcher and librarian

already have a good rapport, and the librarian has offered to inter-library loan books for a book club in the future. A certain number of books can be inter-library loaned, whereas other members may have to purchase them depending on the size of the club.

5. ***Create a Multicultural Book Club:*** One member of the book club committee will email staff members at the high school and invite them to join the voluntary multicultural book club. If interested, staff members must complete a Google Form survey, which will include the book club requirements and questions, such as preferences for meeting via a video conference platform or in person.

    a. ***Book Club Requirements:***

    1. Members must participate for the entire year.

    2. Members will read one selected book a quarter and participate in a group discussion about the book.

    3. Members must complete a Google Form survey at the end of the year to provide feedback on the structure of the book club and open-ended questions relating to the CR-SE competencies to measure members' growth.

6. ***Data Analysis and Modifications:*** The book club committee will meet to analyze the data collected by the surveys. The committee will analyze the data based on two main objectives:

    1. Determine if the book club impacted teachers' mindsets/ understanding of other cultures.

    2. Identify strengths and weaknesses of the book club structure.

The findings from the data analysis will guide both the implementation of necessary modifications and the further cultivation of the book club's existing strengths for the following year.

Responsible Parties

The responsible party for the Multicultural Book Club is the book club committee. Ideally, the book club committee will comprise 3-5 people from various job backgrounds in the high school setting. The committee members will plan, implement, facilitate, and evaluate the book club. Though voluntary, it's objectives include facilitating cultural exploration and fostering impactful dialogue to transform perspectives.

Evaluation and Accountability Measures

The year-end survey, comprised of open-ended reflection questions and CR-SE-specific questions, will evaluate staff experiences and assess the book club's progress toward cultural competency. All book club members will receive the evaluative measure to gather comprehensive feedback. The book club committee will analyze the data gained from the surveys. The survey responses will help shape the future format of the book club and the book selection in hopes of promoting cultural awareness.

Conclusion

Years of studying the Spanish language and culture have shaped my professional paradigm on teaching, travel, and advocacy. This study emerges from a desire to raise awareness and appreciation for the vibrant Spanish culture with my colleagues through the lens of a book memoir. The district where the research was conducted has a growing population of Spanish-speaking Multilingual Learners (MLs), highlighting the critical need for culturally relevant training. This phenomenon is common as countless schools

nationwide have similar demographic shifts without adequate training in cultural understanding and effective ML-inclusive teaching practices. As the ML population grows, the need for all educators to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to support this diverse student group becomes increasingly evident.

Based on the data analysis, this study's findings suggest that participating in a book club-based professional development focused on cultural awareness and lived experiences increased teachers' perceptions and understanding of Multilingual Learner students. This study emphasizes the crucial role of creating spaces for reflection and dialogue regarding culturally relevant and sustaining education practices. Book clubs hold significant potential within professional development sessions for educators as they embody many core elements of effective PD practices. The engagement, collaborative exchange, and opportunities for introspection in a book club can catalyze transformative shifts within participants. As individuals reflect and acknowledge their own experiences and biases, they cultivate the capacity to learn about others with greater empathy and appreciation, ultimately perceiving diverse backgrounds and experiences as valuable assets within the classroom environment.

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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted through Kutztown University. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. The University requires that you give your signed agreement if you choose to participate.

This study is being conducted by Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky

Title of the Study:

Culturally Integrating Nuestra Juventud: Understanding Spanish-speaking Multilingual Learners through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research study is to analyze educator's understanding and perception of culturally relevant pedagogy as it relates to multilingual learner students through a book club based professional development.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things…

1. Read and answer a 10 question Likert scale survey.

   (Approximately 15 minutes to complete)

2. Given a nonfiction book consisting of 15 chapters (270 pages) titled *When I was Puerto Rican,* read the book it its entirety in the allotted 4-6 weeks.

3. Participate in 2-3 one-hour-long book club discussions via Zoom. Participants will voluntarily respond to discussion questions regarding the book and their own lived experiences. The discussions will occur after reading specific chapters of the book.
4. Read and answer a 10 question Likert scale survey.

   (Approximately 15 minutes to complete)

Risks or Discomforts, and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has no risks and/or discomforts.

The benefits to participation are…

a. adds to knowledge/ literature base regarding this population of students

b. investigates professional development intervention to support students

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Records will be kept private and will be handled in a confidential manner to the extent provided by law. In any report or presentation, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a research study participant. You will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms will be provided to all participants in the study for reporting purposes. Upon completion of the study, all data and information obtained from the study will be permanently deleted.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is:

Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky

Email: mculp434@live.kutztown.edu

Advisor name: Dr. Helen Hamlet

Email: Hamlet@kutztown.edu

Phone: 610-683-4202

Department: Counselor Education & Student Affairs

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

If you have questions regarding the research study, you may contact the researcher listed above. you have any questions or concerns about the rights of research participants, please contact the II Committee at Kutztown University at 484-646-4167.

Future Research Studies:

Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, it will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the information described above and have received a copy of this information. I have asked questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix B: Seven-Point Pre- and Post-Book Club Likert Scale Survey

1. How aware am I of my own biases and experiences. *

	Unaware	Slightly unaware	Neutral	Slightly aware	Aware	Moderately aware	Extremely aware
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

2. How often do I think about my race, ethnicity, beliefs and values. *

	Never	Rarely (<10% of the time)	Occasionally (~30% of the time)	Sometimes (~50% of the time)	Frequently(~70% of the time)	Usually (~90% of the time)	Always
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3. How often does my race, ethnicity, beliefs and values impact my behavior in daily life. *

	Never	Rarely (<10% of the time)	Occasionally (~30% of the time)	Sometimes (~50% of the time)	Frequently (~70% of the time)	Usually (~90% of the time)	Always
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

4. How important do you think it is to consider a learner's cultural background in the classroom. *

	Not important at all	Low importance	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Considerably Important	Very important	Extrem importa
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

5. To what extent do I incorporate my students' unique cultural identities to build a better student to teacher connection. *

	Never	Rarely (<10% of the time)	Occassionally (~30% of the time)	Sometimes (~50% of the time)	Frequently (~70% of the time)	Usually (~90% of the time)	Always
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

6. To what extent do I use an asset based approach to view learners' cultural backgrounds. *

	Never	Rarely (<10% of the time)	Occassionally (~30% of the time)	Sometimes (~50% of the time)	Frequently (~70% of the time)	Usually (~90% of the time)	Always
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

7. How aware am I of the knowledge, ideas, and opinions of learners from diverse identity groups. *

	Unaware	Slightly unaware	Neutral	Slightly aware	Aware	Moderately aware	Extremely aware
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

8. My classroom operates in ways that promote equity, diversity, and respect for all learners . *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Mildly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

9. To what extent do I recognize and value students' home dialects and languages. *

	Never	Rarely (<10% of the time)	Occasionally (~30% of the time)	Sometimes (~50% of the time)	Frequently (~70% of the time)	Usually (~90% of the time)	Always
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. When working with a multilingual student, how often do I make a cognitive effort to view their language differences as an asset *

	Never	Rarely (<10% of the time)	Occasionally (~30% of the time)	Sometimes (~50% of the time)	Frequently (~70% of the time)	Usually (~90% of the time)	Always
Choices	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix C: Copyright Permission Letter- Table 1

Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky
Kutztown University
February 1st, 2024

Dear Dr. Amado Padilla,

I am completing a dissertation at Kutztown University entitled "Culturally Integrating *Nuestra Juventud*: Understanding Spanish-speaking Multilingual Learners through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." I am reaching out as I would like to have your permission to use the exact wording in the article below but in a table format. I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation wording from the following:

Padilla, A. M., Chen, X., Song, D., Swanson, E., & Peterson, M. (2022). Mindset, stereotype threat and the academic achievement gap between Chinese and Latinx English Learners (ELs). *International Journal of Educational Research*, *112*, 101916.

The table is shown below:

Table 1

Fixed vs. Growth Mindset in Education

	Fixed Mindset Approach	**Growth Mindset Approach**
Overall	-View intelligence as mostly innate and unchangeable.	-Tend to think of intelligence as malleable and something that can be improved upon through effort.
Pedagogy	-Teachers with fixed mindsets more often use performance-oriented pedagogical practices, such as separating students by ability or grading students in comparison to each other	-Teachers with higher levels of growth mindset are more likely to use mastery-oriented pedagogical practices, such as using mistakes as learning opportunities and allowing students to resubmit work for a higher grade.
Classroom Performance	-A study found that when teachers had fixed mindsets about their students' abilities, students with low achievement at the beginning of the year tended to remain underachievers.	-A study found that when teachers possessed a higher growth mindset regarding students' abilities and emphasized the role of effort in learning, originally low-achieving students were able to end the year as moderate to high-achievers.

Note. Table adapted from Padilla, A. M., Chen, X., Song, D., Swanson, E., & Peterson, M. (2022). Mindset, stereotype threat and the academic achievement gap between Chinese and Latinx English Learners (ELs). *International Journal of Educational Research*, *112*, 101916.

If this meets with your approval, please e-sign this letter. Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

Amado Padilla
_____
Signature

Date: 2024-02-02

Appendix D: Copyright Permission Letter- Table 2

Re: Copyright Permission

Annie Drinkard <ADrinkard@exceptionalchildren.org>
Wed 1/24/2024 10:25 AM
To:Culpepper-Yablonsky, Mallie

Good Morning,

Your request for permission to use the table in your dissertation with the source listed is granted.

Sincerely,
Annie

Annie Drinkard | **Director of Communications and Publications**
Council for Exceptional Children

CEC 2024 SPECIAL EDUCATION CONVENTION & EXPO SAN ANTONIO

A professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the success of children with exceptionalities

FROM
Culpepper-Yablonsky, Mallie

Jan 14, 2024, 4:00 PM EST

Good afternoon,

My name is Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky, and I am a doctoral candidate at Kutztown University. I am currently working towards my education doctorate and am writing my dissertation. My action research study focuses on ESL students, and one of my literature review sections is on ESL students and special education. I am writing to obtain permission to utilize Table 2.1, Characteristics of Learning

Disabilities and Secondary Language Acquisition (p. 15, 16), from the book English Language Learners: Differentiation Between Language Acquisition and Learning Disabilities by Klinger and Eppollito (2014), in my dissertation.

Thank you,
Mallie Culpepper-Yablonsky