

Disrupting Siloed Spaces in Teacher Education: Collaborative Learning in Pursuit of
Critical Inclusive Literacy for Multilingual Learners Labeled with Disabilities

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Abstract

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Special Education

Multilingual youth labeled with disabilities require a holistic approach to literacy instruction that addresses both language and learning needs. Unfortunately, teacher candidates are often prepared in siloed programs that may address language or unique learning needs, but not both. This can perpetuate deficit framing of this population of learners and lead to disjointed and decontextualized instruction that does not account for the breadth or depth of student needs. In this study, I sought to understand the ways in which teacher education programs within one large urban university supported teacher candidates in working with multilingual youth labeled with disabilities in literacy instruction. Program directors and course instructors were interviewed, and relevant course syllabi and other artifacts reviewed. I also argue for an interdisciplinary praxis-oriented approach to better prepare teachers across different programs to collaborate toward the enactment of critically inclusive literacy practices. A small group of

participants across programs were individually interviewed and later participated in a series of small group collaborative inquiry sessions designed to promote critical reflection and collaboration. Findings revealed how teacher candidates may benefit from increased strategically designed opportunities in teacher preparation to reflect, plan, and problem solve to support multilingual youth labeled with disabilities.

Dedication

To my students and their families: past, present & future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Your awareness is a very big space within which to reside" Jon Kabat-Zinn

Preparing teachers to support multilingual learners with disabilities requires inhabiting a space of complexity. Across teacher education programs, teacher candidates are asked to make sense of language, disability, and literacy--domains that are often addressed separately in coursework and practice. Yet in classrooms, these dimensions converge, requiring teachers to notice, interpret, and respond in myriad ways. This work demands more than discrete instructional strategies; it calls for an expanded awareness—one capable of holding multiple understandings of learners and their needs.

Introducing the Study

Deficit perspectives of multilingual youth and students with disabilities are pervasive in U.S. schools. Youth labeled as both multilingual and disabled are dually positioned as academically incompetent within a system that upholds a white, middle class, nondisabled, and English-speaking normative center (Baglieri et al., 2011) and views “difference as deficit” (Mitchell, 2013). Deficit perspectives on language and learning differences are the basis to justify the exclusion of both multilingual learners (MLLs) and students with disabilities. The responsibility of educating these students has historically fallen to teachers with specialized training in English language development or special education, but not both (e.g., Nieto, 2000; Kangas, 2020); yet, a social justice orientation signals the need for all teachers to be prepared to effectively support multilingual learners with disabilities in their literacy classrooms. Unfortunately, teachers continue to be trained in siloes yet are expected to collaborate in the real world once

they begin teaching. Teachers' siloed training and the underlying ideologies related to language, literacy, and disability embedded in their respective programs may counter each other and perpetuate cultures of exclusion.

Importantly, a positive orientation to learner diversity is linked to improved student outcomes (e.g., Nieto, 2005). Similarly, the way teachers approach literacy instruction for diverse learners is crucial, as Nieto (2000) argues that educational reform requires an understanding of the sociopolitical context of learning and teaching. She contends that an interrogation of the larger social and political forces, including issues of structural power dynamics, influence the assumptions about race, language, and ability that teachers bring toward their students and families. Nieto's argument also draws on Freire (1985) arguing that educational decisions such as ability grouping, testing, curriculum, pedagogy, and which language to use for instruction are also political decisions. Therefore, Nieto (2005) astutely notes that, "embedded within all educational decisions are also assumptions about the nature of learning in general, the worthiness and capability of students from different social groups, and the inherent value of languages other than the dominant one" (p.143). I connect here to the siloing of teacher educational spaces as a key part of this broad sociopolitical context in which teachers are continuing to develop their beliefs about MLLs labeled with disabilities, literacy pedagogies, and make sense of their roles. Teacher candidates stand to benefit from engaging in collaborative learning experiences as they prepare to move into a field with increasing expectations for collaboration. Teacher candidates should be afforded the opportunity to train together, reflect on their commitments to multilingual learners (MLLs) with disabilities, and mutually support each other's critical consciousness in

decision making for critically inclusive literacy practices. Moreover, fostering a collective critical consciousness based on shared understandings of language and disability stands to positively inform pedagogical decisions (Sacramento, 2019). In this study, I argue for an interdisciplinary praxis-oriented approach to better prepare teachers to enact critically inclusive literacy practices for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities.

In the current study, I prioritized exploring, understanding, and uncovering points of convergence as well as tensions across special education and bilingual education teacher education programs in one large urban university. I argue that fostering a collective critical consciousness is an essential facet for enacting justice oriented inclusive literacy practices. Justice oriented inclusive literacy instruction asserts that: student and teacher identities matter, students need to be known and seen, language and learning diversity is an asset, and requires critical interrogation of power dynamics that perpetuate oppressive systems (e.g., Sailors & Manning, 2019; Winn, 2018).

Drawing from a theoretical lens of critical sociocultural learning theory (Lewis & Moje, 2003), my aim for this study was to offer teacher candidates the opportunity to pool their knowledges and skillsets in pursuit of providing a more transformative justice driven literacy agenda to their work with multilingual learners labeled as disabled. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the literature in teacher education to promote collaborative opportunities to support multilingual learners labeled with disabilities.

Roadmap for the Chapter

In this chapter, I will first provide an overview and brief historical background of the educational context of multilingual learners labeled as disabled. I follow with a

discussion of the significance of teachers as agents of change, and more recent trends toward inclusion. Next, I briefly compare literacy paradigms within special and bilingual education programs and highlight the need for more explicit interdisciplinary learning opportunities. Finally, I close the chapter with aims and research questions guiding this study.

Background and Context

More than 400 languages are spoken by the U.S school aged population (NCES, 2022a). At an enrollment of approximately 5.1 million, multilingual youth make up the fastest growing subgroup (10.4%) of the school aged population (NCES, 2022a). Most multilingual learners (MLLs), nearly 76%, speak Spanish as an additional language, and 15.5 % also receive special education services (NCES, 2022a). More than two-thirds of MLLs receiving special education supports are identified with learning disabilities and/or speech and language impairment, spend more than 80% of their day in general education settings, and receive specialized literacy services (NCES, 2022b). Statistics like these, which are common in the literature on MLLs labeled as disabled, may help provide frame of reference for a specific population of learners, but also pose the risk of situating students as fractured beings (Cioè-Peña, 2020), whose needs and supporting services related to language development and academics are viewed as separate, rather than holistic. Multilingual youth labeled with disabilities deserve to be viewed as whole people with intersecting identity markers. MLLs labeled as disabled are fully whole, competent young people who also have unique educational needs related to language and literacy development (Bhattacharya, 2024).

Despite the decades long trend toward increasing enrollment, youth at the nexus of these multiple marginalizations are often misunderstood and susceptible to a variety of dire outcomes due to the school systems' inability to effectively meet their needs (Cioè-Peña, 2017). The negative long-term consequences of these unmet needs include dual risk for low literacy outcomes resulting in reduced graduation and college enrollment rates as well as increased incarceration rates (Valencia-Ayala, et al., 2026; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). These youth are also more likely to be disproportionality placed in special education, particularly in specific learning disability and communication disorder categories (Linan-Thompson, 2010), receive instruction in more segregated contexts, and be afforded less access to bilingual education (e.g., Escamilla, 2015; Klingner & Artiles, 2010). Perhaps most problematic, is that the persistent failure to adequately support multilingual youth labeled as at risk or disabled continues to perpetuate a culture of exclusion and pervasive inequities (Kozleski & Smith, 2011) foregrounded on the hegemonic myth of the normative center of schooling (Baglieri et al., 2011).

The fraught history of exclusion in U.S. schools is undergirded by interlocking racist, ableist, and English monolingualistic ideologies that have long served to privilege and uphold white middle-class English-speaking students as the norm (Deschenes et al., 2001) and used to justify the exclusion of youth of Color, immigrants, and disabled students (e.g., Ferri & Connor, 2005). That is, youth with language, culture, and ability differences that diverge from the perceived normative center have long been viewed as deficient and in need of remediation (e.g., Baglieri et al., 2011; Reid & Knight, 2006). While rights-based legislation in recent decades (e.g., *Brown v Board of education*,

Bilingual Education Act, Lau v Nichols, IDEA, ESSA) has attempted to desegregate schooling spaces, these efforts have failed to disrupt deep seated deficit ideologies that remain pervasive. Youth at the intersections of multiple markers of difference continue to be most at risk of marginalization and the most underserved in schools.

One example of how these underlying ideologies coalesce within school-based contexts to justify exclusionary practices for MLLs, shows up in the ways educators notice how children use language and then how those observations influence assumptions about their ability. Together, these frames about multilingual youth labeled as disabled have resulted in the overreliance on asking, “is it language?” or “is it disability?” (Kangas, 2020). The emphasis on asking these questions tends to funnel MLLs with disabilities out of their general education classrooms and into English language supports OR special education services, but often without access to both branches of support. In addition to resulting in the physical removal of these students into siloed spaces, the questions also reify deficit framing of language acquisition and medicalized models of disability viewing learners as deficient and in need of being fixed (Kangas, 2020). While I am not arguing that MLLs labeled as at risk or disabled don’t require unique language or literacy learning supports, I argue that educators should instead turn toward interrogating how to adapt our literacy instruction and learning environments to better serve students’ needs instead of focusing on fixing them. This will require collaboration that challenges traditional roles and practices in schools.

Despite the dispiriting context outlined so far, there is a body of literature signaling the profound positive effects teachers have on student learning (e.g., Darling-Hammond; 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Feng & Sass, 2010). Student achievement

is strongly related to teachers' content knowledge and methods, understanding of student learning, as well as levels of preparedness for working with diverse learners such as those labeled as disabled or multilingual (Darling-Hammond, 1997; 2003; Feng & Sass, 2010). Unfortunately, the teacher workforce is largely underprepared to deliver multicultural education and/or work with students with disabilities from an intersectional perspective (Wang & Woolf, 2015). In a review of teacher preparation programs, Wang and Woolf (2015) found only 15 programs across the U.S. specifically to prepare educators working with students at the intersection of language and disability. Similarly, Shelton and colleagues (2025) conducted a study of special education teacher educators in preparation programs and found a limited focus on multilingual learners within special education literacy coursework. These findings are consistent with others in the literature highlighting lack of preparedness of teachers to work with multilingual learners with disabilities (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017; Miranda et al., 2019)

Furthermore, the body of literature on the impact of well-trained teachers on student achievement does not explicitly link to the political nature behind the decisions teachers make (Freire, 1985; Nieto, 2005). A critical consciousness is also necessary for teachers to interrogate hegemonic policies, structures, and curriculum in ways that further marginalize youth at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression (Picower, 2013). This includes developing the critical lens to analyze: (a) the types of questions being asked; (b) the way literacy is being defined and assessed; (c) whose language(s) are privileged; and (d) the widespread "ideology of ability" contributing to the normative practice of categorizing and ranking students in schools (Siebers, 2008). Taken together, these factors provide the foundation and rationale for the special education

system and affect the ways that MLLs labeled with disabilities are taught. Without the opportunities for teachers to interrogate and disrupt internalized biases and stereotypes about language acquisition and variation among youth in learning and access needs, the risk for the cascading effects of lowered expectations, disproportionate referrals to special education (Artiles et al., 2010), and poorer academic outcomes (Muñoz & Valdés, 2024) remain.

Wang and Woolf (2012) highlight that special education and bilingual education preparation standards alike represent “a rich and broad scope of professional knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions” (p. 38). However, there is often misalignment between the engagement of theoretical and pedagogical tools within the university context and how they transfer to school-based contexts (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010). Thus, teacher candidates need opportunities to practice identifying how the dominant oppressive practices they may, or may not, be exploring in preparation programs are playing out within their own contexts (Broderick et al., 2012). Furthermore, they should be afforded space to imagine alternate pathways, particularly as they prepare to move into professional learning communities that will continue to shape and define their teacher identities and practice (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007).

Toward Critical Inclusive Education

In recent years, there has been a growing trend toward inclusion. Waitoller and Annamma (2017) point to this body of literature over the past two decades and find that in U.S. based contexts, inclusion, or inclusive education, pertains to students with disabilities and is largely placement-based (e.g., Ainscow, 2005; Artiles et al, 2006; Baglieri et al. 2011). Meaning, that even though inclusive education pertains to multiple

markers of difference, it remains largely associated with special education (Slee, 2010) and is primarily framed around *where* students are being instructed. This is also reflected in the fact that the majority of MLLs labeled as disabled spend 80% or more of their school day in their general education classrooms (NCES, 2022b). This conceptualization of inclusive education, primarily housed within special education, is fraught with deficit-based assumptions that perpetuate ableist notions of disability and fails to account for the importance of preparing general education teachers to work with students with disabilities. There is also a dearth of interrogation of how oppressive structures rooted in ableism intersect with other oppressive systems such as racism, linguicism, and classism, for example, and reify decontextualized education in segregated settings (e.g., Artiles, 2011; 2013).

However, a more transformative and expansive definition of inclusive education asks, “*included into what?*” Internationally, and among Disability Studies in Education (DSE) scholars, the term inclusive education has a more expansive scope. In contrast to viewing inclusive education as a service delivery model for students with disabilities, it is conceptualized as a transformative philosophy for educating all children, and centers on interrogating and dismantling the normative practices of schooling that marginalize and exclude children and families at the intersections of race, disability, and language (e.g., Ainscow, 2005; Baglieri et al, 2011). Furthermore, Lavani and Bacon (2019) highlight the ways that classrooms should mirror diversity in broader society. This study sought to draw on a more critical and expansive framing of inclusive education to consider redefining what literacy instruction may entail for multilingual learners labeled as disabled.

The way that inclusive education is interpreted has enormous implications for pedagogical and curricular schooling practices across content areas. One content area that warrants interrogation of normative practices is literacy instruction. Traditional frames of literacy rooted in white monolingual English middle-class values coupled with narrow definitions of inclusive education have justified the removal and labeling of young children with markers of difference, particularly related to race, language, and disability (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). For example, most young people receiving special education services receive instruction in literacy, and children of Color are more likely to be placed in segregated, decontextualized instructional settings than their white peers (e.g., Klingner et al., 2007; Morrison & Epps, 2002; Ordoñez–Jasis & Jasis, 2011).

In summary, a transformative justice-driven inclusive education agenda critiques the ways that difference has historically been used to justify exclusion and calls for a deep cultural transformation and interrogation of the normative center of schooling. It imagines a pluralistic education in which all forms of cultural and linguistic practices are honored, valued, and sustained. Educators and scholars working toward a transformative justice-driven inclusive education are called upon to collaborate and coalition-build to consider how they are fostering accessible learning environments for a vast spectrum of learners. Next, I point to some ways that teacher education may serve to advance transformative justice-driven inclusive literacy practices.

Potential Impact

There is limited research on how to prepare teachers to enact transformative inclusive practices that address the complex literacy needs of MLLs labeled as disabled. Both a result of and potentially a contributor to the long history of exclusionary practices

has been the historically siloed nature of teacher education programs that prioritizes preparing teachers to work with students with disabilities or multilingual learners, but rarely at the intersections of both (Wang & Woolf, 2015). Further contributing to the divide is that approaches to literacy instruction for these different groups of students have historically been rooted in different theoretical paradigms (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012; Martínez-Álvarez, 2021). However, to support the learning of kids at the intersection of disability and multilingualism, strong collaborative models must be in place (Hayaman et al., 2013). To challenge dominant deficit narratives that uphold hegemonic practices of exclusion, educators need to reimagine inclusive literacy practices that account for the spectrum of language and learning differences of multilingual learners labeled as disabled and provide teachers the opportunities to reflect and learn with one another.

In this study I aimed to support teacher candidates during their preparation within their special and bilingual preparation programs in the construction of a collective critical consciousness in pursuit of aligning with a critically inclusive literacy agenda. In the current study, teacher candidates engaged in shared learning opportunities through a facilitated and co-constructed small inquiry group. I aimed to be responsive to the interests and needs of the participants. Together, we surfaced internalized ideologies about language and literacy, as well as considered practical context-specific implications for supporting multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. We engaged in reflective and collective sense making by supporting each other through problems of practice conversations and reviewing a variety of practice-oriented resources. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do different teacher preparation programs within one institution prepare teachers to work with multilingual youth labeled as disabled?
2. How do teacher candidates across these different programs understand literacy instruction for multilingual youth labeled as disabled?
3. How does an interdisciplinary critical inquiry group contribute to the ways that teacher candidates think about supporting multilingual youth labeled with disabilities?
4. What tensions and contradictions surface for teacher candidates as they participate in an interdisciplinary critical inquiry group designed to support literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities?

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Framing

In this chapter, I elaborate on the need for critical inclusive education and argue that collaboration across general and special education teachers is needed. I start by synthesizing literature on the sociopolitical and historical contexts of education and offer rationale for moving toward transformative justice driven inclusive practices. I then connect to the literature on critical consciousness as a framing that may inform the enactment of inclusive practices for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. I review how language and literacy ideologies that have predominated siloed educational spaces may have served to perpetuate deficit framing of MLLs labeled with disabilities and then counter by pointing toward asset-based framing. Next, I argue that professional learning communities play an essential role in advancing critical inclusive literacy practices and thus call for collaborative learning communities in teacher preparation programs. I point to the emerging literature on critical inquiry spaces in teacher education that involve participants across different programs.

Finally, I describe the theoretical framework for the current study, critical sociocultural learning theory (Lewis & Moje, 2003). These frameworks allowed for multiple lenses to explore the ways in which professional learning communities can serve as sites for advancing critically inclusive pedagogies.

Historical Context

Disability has long been used as the justification of subjugation of people (Baynton, 2001). For example, Baynton (2001) contends that “disability has functioned historically to justify inequality for disabled people themselves, but it has also done so for women and minority groups... not only has it been considered justifiable to treat

disabled people unequally, but the concept of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them” (p. 33). From this understanding, we see how ableism has been used for the systematic labeling, ranking, and othering of bodies and minds based on socially constructed ideals of normalcy, intelligence, productivity, and excellence, and is the foundation for all other forms of oppression (Lewis, 2022). This not only helps situate the historical co construction of ableism, racism, and linguicism, but surfaces how this continues to persist rampantly in education. For instance, language practices are pathologized and often used to serve as indications of disability, a response to a disability, and a barrier to inclusion, regardless of classification of disability (Cioè-Peña, 2020).

Furthermore, despite the vast research highlighting the value and benefit for multilingualism (e.g., Thomas & Collier, 2004), the U.S.’s long history of devaluing languages other than English, rooted in raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015), has resulted in limited bilingual educational opportunities for MLLs labeled as disabled. MLLs labeled as disabled are especially unlikely to have access to bilingual education supports and have their disability and languages targeted for remediation in segregated contexts (Martínez-Álvarez, 2019).

There is also a connection between race, disability status, literacy outcomes and the school to prison pipeline (Erevelles, 2014). While a more complete discussion of the sociopolitical and historical underpinnings of the school to prison nexus is beyond the scope of the current study (see for example: Erevelles, 2014 and Erevelles & Minear, 2010), a few points are worth considering here. Importantly, young people at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities are “extremely vulnerable to the school-

prison nexus” (Annamma, 2017, p. 11). For instance, 85% of youth in juvenile detention facilities have special education qualifying disabilities and are disproportionately males of Color, particularly Black and Latino (ACLU, 2022). Additionally, there is a long history linking low literacy outcomes and incarceration (e.g., Haigler, 1994; Morrison & Epps, 2002). Clearly, normative literacy practices embedded within dominant discourses of inclusive education are not only *not* serving youth of Color or multilingual learners with disabilities, but they are also systematically segregating them through special education, limiting access to bilingual programming, and pushing them out of schools entirely.

Dominant U.S. Discourses of Inclusive Education

The presence of inclusion and inclusive education appeared more substantively in the special education literature in the wake of the passing of IDEA legislation in 1975 (Artiles et al, 2006). Driven by the Disability Rights Movement, the initial law titled, “Education for All Handicapped Children Act” (EHA, 1975) was designed to provide educational protections for young people with disabilities and their families. Prior to the 1970s, only 1 in 5 children with a disability was being educated in public schools (U.S. Department of Education). The EHA was renamed to the Individuals with Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 during the legislative reauthorization and reauthorized once again in 2004 (U.S. Department of Education). Thus, the decades long emphasis in the literature on “inclusive education as placement” and resulting implications that has persisted since ensued from the rights-based transition of students with disabilities from isolated facilities or homeschooling into their neighborhood schools and among general education peers (Connor & Ferri, 2007). Additionally, special education evolved as a

parallel system to general education during this time (Artiles et al., 2006) and they continue to operate primarily as parallel systems.

The historical underpinnings of this legislation span much farther back in U.S. history than the 1970s and are tied to deep seated ableist ideologies that resulted in the Ugly Laws (Schwiek, 2009), and the eugenics movement. Disability status has also been one of the most significant markers for justification of exclusion and establishment of a cultural hierarchy entrenched on the notion of normality and used in conjunction with other markers such as race, gender, class, and language (Baynton, 2011; 2013). For example, constructions of disability have been applied to rationalize slavery and enforce strict immigration laws (Baynton, 2013). This all highlights the ways that racism, ableism, and linguicism have historically been deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

The history of how disability has been viewed in this country continues to deeply influence the field of special education. Special education largely construes disability from a medical, or individual, model (e.g., Martínez-Álvarez, 2023). This conceptualization locates disability within an individual's body and/or mind, and is framed as a defect, and something to be fixed (e.g., Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020; Oliver, 1983), as opposed to a form of diversity. As such, special education has been steeped in the pathologizing of disability, remediation, and relying on the innateness of disability as a means for explaining why certain students cannot access or participate in general education (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). This framing also focuses on what young people lack, or cannot do, and reinforces an individualized accommodation or modification

approach to curriculum (Baglieri, Valle, et al., 2011) rather than an interrogation of how curriculum could be adapted or designed to account for broader access.

A key component of IDEA legislation is *the least restrictive environment* (LRE) which can largely explain how the dominant discourse of inclusive education became focused on placement, or location of service delivery and time spent with nondisabled peers. The way that IDEA has afforded access to general education is not inherently problematic (Artiles, 2011). In fact, few would argue against the substantial proportional increase of students with disabilities receiving at least 80% of their instruction in general education settings over the past 30 years, from 31.7% in 1989 to 66% in 2020 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). However, in tandem with the medical model of disability, the LRE is also used to justify the exclusion of children with disabilities to receive the instruction necessary to “fix them enough” to return to general education (Connor & Ferri, 2007) and uphold the status quo (Graham & Slee, 2008). Furthermore, increased access to general education settings is not distributed equitably, with certain disability categories or multiply marginalized students remaining segregated (Artiles et al., 2006).

The dominant U.S. discourse on inclusive education has largely been influenced by the disability rights movement, subsequent legislation, and a service delivery, placement based special education model, all of which are steeped in the medical/individual model of disability. This hyperfocus on a deficit-based framing of disability fails to account for the ways that disability intersects with other forms of marginalization (Artiles, 2013; Connor & Ferri, 2007), and serves to uphold the mythical normative center of schooling (Baglieri et al., 2011) which perpetuates white, English

speaking nondisabled students as the norm and anything outside of that as abnormal.

The following section troubles this dominant discourse of inclusive education and offers a more transformative inclusive education agenda.

Toward a More Transformative Inclusive Education

In contrast to the narrow, deficit-based U.S. conceptualization of inclusive education focused primarily on children with disabilities, Ainscow and colleagues (2006) note that internationally, inclusive education values student diversity, seeks to eliminate social exclusion of all kinds, and transform education to be spaces of belonging for all learners. In 1994, 92 governments adopted the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) committing to inclusive educational systems that should account for the wide variety of diversity of learner characteristics and needs, not solely those with disabilities. In a special issue on global progress toward these commitments, Ainscow et al., (2019) highlight the subsequent UNESCO conferences that continue to reinforce that all children matter equally. Thus, more expansive frames of inclusive education are interested in pluralism and require critical engagement toward the disruption of normative practices of schooling, reframing notions of disability and difference (Baglieri, Valle, et al., 2011), and an intersectional analysis of the ways ableism operates with other cultural markers such as race, language, gender, and class.

Scholars in disability studies (DS) and disability studies in education (DSE) have called for a transformative agenda in which the traditional model of schooling is questioned and assumptions of normality and difference are disrupted (Waitoller & Annamma, 2017). Graham and Slee (2008), describe the normative center of schooling as the invisible unnamed source of power underpinned by whiteness, ablebodiedness,

and English dominance, for example, which is upheld by attributing labels of difference to those outside of this normality by identifying disability, race, or language. They, and others, argue that inclusive education isn't attainable without disrupting this normative center that seeks to maintain a status quo (Baglieri et al., 2011; Graham & Slee, 2007). Otherwise, without this interrogation, even if the aim is to desegregate, dominant discourses in special education perpetuate assimilation into practices that maintain oppressive power dynamics that keep certain students on the margins.

Perhaps the most foundational difference in a more expansive conceptualization of inclusive education are the ways disability and difference are perceived. DS and DSE scholars have long critiqued the medical, or individual, model (Oliver, 1990) for its emphasis on pathologizing, fixing, and trying to erase disability and uphold normality (e.g., Linton, 1998). In contrast, DS and DSE recognize a vast spectrum of bodies and minds as natural, inevitable, and a valued form of human diversity. Rather than locating disability within an individual, alternative models examine the ways that people with disabilities are systemically oppressed through historical, political, social, and cultural practices and structures (e.g., Kafer, 2013; Withers, 2012). DSE draws heavily on the social model (Oliver, 1983), which situates disability as a result of the interaction of individual characteristics and one's environment in ways that limit access or participation. Importantly, proponents of the social model acknowledge that learners can and do vary in psychological, biological, physical ways, but the consideration is on the significance of the meaning that is assigned to these differences (Baglieri, Valle, et al., 2011). Viewing disability as diversity is an essential philosophical shift toward more transformative inclusive education as it fundamentally calls for educators to reject

dominant deficit-based notions of disability that view something wrong with learners used to deny participation and access to educational opportunities.

Artiles and colleagues (2006) highlight that the heart of the international inclusive education agenda has been *justice* and remind us that it does not occur in a vacuum. As such, it is imperative to consider the role of power, privilege, and the ways that young people often experience multiple marginalizations at the institutional and individual level (Kozleski et al., 2014). Thus, I draw from others who have sought to frame this work as a transformative *justice-driven* inclusive agenda (e.g., Love & Beneke, 2021; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Waitoller and Artiles (2013), describe a transformative justice-driven inclusive agenda involving the iterative, critical examination process of unjust systems through: (a) redistribution of meaningful learning opportunities; (b) recognition and valuing of differences in content, pedagogy, and assessment; and (c) representation of marginalized groups in decision-making processes. This iterative and critical reflection process needs to bring teachers, teacher educators, and researchers into collaborative conversation that have historically worked separately (e.g., special education, bilingual education, general education), as well as garner input from families, students, and advocates in efforts to foster the transformative dialogue and practice necessary to dismantle the complex web of historical barriers that have excluded multiply marginalized youth and families for decades (Artiles, 2011; Baglieri, Bejoian, et al., 2011; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Drawing on previously mentioned work, Siuty (2019) advances Critical Inclusion as the most recent iteration of transformative equity-based inclusion. Critical Inclusion situates ableism as the driver for reinforcing a mythical normative center of schooling, asserts that youth at the

intersections of multiple markers of difference experience compounded marginalization, and promotes a social justice agenda. I refer to Critical Inclusion and transformative justice driven inclusion interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

Cultivating Critically Inclusive Teachers

Critical Efficaciousness

The path toward a more transformative justice-driven inclusive education agenda requires critical efficaciousness in teachers. Based on the work of Freire (1970/2018, 1973/2021), teachers must interrogate the ways we live, teach, and learn in a world full of oppressive systems and by raising our critical consciousness, we “will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond” to the inequities we encounter (Freire 1970/2018, p.81). Developing critical consciousness supports teachers’ ability to recognize power, privilege, and oppression embedded in schools that are situated within broader social, historical, and political contexts. Central to critical consciousness is examining one’s own role within these systems, and the pursuit of transformative action.

Extending on critical consciousness to account for the importance of self-efficacy in agency, Flores and colleagues (2018) suggest *critical efficaciousness*. A critically efficacious teacher is socioculturally conscious, has a strong sense of racial/ethnic identity, engages in critical reflection, believes in all students’ inherent worth, and trusts in their capacity to enact change (Flores et al., 2018). This study aimed to create guided opportunities for teacher candidates to foster their critical efficaciousness. Furthermore, a critically efficacious teacher can bring their lenses to their collaborative communities to promote inclusive practices. I turn now to exploring how the traditionally siloed nature

of preparation practices contributes to deficit-based framing of the language and literacy practices of multilingual learners labeled with disabilities.

Problematizing Siloed Practices

A transformative justice driven inclusive literacy agenda seeks to disrupt dominant discourses and practices in traditional literacy instruction that perpetuate deficit-thinking (Valencia, 1997) of multilingual learners with disabilities. Multilingual children make up the fastest growing school aged population (McFarland, et al. 2019). According to the Children's Defense Fund (2021), one in four children in the U.S. lived with at least one immigrant parent and likely speak a language other than English at home, and up to 33% of children under age 9 are multilingual (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). Despite their growing presence, multilingual children are often misunderstood, especially those with disabilities.

U.S. schools are steeped in practices that uphold notions of a white, nondisabled, monolingual English-speaking child as the normative center (Baglieri et al. 2011). This normative center has insidiously developed over time paralleling historical and political influences of our nation's fraught policies and cultural practices rooted in racism, ableism, and linguicism (Baynton, 2001). As a result, children that vary from this idealized norm, including multilingual children with disabilities, are often classified as deficient, labeled, and segregated (e.g., Graham & Slee, 2008).

Multilingual children with disabilities often receive language services or special education services, but not both (Cioè-Peña, 2017; Kangas, 2014). As a result, their literacy instruction may take a turn toward more narrowly defined, explicit, decontextualized approaches in isolated settings (Au, 2022; Harry & Klingner, 2014),

completely ignoring or denying the simultaneous rich oral language development they need (Goldenberg, 2008). Literacy is an interconnected complex set of processes that include word level processing, *and* language comprehension including vocabulary, building background knowledge on a wide range of topics, and nurturing critical thinking skills (Scarborough, 2003). MLLs labeled with disabilities risk receiving distilled instruction that is overly prescriptive, focused on “remediating” one set of processes, while failing to provide opportunities for critical inquiry (Skerrett & Smagorinsky, 2022). Narrow definitions of literacy also can risk reinforcing skills-focused instruction in reading and writing without also simultaneously embedding instruction with a larger justice oriented, language and identity affirming endeavor that is more expansive. Traditionally, special education programs tend to focus on a remediate approach which can risk the reinforcement of narrow definition of literacy. As such, special education teachers are also less likely to be trained in bilingual frameworks, language acquisition, or translanguaging pedagogy, while general education teachers are less likely to be trained in Universal Design for Learning or working with a diverse range of ability needs (Martínez-Álvarez, 2023). Teachers across preparation programs need the opportunity to learn with and from one another as they are making meaning of the various ways literacy is being conceptualized in their programs. This “cross-pollinating” (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016) may support teacher candidates in collaboratively designing literacy learning opportunities that are both meaningful and expansive. In doing so, these opportunities can foster MLLs with disabilities use of their full linguistic repertoires and promote collaborative sense making and inquiry of the world around them. Importantly,

they can also integrate evidence-based approaches to teaching foundational skills in elementary contexts.

Multiple systems and processes contribute to this binary thinking. Artiles and Kozleski (2007) have noted that our educational systems often force children into binary categories (e.g., white/nonwhite; abled/disabled; Multilingual Learner/Non MLL). Also, multilingual children with disabilities are forced into being either an “English learner” or disabled, but not both. Furthermore, Kangas (2021) has troubled the pervasive reliance in education on the question, “is-it-language-or-disability?” regarding multilingual children with disabilities. Through this language-or-disability “filter” educators attempt to understand academic performance and behaviors of multilingual children with disabilities by focusing on language or disability alone. Viewing multilingual children with disabilities from this problematic filter reinforces alleged deficits in ability or language existing within an individual, perpetuates notions of “struggling” (Hikida, 2018), and upholds ableist, monolingual assumptions of normality (Kangas, 2021). It also fails to account for the ways that language and disability intersect, especially considering that language and literacy are deeply enmeshed.

One possible contribution to this default to the “language-or-disability” filter is that special education and bilingual education operate predominantly in parallel, siloed spaces (Artiles et al., 2006; Martínez-Álvarez, 2021; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). Language instruction and support is centered in bilingual education programs, and the consideration of accommodations and instructional strategies related to disabilities, often from a remediation, “fixing” lens, is housed in special education.

The siloing of special education and bilingual education is reflective of the broader division of special and general education dating back decades. In 2002, The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education report (PCESE, 2002) highlighted that educators and policymakers alike think about special education and general education as two separate systems. Frizelle et al (2016) note that, "a shared accountability for the learning of *all* students was, and continues to be, woefully absent" (p. 11).

Thus, I contend that there is a great need for research to consider how teacher candidates can collaboratively disrupt the dominant frame of "struggling" as a characteristic within multilingual children with disabilities and instead see it as a systemic failing. The polarization of approaches to teaching literacy and siloing of teachers beginning from within preparation programs may contribute to a culture of misaligned and conflicting messages about how best to support this group of learners. A move toward more critical and inclusive literacy education for multilingual learners with disabilities requires a shift in the way bilingual and special education teachers are prepared. Teacher candidates need to be supported in recognizing the intersectional oppression fueled by ableism, racism, and linguicism in schools and reflect on their positionality in relation to these systems. Teachers need opportunities to practice collaboratively turning toward the question, "has the child had the opportunities they need to learn?" (Migliarini & Annamma, 2019). Teacher preparation programs are one place where teacher candidates in special education and bilingual education can practice critically interrogating how their own assumptions about normalcy, language, and literacy influence their classroom practices. The perspectives they each bring could

mutually contribute to a more expansive frame of inclusive education. Critical reflection is a necessary component to enact transformative change.

This study sought to offer teacher candidates from bilingual education and special education programs the opportunity to collectively engage with critical inquiry: to interrogate their own assumptions related to language, literacy, and disability; to reflect on fieldwork experiences and observations; and collectively problem solve with the intention of moving toward critical inclusion. Furthermore, the collaborative inquiry space also created opportunities for resource exploration that allowed teacher candidates to delve into more than what was being covered from within their respective programs related to this population of learners. This collective engagement aimed to prepare teacher candidates to collaborate in professional spaces. Collaboration across programs and roles is a necessary facet of enacting critically inclusive practices. I will briefly explore the role of collaboration in educational contexts, as well as review common ways that collaboration has been conceptualized in the coming sections.

Collaboration

Collaboration has long been considered one of the most important aspects of educational reform (e.g., Friend & Cook, 1990), particularly in response to legislation to support students with disabilities (e.g., No Child Left Behind, 2001; Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act, 2004) as well as the movement toward inclusive education. Collaboration is a high leverage practice for supporting students with disabilities (McLeskey & Brownell, 2015). Friend and Cook (1990) have defined collaboration as, “a style for interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a

common goal” (p. 72). As schools and districts increasingly adopt more inclusive practices, collaboration will be a key driver in its successful implementation.

Researchers have also long been calling for more opportunities in teacher preparation programs to foster collaborative practice (e.g., Graham et al., 1997). Teacher candidates benefit from opportunities to practice navigating complex scenarios addressing concepts they have learned about in coursework (Brownell et al., 2020). This practice allows for the development of fluent performance and situated knowledge. The siloed nature of many teacher preparation programs means that many teacher candidates are not being afforded guided and supportive practice in interdisciplinary collaboration, leaving novice teachers ill-prepared to engage in effective collaboration. This may result in the commonplace practice of seeing and briefly checking with colleagues that can yield an illusion that collaboration is happening. Plainly, interaction alone does not constitute collaboration (Friend & Barron, 2019). Collaboration requires intention, effort, and skill. Over the past few decades, there has been an increase in drawing on frameworks and structures in schools to facilitate collaboration as well as growing efforts to incorporate more *critical* collaborative inquiry within teacher preparation.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are one avenue to exercise collaboration across the general education-special education divide. Schools are increasingly adopting PLC frameworks in response to national initiatives to transform schools and increase student learning outcomes (Dufour & Dufour, 2010). Three big ideas undergird the aims of PLCs. These include: 1) a commitment to high levels of

learning for *all* students; 2) the imperative of a collaborative and collective effort to fulfill that effort; and 3) the intense focus on results that enables a school to respond to the needs of each student, inform teacher practice, and fuel continuous improvement (Friziellie et al., 2016).

A PLC is defined as an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve (Dufour et al, 2010). Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that “the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators” (p. 11). Some of the cultural shifts that need to be in place to adopt a PLC stance include: the need for teachers to build a collaborative culture and systems that promote effectiveness and equity, and that teachers must take collective responsibility for all students. Reflection leads to improved practice when based on data of student learning and when done collectively (Hattie, 2008).

PLCs are guided by: (a) a focus on the learning, (b) a collaborative culture, and (c) a results orientation. These processes are shaped by four critical questions: (1) What is it we expect our students to learn? (2) How will we know when they have learned it? (3) How will we respond when some students do not learn? And (4) How will we respond when some students already know it? Anchoring on these questions allows educators to learn from and with each other to develop a clear path for rigorous instruction. Unfortunately, Frizielle et al. (2016) note that there is a lack of clear expectations for the inclusion and participation of special education in the work of PLCs. There may be many reasons for this including conflicts in mindset, deficit-based framing of students with disabilities, and medicalized models of disability that are pervasive in

the structure and implementation of current special education systems. Logistical factors may include the lack of time and capacity in managing caseloads that span multiple grade levels.

Approaching PLCs with a critically inclusive stance may be one driver to change. To apply the PLC framework to advance transformative justice driven inclusive literacy practices, two critical beliefs about learning must be adopted: (1) all students can learn at high levels, and (2) teams must take collective responsibility for the learning of *all* students (Dufour & Dufour; Frizelle et al., 2016). Educators should work to disrupt the pervasive tendency to focus on what students are “lacking” which results in immediately looking toward the special education teacher to “fix” the problem of struggling learners, and instead, educators should seek to cultivate a culture of collective accountability to all students rooted in strengths.

There is a need for teacher candidates to have the opportunity to collaborate in teacher preparation settings to be better prepared to advocate and participate in school-based PLCs. While limited in scope, there is a small body of research pointing to the positive impact of PLCs on preservice teacher learning (e.g., Dillard, 2016; Franzak, 2002). Dillard (2016) first designed coursework about PLCs for secondary teacher candidates pursuing Educational Leadership and then followed those teachers throughout their first year of teaching as they participated in site-based PLCs. Findings from this study point to the benefits of novice teachers developing mutual accountability in supporting student learning as well as emphasizing the importance of collaboration as a key part of teaching. Furthermore, there is an emerging body of research tied to

interdisciplinary critical inquiry more broadly in teacher preparation that I will explore in the following section.

Models of PLC Implementation

Under the more modern umbrella of PLCs lies *The Critical Friend Collaboration Model*. Also known as Critical Friend Groups (CFGs), CFGs are practitioner driven self-study groups that are designed for teachers to meet to share their practice and improve student learning (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Miller, 2014). Structured protocols are used to facilitate exploration of teaching strategies, conduct peer observations, and analyze evidence of student growth (Franzak, 2002). For example, the consultancy protocol invites participants to bring a focus question to the group to address a specific dilemma, like a problem of practice. Participants ask probing questions and discuss the problem while the presenter takes notes and shares takeaways that they may apply to their dilemma. In addition to being a transformative space for meaningful professional development, CFGs can also be spaces to bolster collegial relationships and afford teachers opportunities to provide much needed support to one another (Dunne & Honts, 1998). Participating in CFGs may also contribute to higher expectations for student achievement (Dunne et al., 2000). Franzak (2002) notes, “the collaborative inquiry model presented by CFGs is grounded in the belief that teachers of all levels can mentor and support one another” (p.278). This situates teacher candidates as knowledgeable with valuable contributions to make to one another.

Traditionally, CFGs occur within job embedded, or school site, contexts. As a result, much of the literature about CFGs includes in-service teachers (Dunne & Honts, 1998). It is also unclear to the extent that special education teachers participate in site

based CFGs alongside general education peers, or how CFGs may be used specifically to enhance learning and outcomes for multiply marginalized multilingual youth labeled with disabilities.

However, there is a small body of research indicating the potential for CFGs to support preservice teacher agency in enacting inclusive practices (Franzak, 2002; Graham et al., 1997). For example, Franzak (2002) conducted an interpretative case study with a preservice teacher in which the preservice teacher participated in a CFG in her school placement as well as incorporated the CFG structure into a seminar for preservice teachers. Franzak found that the participant's experience in the CFG helped enrich her vision for the profession and provided a safe space for her to find her voice, and collaboration toward change (Franzak, 2002). Franzak's participant found benefit in using the consultancy protocol as means to work through a challenging dilemma in her student teaching placement. After the protocol session, the participant was able to reframe the problem and found the agency she needed to address the problem directly herself. The participant also described how the CFGs contributed to her sense of becoming an activist teacher. In summary, the exploration of collective inquiry spaces may serve as a productive lever to allow teacher candidates to learn how to engage in collaborative practices.

Language and Literacy

In the following section, I explore the importance of literacy instruction as well as explore some pedagogical approaches that may serve as points of exploration in advancing critically inclusive literacy practices. The pedagogies offered here coincide with humanizing approaches to teaching and learning that align well with bilingual

education tenets as well as inclusive education (Martínez-Álvarez, 2023). Meaning, these approaches have an emphasis on thinking about moving away from assimilative, normative structures pervasive in U.S. schools. These approaches promote an ongoing dialogue between teachers and students, help situate and frame multilingual learners labeled with disabilities as agentic, and seek to surface and support learner interests and strengths (Martínez-Álvarez, 2023). Finally, I then briefly put these approaches into conversation with a popular approach commonly taught within special education preparation to find possible points of convergence even despite the stark differences in approaches. This section is not intended to be prescriptive, or exhaustive, but to serve to highlight *some* of the approaches that Teacher candidates may consider when thinking about supporting multilingual learners with disabilities from a critically inclusive stance.

Literacy As a Civil Right

Before delving into pedagogies, I first discuss literacy as a civil rights issue. A transformative inclusive agenda views literacy as a civil right, one that situates literacy not as a set of neutral skills, but rather as a cultural, historical, and political practice (Greene, 2008). Literacy as a civil right acknowledges the importance of young people learning to read, write, and communicate in multiple modalities *critically* to interrogate and engage with the world around them, including countering oppressive educational systems (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Winn and Behizadeh (2011) argue that a literacy as civil rights framing invites youth to collaborate with adult allies, values their cultural and linguistic repertoires, and provides opportunities to have their voices heard, ultimately resulting in a disruption of the school to prison pipeline. The dramatic increase of

standardized testing has only served to reinforce narrow views of what counts as literacy and has often led to reductive, isolated, decontextualized instruction, especially for youth of Color and those identified with disabilities (e.g., Greene, 2008). Winn and Behizadeh (2011) further offer, “students have a right to their own literate practices and the mainstream academic literate practices needed for college and job success; to deny either is to impede students from developing the rich literate identities that are rightfully theirs” (p.166). Thus, framing literacies as a civil right is one critical step in the direction of disrupting the normative center of schooling.

Critical Literacies

Another path toward a transformative agenda is looking toward critical literacies. The growing body of scholarship around *critical literacies* has “the potential to restore the right to be literate and that repositions marginalized youth as deserving and worthy of a robust education” (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011, p. 163). Morrell and Morrell (2021) offer that while developing academic literacy may change the trajectory toward prison, “*critical literacy* will produce young people capable of dismantling an inequitable system” (p. 51). The notion of critical literacies offers a philosophical shift from the way literacy has traditionally been conceptualized as a neutral, apolitical process of reading and writing to one that is anchored in sociocultural and political understandings of using language and literacy as tools for critical analysis and transformation (Mosley Wetzel et al., 2019).

The critical literacies scholarship has been influenced in recent decades by a wide variety of theoretical traditions (see Vasquez et al. 2019) but is anchored in Freire’s (1970) work calling to the importance of examining power relationships through

language, literacy, and culture for social transformation (Janks & Vasquez, 2011). Additionally, Morrell and Morrell (2021) situate critical literacies in a broader transformative agenda that seeks to disrupt the psychology of oppression, school to prison pipeline, and cultivate radical self-love. At its core, a critical literacies perspective seeks to cultivate young people who see themselves as powerful change agents. A critical literacy perspective can offer educators a frame for what literacy instruction may entail.

While literacy is taken up in many ways in the literature, it is most commonly defined as reading and writing. Instruction in the U.S. over the past twenty years has largely been influenced by the results of the National Reading Panel (2000) findings indicating that the five core components of reading include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. A critical literacies perspective does not necessarily seek to remove or replace traditional aspects of reading and writing but acknowledges that decoding or spelling does not in and of itself lead to liberation (Morrell & Morrell, 2021). Critical literacies scholarship defines the concept of literacy in pluralistic, expansive ways that accounts for myriad ways that we enact literacy practices, and engage with a wide variety of materials, including viewing our environments as texts (Vasquez et al., 2019). Furthermore, critical literacies can be a concept, framework, or teaching and learning perspective (Vasquez et al., 2019), and is ultimately about a set of skills or dispositions to language and text that enable young people to critically “read the word and the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In addition to the various ways one can orient to critical literacies, Vasquez and colleagues (2019) highlight some key tenets that have been outlined in the related

research which have been collapsed here for brevity: (a) critical literacies is about an ingrained critical perspective way of being and doing that encourages young people to critically read the world around them; (b) critical literacies draws upon the issues and perspectives that children notice and encourages the connection to their own lived cultural and linguistic experiences; (c) a critical literacies perspective acknowledges that texts are socially constructed by author(s) that seek to convey a message and bring a unique perspective, and as such, can never be neutral while simultaneously acknowledging that the way we engage with texts can never be neutral either based on our own lived experiences and positionalities; (d) critical literacies engages with multimodal texts, expanding on the written word to include images, videos, labels, sounds, movement in ways that also promote viewing the world around us as “text” that can be read; and (e) perhaps most saliently, critical literacies involves the interrogating and sense making of the larger sociopolitical systems in which we situate our lives.

Critical Literacies and Multilingual Children

Vasquez and colleagues (2019) note the need for critical literacies scholarship to further extend to multilingual learners. While critical literacies tenets seek to draw on learners’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), promote the use of multiple languages, and invite students to bring in cultural artifacts, it also seems plausible under a system steeped in norms around monolingual English, that multilingual learners, and particularly those with or “at risk” for learning disabilities, seem likely to be wrongly assumed not to have the language or literacy skills necessary to engage with critical literacy practices. Further critical literacies scholarship in this area could also be informed by considering how raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) influence

the ways that language is racialized and intersects with disability (Cioè-Peña, 2021) and to critique the types of language that is privileged. Additionally, an increased focus on justice issues related to immigration, transnationalism, and linguicism, may more closely align with the lived experiences of multilingual students.

Multilingual learners are not being served well by traditional approaches. In fourth grade, a mere 10% achieve proficiency or above in literacy compared to 45% of white peers (NCES, 2019). While these numbers are discouraging for both groups, the gap is striking, and the consequences are profound. Bilingualism is a gift and asset that deserves to be fostered, developed, and sustained, yet many schools seek to assimilate these young people into English only schooling. One way to resist these assimilative approaches to learning, is to turn toward pedagogical approaches to language and literacy instruction that align with the goals of critical literacies. Two such approaches include translanguaging and TrUDL.

Translanguaging

A translanguaging pedagogy views multilingualism as dynamic and allows for students to employ their full linguistic repertoires; meaning they need not only adhere to the language officially used for instruction (Garcia et al., 2017). Translanguaging classrooms are built collaboratively as teachers and students draw on all their language practices, including their nonverbal linguistic practices, to teach and learn in creative and critical ways (Cioè-Peña, 2021; Garcia et al., 2017). Importantly, translanguaging pedagogy can be taken up in any classroom, dual language or not. Literacy is ripe for opportunities allowing for translanguaging. For example, the use of texts that have been constructed with the strategic use of two languages in relationship with each other can

be a culturally and linguistically supportive and affirming approach (Garcia et al., 2017). Additionally, allowing students to draw from their full linguistic repertoires enables students to: (a) offer opinions on issues raised by texts and question text regardless of the language of text, (b) compare and contrast language features developing their metalinguistic awareness, and (c) deepen their engagement (Escamilla et al., 2014; Garcia et al., 2017). Translanguaging during literacy instruction enables multilingual students to orally participate in text inspired discussion, even if they aren't yet accessing the language of the text, draw from their own voices in their writing as they incorporate meaningful dialogue, and connect culturally to content.

TrUDL

Drawing on scholars who have called for interdisciplinary research (e.g., Baglieri et al., 2011; Castro & Artiles, 2021), Cioè-Peña (2021) is one scholar putting special education and bilingual education literature in conversation to create more inclusive learning environments for multilingual children with disabilities. She proposes an overlay of translanguaging with Universal Design for Learning, referred to as TrUDL (Cioè-Peña, 2021). UDL draws from universal design architecture principles, incorporates decades of research on neuroscience, and is largely talked about and taken up in special education discourse (Chardin & Novak, 2021). UDL is a framework for educators to consider the broadest physical and intellectual access to learning environments as a counter to a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Designed to challenge educators to transfer power to students so they cultivate agency in their learning (Chardin & Novak, 2021), UDL is grounded in the following three principles: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action

and expression (CAST, 2018). In TrUDL, Cioè-Peña (2021) identifies points of commonality, noting the ways that translanguaging and UDL both *proactively* foster multiple means of access, expression, and engagement. A TrUDL framework could be applied to classrooms of all types.

Structured Literacy

I now consider how drawing from another increasingly common approach to instruction, *structured literacy* (IDA, 2014), which has been described as effective for teaching students with disabilities and those at risk to be labeled as struggling readers, can also be aligned with critical inclusive literacy practices **when** there is strategic application in conjunction with other aforementioned approaches and an intentional critical lens applied. Because the International Dyslexia Association first introduced the term, it may have led many educators to incorrectly conclude structured literacy (SL) is to be used uniquely for students with dyslexia, or other identified disabilities (Spear-Swirling, 2022). As a result, it has become an increasingly common focus in special education preparation programs, particularly for teaching at the elementary level, and not as widely taken up in general education or bilingual education programs. Critics of SL point out that much of the research informing SL is from studies with white monolingual English students thus increasing the risk of reinforcing monoglossic language ideologies and deficit framing of what counts as language and literacy (Flores & Rosa, 2015) and pathologizing language and literacy differences as deficits (Ferrell et al., 2024). Additional critiques include how SL also fails to account for the sociocultural and pragmatic uses of language that will differ for multilingual students (Ferrell et al., 2024). The differences in approach to instruction as well as the underlying ideologies

and research bases for differing paradigms is another factor contributing to the siloing (and often polarization) across programs. There is a need for SL to draw on more of the multi and biliteracy literature (Villegas, 2024). As the fields hopefully move at least somewhat in the direction of more integration and less polarization, in the meantime, teacher candidates need opportunities to make sense of the varied ways they are learning to become literacy teachers.

In summary, a transformative justice-driven inclusive literacy agenda takes up an expansive frame of literacy while also recognizing that being taught to read and write printed text is often part of that frame, particularly in elementary school. Learning to read is a complex process of language comprehension skills becoming increasingly strategic and word recognition skills becoming increasingly automatic (Scarborough et al., 2001). As English is an opaque language, all children deserve early access to high quality instruction that gives them the tools they need to become emergent readers and writers, which drawing from SL principles could afford, especially when taught alongside connections to their other languages (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). A transformative justice-driven inclusive literacy agenda acknowledges that some children may find certain components of this process more challenging than others but resists the dominant default to affix a label of “struggling”; instead, it seeks to consider if the child has had the instructional opportunities they need while remaining skeptical and critical of the ways dominant methods may be oppressive. This agenda also considers language processes as dynamic and fluid and seeks to reinforce learners drawing on their vast linguistic repertoires to communicate and engage in meaningful literacy tasks. Multilingual learners with disabilities may indeed benefit from some degree of explicit,

systematic instruction in developing word recognition or language skills (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020) while also rejecting the notion that this encapsulates the entirety of their reading instruction, or that this instruction requires special education services in segregated settings. Multilingual learners also need to build cross linguistic connections, develop metalinguistic awareness, and have their identities and strengths affirmed (Escamilla et al., 2014; Ferrell et al., 2024). Ideally this includes strategies and/or bilingual programming that allows for instruction in all their languages (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020; Ferrell et al., 2024; Garcia et al., 2017) while also facilitating critical sense making (Skerrett & Smagorinsky, 2022). Teacher candidates from different programs could benefit from opportunities to pool knowledges and pedagogical resources to collaboratively and *intentionally* plan for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities.

Critical Inclusive Teacher Education

There is an emerging body of scholarship that considers the reimagining, critiquing, and consideration of more expansive and critical approaches to supporting language and literacy development within teacher preparation and across programs (e.g., Beneke, 2021; Siuty & Beneke, 2021). That said, there is a clear lack in the traditional special education empirical literature related to supporting special education teacher identity or critical engagement with issues of racism, ableism, or linguicism. However, recently, critical scholars have drawn on a disability studies in education (DSE) perspective that negates the medicalized, or individual, model of disability and instead seek to highlight the systemic and structural barriers that lead to exclusion and advance transformative justice driven inclusive education. I point to related examples to

situate this study within the broader landscape of teacher preparation toward critical inclusion.

Building on the work of critical scholars that trouble the ways racism and ableism intersect to uphold notions of “normalcy” (e.g., Annamma et al., 2013; Baglieri et al., 2011), Beneke (2021) investigated how spatial dimensions of four white nondisabled teacher candidates’ P-12 educational histories influenced the ways they made meaning of whiteness and ability throughout their own schooling and teacher preparation program. In a participatory multiple case study, Beneke employed critical conversational journey mapping (CCJM) as a means for teacher candidates to reflect on their conversations and messaging related to racism and ableism throughout their educational journey. Journey maps and interview data were analyzed drawing from socio-spatial dialectic (Dwyer & Jones 2000; Soja 2010) and whiteness and ability as property (Annamma et al., 2013; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011) perspectives. Findings indicated that teacher candidates’ histories revealed decades of upholding whiteness and nondisabled as normative while at the same time creating deficit-based assumptions outside of this notion of normality.

Similarly, Siuty and Beneke (2021) employed CCJM, but this time with teacher candidates that identified as dis/abled. They applied sociocultural (Rogoff, 2002) and desiring dis/ability (Goodley, 2014) theories to analyze the ways that dis/ability identities had been constructed over time. Teacher candidates in their study made sense of the various ways ableism had presented in their life histories, but they also found that white teachers failed to engage with race as a factor in their experiences. These examples point to a powerful practice that teacher preparation programs can implement to foster

critical reflection. It also highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for guided support to explicitly engage with the way race intersects with other facets of identities.

Finally, in a participatory case study involving P-3 special education and general education teachers in a yearlong inquiry group, Beneke and colleagues (2022) enacted DisCrit literacies as way to read school as text. Their inquiry groups operated similarly to Freirean culture circles (Freire, 1970) in which each member brought a dilemma (e.g., problem of practice, student work sample) for the group to discuss. They also read children's and professional literature, listened to podcasts, and composed their own pedagogical and creative writing. Their group explored how teachers might disrupt intersecting oppressions of racism, ableism, and linguisticism "to create justice-driven early literacy classrooms where multiply-marginalized young children could be their whole selves" (p. 4). Beneke et al. (2022) offers intriguing points of connection to the current study on levels such as addressing critical self-reflection, interdisciplinary collaboration, and connecting to field work all while anchored in disrupting normative schooling practices.

Collectively, these findings, along with findings in earlier sections discussing preparing teachers to work in PLCs, and through Critical Friend Groups, highlight the promise of interdisciplinary collaboration and critical inquiry to advance critical inclusive education. While it is evident that these approaches are being embedded within some teacher education spaces, they are limited in scope. Pugach and colleagues (2014) reviewed literature focused on general education and special education collaboration. While they reviewed several studies, much of them were embedded within course design, or included perspectives from faculty, and lacked a clear indication of taking up

broader critically inclusive approaches accounting for a spectrum of diversity. There is a clear need for more interdisciplinary research with preservice teachers, including research that considers how teacher candidates are making sense of their coursework, fieldwork, and developing their understanding of teacher role and identity in relation to working toward critically inclusive practices. To create coalitions seeking transformative inclusive practices for multilingual youth with disabilities, teacher educators need to provide opportunities for bilingual and special education preservice teachers to collaborate and consider their perspectives. Preservice teachers also need opportunities to foster their critical consciousness through opportunities to critically reflect and interrogate racist, ableist, and monolingualistic underlying assumptions on what is meant by “good” language learner and/or “reader”. There is an equally important need for supporting teacher candidates to employ agency and make sense of their field experiences. Once preservice teachers enter their school sites, they will be expected to participate in PLCs, thus offering teacher candidates opportunities to collaborate during teacher education is in pursuit of supporting their capacity to enact transformative inclusive practices upon entering the field.

Theoretical Framing

In the current study, I drew from theoretical terrains that contest deficit frames of MLLs with disabilities as well as foster critical and collaborative reflective learning spaces. These include drawing from *critical sociocultural theory* and a *Critical Disability Raciolinguistics Perspective*. Together, these lenses helped inform the ways I considered how teacher candidates made sense of learning from and with their peers, engaged in collective problem solving and reflection as they grappled with the

challenges of applying theory to practice, and (re)imagined together what literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities entails.

Critical Sociocultural Theory

For my study, I adopted critical sociocultural theory (Lewis & Moje, 2003). Lewis and Moje (2003) layer onto sociocultural theory by accounting for the role that identity, agency, and power play in learning while simultaneously considering how micro *and* larger macrosystems influence interactions with one another. They argue that mainstream versions of sociocultural theory tend to focus on how people in interaction with one another make meaning and learn new ideas as individuals within particular contexts, or rather, at a microlevel, “and less around the *systems* (sic) of meaning and power that people build, reproduce, and contest in and through their interactions with one another” (Lewis & Moje, 2003, p. 1991). I pointed to critical framings of inclusive education as well as the need to adopt critical pedagogies. The current study is also interested in: (a) how teacher candidates are defining literacy; (b) their beliefs around literacy, language, and inclusion; and (c) in how teachers make sense of their experiences, beliefs, and engage in collective sense making vis a vis collaborative problem solving and learning. Drawing on critical sociocultural theory allowed for me to examine the ways that teacher candidates’ beliefs and meaning making were being informed both within the microsystems of inter and intrapersonal learning within a collective inquiry learning space, while also attending to the ways that macrosystems, such as the paralleled preparation programs, school and district contexts, and broader sociopolitical climate influenced discourse. Taken together, this lens, coupled with an attention to how “systems of power get built, reproduced, and contested in subtle and

usually invisible ways during everyday processes of learning, producing knowledge, and making meaning” (Lewis & Moje, 2003, p. 1992) helped me analyze the multitude of factors that contribute to how teacher candidates engage with each other to reify and/or resist dominant narratives and practices toward MLLs with disabilities and literacy instruction.

Taking into account the review of the literature in the area of cross program collaboration and inquiry within teacher education, as well as the theoretical landscape, I contend that there is a need for more research looking at how teacher preparation programs can better support teacher candidates on a path to become more critically inclusively minded educators. More specifically, teacher candidates need opportunities to reflect on the convergence and mismatch between theoretical underpinnings of coursework and the practical applications of fieldwork. Teacher candidates also stand to benefit from an opportunity to collaborate, collectively reflect, and problem solve around the ways that they are supporting literacy development for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. In the next chapter, I describe the research questions informing the study as well as present methods for the research design, data collection, and analysis.

Chapter 3: Methods

Overview of Research Design

This study sought to understand: how different teacher preparation programs within one large urban university prepare their teacher candidates to provide literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities; and how a small group of graduate students across teacher preparation programs collaborated in pursuit of justice-oriented literacy practices for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. My epistemological assumption was that teacher candidates would engage in meaning making processes through collaboration that informed the way they viewed their literacy instruction and their learners. In the study, I was tasked to foster an open and collaborative culture of trust and respect among myself as the researcher and the teacher candidates. An open and collaborative culture allows for risk taking, dialogue, and honors a diversity of perspectives (Aguilar & Cohen, 2022). I also acknowledge that the multiple perspectives of the participants were deeply contextual. For these reasons, I used qualitative inquiry to explore the following research questions: (1) How do different teacher preparation programs within one institution prepare teacher candidates to support multilingual youth labeled as disabled in literacy? (2) How do teacher candidates across different programs understand literacy instruction for multilingual youth labeled as disabled? (3) How does an interdisciplinary critical inquiry group contribute to the ways that teacher candidates think about supporting multilingual youth labeled as disabled? And (4) What tensions and contradictions surface for teacher candidates as they participate in an interdisciplinary critical inquiry group designed to support literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled as disabled?

I employed a participatory critical inquiry case study design (Reilly, 2010) to investigate how teacher candidates from different disciplines collectively analyzed and reflected upon their literacy and language ideologies and practices to transform thinking and action (Reilly, 2010). This design approach aims for proposing transformative change and views participants as critical sources of knowledge and contributors to the research process. A participatory case study is also locally and contextually situated, both constructed by the participants and for the participants (Reilly, 2010). In this case, the context of study was graduate students from the special education and general education programs within one college of education in a large, urban university. One main goal of using this design for the study was to facilitate authentic knowledge that would benefit the participants as they develop as critical agents of change to disrupt the status quo, as well as offer insights to the college and programs they are members of to continue the collaborative work beyond the scope of the study (Reilly, 2010).

I engaged in multiple data collection methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to best understand the contextual experiences of the teacher candidates in relation to literacy and language ideology in their preparation programs, and the ways they view and engage in a collaborative problem-solving process. The research process was facilitated by me as the researcher, but increasingly informed and guided by input from participants. This study is bounded within one large urban university college of education which allowed for analysis across and within the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data generation included: gathering contextual information about the different graduate programs that participants are enrolled in, conducting individual semi-structured interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017), and facilitating six critical inquiry collective

sessions (Beneke, et al., 2022; Dunne & Honts, 1998; Freire, 1970), which guided participants through a series of opportunities to engage in collaborative problem solving and reflection. Data collection occurred over the course of one year from the spring 2025 to the spring 2026.

To be as responsive as possible to the participants as well as to decenter the hierarchical role of researcher/participant (Reilly, 2010), most of the time spent in collaborative inquiry collective sessions was informed by and with the participants. I attempted to align to a core value of participatory case study design that “knowledge production and its use is mutually owned and democratic” (p. 3). Additionally, creating space for participant input helps ensure that participants are engaging in issues, dialogue, and problem-solving practices that are important to their own learning. Kindon (2005), notes that in participatory design, “information is generated, analyzed, and reflected upon in the group in a way that helps to transform the thinking and realities of that group” (p.25). Through the consideration of their wants and needs, as a facilitator, I provided a framing and structure for the group in a way that sought to elevate their input. For example, in our first session, I provided a summary of themes that emerged from the initial interviews. Together, we considered a variety of options for how to utilize our time and engage in goal setting. Based on input, we loosely followed an adapted consultancy protocol (CLEE, 2021) for engaging in dilemma dialogues. We also explored some intersectional frameworks and planning resources. The structure and schedule of the critical inquiry collective was iteratively designed alongside participants as they indicated questions, concerns, or themes surfaced in the interview process and throughout the inquiry sessions (Reilly, 2010). It was also informed by what I learned

during the information gathering stage of the respective programs.

Context

Participants

The study participants were recruited from one large university located in an urban area of the pacific northwest. Phase one participants included five faculty members who were key personnel within the teacher education programs within the School of Education. To protect anonymity of these personnel participants as well as the specific university context, I reference them all as School of Education personnel. A table with pseudonyms, program affiliation, and roles was intentionally omitted.

I also recruited a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of special education and general education teacher candidates from within the college. In the initial data collection phase with faculty, I learned about a jointly enrolled course focused on inclusion and narrowed my recruitment focus to the three sections of the course offered at the beginning of fall quarter 2025. I attended the first meeting of each of the three sections in person to provide an overview of my project and share a recruitment flyer. I also posted recruitment flyers on bulletin boards throughout the college of education. Interested teacher candidates completed a succinct Google form with questions about availability, program and endorsement info, general availability, and a space for questions for follow up. Eight teacher candidates completed the interest form and six responded to invitations for initial interviews. After individual interviews with the six interested teacher candidates, one declined to continue forward citing scheduling conflicts. Five teacher candidates, three from EPP and two from SPEPP, remained to participate in the collaborative inquiry group sessions. See Table 2 for teacher

candidate descriptive information. Any personally identifiable information about the participants has been de-identified and names are pseudonyms. Teacher candidates were invited to select their own pseudonyms, only one of whom opted to. See Appendix A for the consent form.

Table 1

Teacher Candidate Participants

	Jocelyn	Melissa	Ethan	Brittany	Madison
Program	SPEPP	EPP	EPP	SPEPP	EPP
Endorsement	N/A	N/A	Bilingual	Reading	N/A
Age range	mid-late 30s	mid-late 40s	early 30s	early 30s	early 20s
Racial identity	Other, NR	White	Asian	White	White
Gender identity	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female
Disability status	N/A	No	Yes, ADHD	“Not diagnosed”	No
Languages spoken	English	English “very little Spanish”	English Vietnamese Spanish	English	English Spanish “non fluently”

Note. NR= not reported; N/A= not applicable

Setting

The setting for this study was within one research focused institution in a large urban area located in the pacific northwest of the U.S. that I will call *River Bank University*. I recruited participants from within the elementary preparation program (EPP) and the special education preparation program (SPEPP). My first research question addressed how the programs prepared teacher candidates to work with multilingual youth labeled as disabled; as such, a deeper dive into the contextual factors of each program such as the aims, mission and vision statements, and a review of literacy practices, will be outlined in greater detail in the findings section. In general, the

teacher certification programs within River Bank's School of Education are graduate programs that prepare teacher candidates for initial licensure. Teacher candidates may also elect to pursue reading, bilingual, and/or multilingual endorsements with added coursework. The programs share similar commitments to social justice and engagement in identity focused teacher education (e.g., Varghese et al., 2005). For example, teacher candidates across these programs participate in race-based caucusing to interrogate the influence of their racialized identities on their teaching. Critical, identity focused conversations are held throughout the entirety of the programs through weekly seminars and embedded within coursework. As such, this context offered a unique opportunity to engage participants in cross-disciplinary collaboration grounded in similar justice-oriented stances for the purpose of education. Both programs require teacher candidates to participate in fieldwork that includes ongoing coaching and feedback cycles with a program affiliated coach.

Researcher Positionality

Prologue. After being an English language teacher, an extensive traveler, and political/community organizer, I applied to be a 4th grade Spanish teacher at a dual language school. To my surprise, I was offered the special education teacher position. I accepted the job despite having very limited background experience working with students with disabilities or special education because I was committed to what the school was doing and wanted to be a part of it. My justice orientation was at its youth, but ripening (and probably with a dose of saviorism, if I'm honest). That decision changed the trajectory of my entire professional future.

One of the most important teachers I have had in my career was a parent. I was

in my first year of teaching and the district proposed placing her second-grade son in a self-contained classroom for extensive support with academic and executive functioning needs at a different school, for the third year in a row. His mom was staunchly against this option and refused to consider pulling him out of his neighborhood dual language school. As much as he needed academic and behavioral support, he also needed his bilingualism and biculturalism nurtured and celebrated. And she was right. He deserved to be taught and included alongside his grade level peers. The subsequent four years of collaboration with this family completely changed the way I viewed inclusion. Was it hard? Yes. Did we always make the right decisions? No. And I continue to grapple and reflect on the ways that I was complicit in problematic practices.

I watched this Mexican woman who immigrated as an adult, refuse to let the American school system tell her what was best for her kid. She became a dear friend. As a result of being trained in a special education and bilingual education programs, I uncovered how generative and important the learning across these spaces became in helping me enact practices that accounted for the multiple layers of nuance that multilingual learners labeled with disabilities require. For instance, I built relationships with my gen ed colleagues to cultivate agency and trust that disrupted traditional notions of, “this is my kid, this is your kid”. I also advocated for bilingual and biliteracy instruction for all kids against a harmful narrative that kids who are struggling can’t or shouldn’t learn in more than one language. I watched a student who struggled for years to learn to read, write, and verbally communicate in both of her languages due to severe dyslexia and apraxia of speech become a poet and outspoken disrupter of injustice. I can’t help but think this was in part due to the collaboration and commitment with her

general education teachers to foster her strengths in compassion, creativity, comprehension, and critical thinking along the way. She left us for middle school approaching grade level in all standards. And most importantly, she appeared confident and assured in herself as a learner. I occasionally still get mail from her with her poems or art inside; she's now in art school. Along this path, I navigated tensions across the special education and bilingual education professional spaces of which I was a member. In bilingual education spaces, I often felt like the only person raising issues of access accounting for learner variability, and in special education spaces, I often felt like the only person surfacing the need to attend to race, language, identity, and culture. As I move forward, I staunchly believe that our students and their families' strengths should be the anchors and drivers of this work. I envision dramatically increased convergence across traditionally siloed spaces to better prepare teachers in addressing the intersecting needs of multilingual youth labeled with and/or at risk of disabilities and am energized by those in the field ahead of me who have also called for this disruption. These experiences, and the years that have followed have greatly informed my personal interest in this dissertation study and contributing to the critically inclusive teacher education literature.

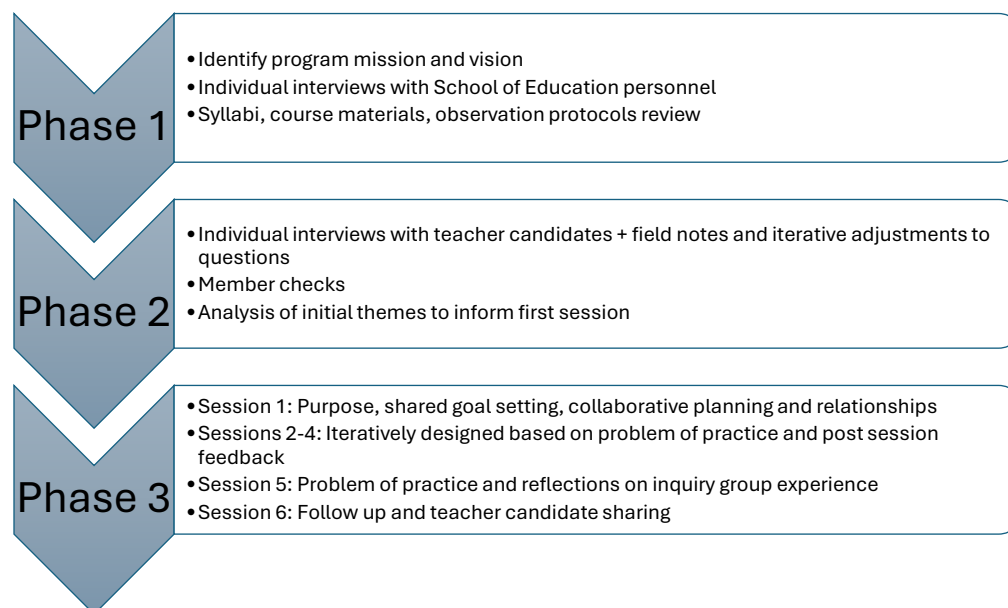
My lenses. As a white, cisgendered, nondisabled, primarily English-speaking woman, I benefited (and continue to benefit) greatly from an educational system designed for people like me. Most of my teachers looked and sounded like me across K-12 and higher education, and I was never positioned in deficit ways based on my race, language, or disability status. Alternatively, I was encouraged to pursue language learning because I was a "good reader" and "good at language". Because of my

whiteness and “academic” English and Spanish proficiency, I have been afforded undeserved privilege and have been positioned as “highly marketable” and “lucky” for being bilingual in ways that bilingual people of Color and/or heritage speakers have not. Yet, also through my years of living and working outside of the U.S. as a language learner, I have developed extreme compassion for the experience and the way language is deeply enmeshed with identity. When I first became a teacher, I was naïve to the structural barriers that many of the children and families I worked with were facing and acknowledge my own complicity in perpetuating oppressive practices through my own underexplored implicit racist, ableist, and monolingualistic ideologies, despite being bilingual. However, as I moved through TESOL and bilingual education programs, and engaged with deep reflective practice related to race, culture, and language in the context of dual language teaching, I experienced how transformative the work can be to praxis, including the importance of dialogue and collaboration. I also noted how these explicit conversations were largely absent in special education spaces, where the focus was exclusively on disability with little to no attention to intersectionality. I organically negotiated a lot of “cross pollinating,” as well as tension, over the years as a teacher navigating the bilingual ed and special ed spheres and wished there had been more direction for how to engage in deliberate interdisciplinary collaboration. This was also readily apparent in comparing the way literacy was conceptualized across both programs as well which I often viewed as in tension instead of the need to consider drawing from a variety of approaches to best support diverse learning profiles. In my work moving forward, I seek to find points of convergence to put the siloed and often competing literacy approaches more in conversation. I come to this with a “forever

teacher” heart and as such, my aim is never to blame teachers; rather to help interrogate their own positionalities and critically engage with how we can collectively disrupt marginalizing systems by simultaneously modeling the process of vulnerability and lifelong learning. I acknowledge that while I sought to engage in the study alongside participants and elevate their questions, concerns, and interests, they inevitably viewed me as a researcher and facilitator. Also, due to my years of teaching experience working across and within both disciplines, they also positioned me as “the expert” within our space.

Data Collection

This study employed a variety of qualitative data generation methods. First, I needed to situate the teacher candidates within their respective programs of study by understanding key aims and pedagogical approaches. I also needed to make sense of teacher candidates’ understanding of literacy, language, and collaboration for literacy instruction for MLLs labeled with disabilities. Data collection occurred in three phases, (see Figure 1), and included a succinct program overview, individual interviews with program faculty and teacher candidates, and collaborative inquiry sessions with teacher candidate participants. Figure 2 details how data generation mapped to each research question. For a more detailed description of data collected, see Appendix B.

Figure 1*Data Collection Phases*

This study's timeline spanned the duration of approximately one year and is summarized as follows in table 2 below.

Table 2*Study Timeline*

Month(s)	October 2024	Spring 2025	Fall 2025	Dec-April 2026
Part(s) of study	Proposal Submit & IRB	Phase 1 Recruitment Interviews	Phase 2 Recruitment Interviews	Phase 3 Six inquiry collective sessions

Figure 2*Data Collection and Alignment to Research Questions*

Research Question(s)	Data Collected
RQ1: How do different teacher preparation programs within one institution prepare teacher candidates to work with multilingual youth labeled as disabled in literacy?	-Program mission and vision -Individual director and instructor interviews -Course syllabi -Course materials -Memos
RQ2: How do teacher candidates across different programs understand literacy instruction for multilingual youth labeled as disabled?	-Individual interviews -Inquiry collective session transcripts -Memos
RQ3: How does an interdisciplinary critical inquiry group contribute to the ways that teacher candidates think about supporting multilingual youth labeled as disabled?	- Inquiry collective session transcripts -Inquiry collective session artifacts -Memos -In between session brief feedback surveys
RQ4: What insights, tensions and/or contradictions surface for teacher candidates as they participate in an interdisciplinary critical inquiry group designed to support literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled as disabled?	-Individual interviews -Inquiry collective session transcripts -Inquiry collective artifacts -Field notes

Phase One: Program Overview and Inquiry. In Phase One, I conducted one-on-one semi structured interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017) with five School of Education personnel. Interview questions were designed to elicit general descriptions about the purpose of the program, “throughlines” or points of connection that would be expected to be woven throughout the teacher candidates’ experiences, and general interpretations about the frameworks and/or objectives of the literacy coursework, and opportunities for collaboration across programs (see Appendix C for the interview

protocol). I also reviewed the School of Education and program websites. (see Appendix D for the interview protocol). Interviews ranged between 35-60 minutes and occurred via the Zoom platform. I also reviewed course syllabi, assignment descriptions, reading lists, fieldwork observation protocols, and screenshots of course canvas pages. These data sources provided insight into the frameworks informing the course design and content, pedagogical moves, and details of the literacy readings and assignments.

Phase Two: Initial individual interviews. In Phase Two, I conducted individual interviews with six teacher candidate participants. Semi structured open-ended interview questions (Bhattacharya, 2017) were asked to engage teacher candidates in describing how they: (a) define literacy, (b) view literacy instruction, and (c) support multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. Follow up questions included inquiring about instructional strategies and how they view their role in relation to literacy instruction (see Appendix E for the interview protocol). Additional questions about their interest and aims for the inquiry space were asked to inform the structure of the first session. Interviews ranged between 35-50 minutes. Since the data collection phase is an iterative process and adjustments are often needed to gather sufficient data (Bhattacharya, 2017; Glesne 2016), I wrote jottings following each interview to capture initial impressions and to guide question revision as necessary for subsequent interviews (Emerson et al., 2011). Interviews were video and audio recorded via the Zoom platform and later transcribed and cleaned via Otter.ai.

Phase Three: Collective Inquiry Sessions. After Phase One and Phase Two, I analyzed the initial interviews and memos for main themes regarding inquiry group interests and goals to inform the initial collective inquiry session. Drawing from

participatory design research (Reilly, 2010), the initial session included: an introduction to the collaborative inquiry space, participant introductions, and exploration of setting the foundation of collaborative relationships (See Appendix F for the agenda).

Participants were invited to share a representation of their relationship to literacy and language in their daily lives (past or present). The subsequent sessions were largely informed by shared interest in engaging in problem of practice, or consultancy protocols, while also considering survey feedback at the end of each session (see Appendix G for my adapted problem of practice protocol and Appendix H for example exit ticket used after each session). Additional resources shared were connected to the problem of practice information shared, or questions that emerged during our group sessions. See Table 4 for an overview of the collective inquiry sessions.

Collective inquiry sessions were audio recorded via Zoom and transcribed and cleaned with Otter.ai. Based on teacher candidate preference and access needs, these sessions took place virtually and in person in a meeting room on campus. I captured written descriptive fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011) immediately following our sessions to serve as a reflective summary of the experience. These memos helped inform our ongoing work and offered initial analytic insights (Emerson et al., 2011). At the end of session five, intended to be the final in our series, I invited participants to reflect on their overall impressions about their experience with the inquiry group. Two open-ended questions were intended to elicit opinions from participants about their experiences (Creswell, 2014; see Appendix I for the prompts). This session took place in a hybrid format. One teacher candidate provided a handwritten response, while the other participant participated verbally and followed up with an email response. After the

session, I emailed the questions to the entire group and received one additional response for a total of three teacher candidate written responses.

During data analysis, I decided to follow-up with teacher candidates regarding the problem of practice examples that were shared in our sessions. Based on individual interview analysis, I had discovered a missed opportunity to invite one of the SPEPP teacher candidates to share about her background in arts integration and universal design for learning. Thus, I invited all teacher candidates back for a final bonus session as an opportunity to check back in as they entered the spring quarter.

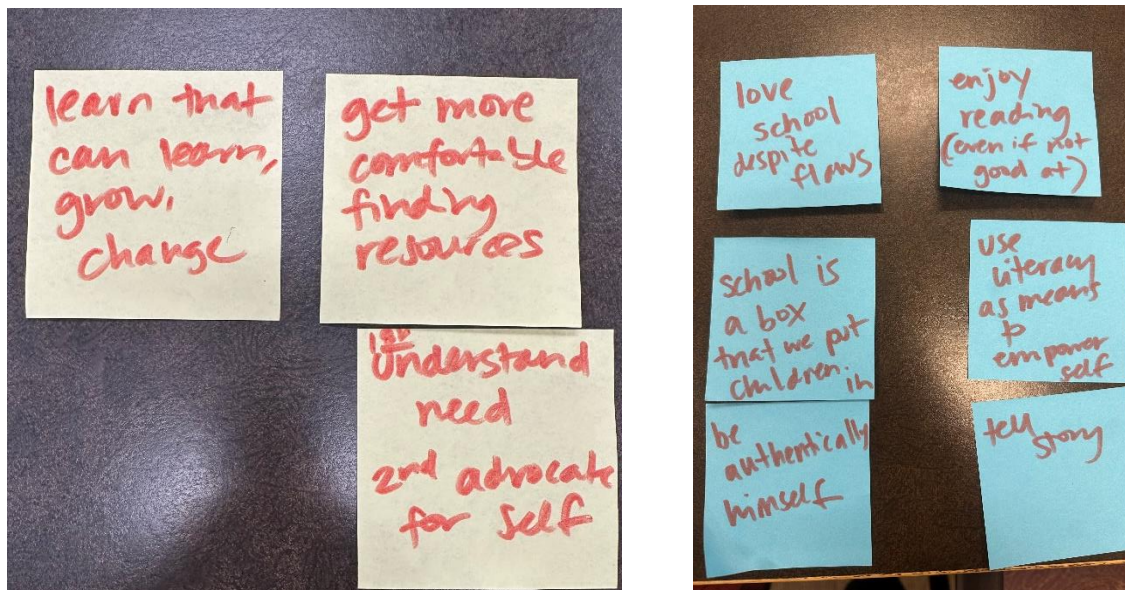
Artifacts. Artifacts from the inquiry sessions included a Padlet, small group generated anchor chart organizers to capture literacy and language conceptualization notes, teacher candidate lesson plan slides related to their focal learner or problem of practice, and teacher candidate handwritten reflections. Additional artifacts included comments from the exit tickets and email correspondence. See Figures 3 and 4 for examples of artifacts generated during inquiry session two. See Appendix B for a complete list of artifacts compiled and included in analysis.

Table 3*Collaborative Inquiry Group Session Overview*

	Session 1		Session 2		Session 3		Session 4		Session 5		Session 6	
Format Length	Zoom	~90 min	In person	~90 min	Zoom	~60 min	Zoom	~60 min	In person	~75 min	Zoom	~60 min
Participants	TC1 TC2 TC5		TC4 TC5		TC1 TC2 TC4		TC2 TC3 TC4		TC4 TC5		TC1 TC2 TC4	
Topic(s)	-Framing -Introduction -Collaboration		-Language and Literacy beliefs and foundations of instruction		-Problem of Practice		-Problem of Practice		-Problem of Practice -Reflections		-TC 4 Middle school example -Reflections	
Resources explored or shared	1. TIES Center, Start your collaboration out right 2. HPS, Building a collaborative relationship		1. ALTELLA Language & Disability Needs Framework		1. Problem of practice protocol		1. Problem of practice protocol 2. Critical Data Matrix 3. WIDA ELD Language Charts 4. WIDA ELD Standards Framework		1. Problem of practice protocol 2. Critical Data Matrix 3. WIDA ELD Language Charts 4. WIDA ELD Standards Framework		1. Habits of Mind 2. Thinking routines 3. lesson slides	
Themes	Inquiry as a community endeavor, collaboration as complex practice to support justice		Humanizing literacy instruction toward fostering identity and agency		Collective inquiry to support multilingual learners in fifth grade classroom		Collective inquiry for language and disability, a fifth-grade student case study		Collective inquiry for designing access for multilingual learners with disabilities in writing; language as central component of literacy		Putting UDL, arts integration, and collaboration in conversation toward justice oriented expansive literacy in middle school	

Figure 3

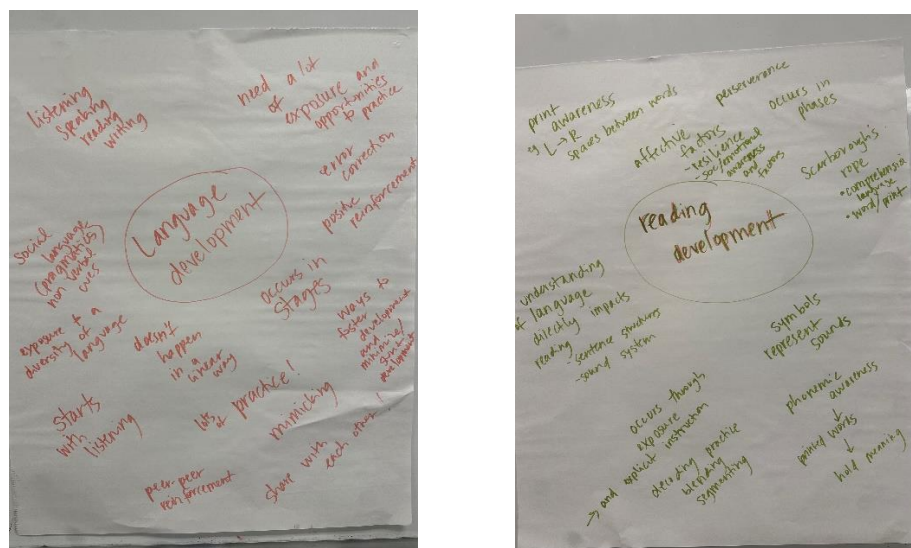
Goals for the Literate Lives of Their Focal Learners



Note. Teacher candidates were prompted to describe their dreams for the literate lives of a focal learner that they called to mind.

Figure 4

Language and Reading Graphic Organizer



Note. Graphic organizer used to facilitate discussion with teacher candidates to activate their prior knowledge about language and reading development.

Data Analysis

Consistent with qualitative research, data collection and analysis are not independent of one another. Thus, the data analysis process was iterative and comparative throughout the study to guide the data collection and sense making process (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Glesne 2016). For example, in Phase One, I reviewed the transcripts, memos, and program and coursework artifacts gathered to loosely inform Phase Two. For instance, upon learning about the co-enrolled inclusive education course, I planned to recruit teacher candidates from within these course sections. A more robust analysis took place at a later stage in data collection. During Phase Two, while conducting interviews, I reviewed my post interview memos and adapted the interview questions. Phase One and Phase Two data informed the rough outline of the Phase Three inquiry session. Throughout Phase Three, jottings, memos, and exit ticket feedback informed planning the structure of the critical inquiry collective sessions.

As a novice researcher, I found it helpful to reference Braun and Clark's work around reflexive thematic analysis as a flexible starting point for how to engage with the data (Braun & Clark, 2020). I mapped on their six-phase process for data engagement, coding, and theme development to my phases of analysis. They describe these six phases as: 1) familiarization with the data; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) defining, refining, and naming themes; 6) writing the report (Braun & Clark, 2020). For my study, Braun and Clark's (2020) phases did not happen in linear fashion as I toggled back and forth between moving forward with analysis for one phase of my own set of

data at a time. For instance, I largely moved through Braun and Clark's phases one through four for each phase of my own data and then moved into Braun and Clark's phases four through six integrating the full data corpus.

Familiarization, Coding, and Initial Themes

Aligning to Braun and Clark (2020), data analysis began with familiarization with the data. To do this, I started by cleaning and rereading the interview transcripts. During this cleaning and rereading process, I simultaneously applied first cycle holistic coding (Saldaña, 2021) to large sections by adding general observational notes and impressions in the margins using the comment feature in google docs. This created an integrated thematic analysis process in that I also added to my memos. I then uploaded the transcripts to Dedoose where I sought to categorize and organize data by labels, or *codes*. Coding is a heuristic and a method of discovery to stimulate thinking about data collected (Saldaña, 2021) and is meant to help link thoughts and actions across data. This approach was generative because I had a general idea of what I was investigating within my data set (Saldaña, 2021). Once the transcripts were in Dedoose, I followed a deductive coding approach (Saldaña, 2021). I stayed close to the data by highlighting words, phrases, sentences, or larger chunks relevant to my research questions and applied an a priori code, or occasionally creating a new code (Glesne, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I largely employed descriptive coding while integrating process coding and organization coding during this cycle. I completed this process for phase one data. I simultaneously created separate excel sheets to help me organize salient participant quotes grouped by emerging themes and research questions. Finally, once Phase One transcripts were coded in Dedoose, I exported the codes into a word document to more

easily manipulate and cluster them into themes. In this process, I realized that my coding technique was limited and that I was relying too heavily on descriptive coding in ways that hindered my ability to engage in analysis. I began to apply in-vivo coding (Saldaña, 2021) which helped me identify themes more quickly. See Table 5 for sample Phase One codes generated based on my holistic, deductive, and in vivo codes based on my research question and conceptual framework.

I repeated the above process for Phase Two. Phase three coding started with a similar deductive approach, but I quickly realized that an inductive approach was better suited to the data set and to help me answer my third and fourth research questions (Saldaña, 2021). Second cycle coding of phase three also led to focused coding. Across transcripts, I prioritized coding participant responses in the transcripts as my focus was primarily on their understanding their perceptions, not my own (Saldaña, 2021). I added to my analytic memos throughout the coding process as these were paramount for me to engage with analysis.

Table 4

Sample Set of Codes and Description

Code	Description
caucusing	References to racial caucusing and role in teacher preparation
“disability as an identity”	Identity orientation to disability that is worthy of sustaining in the classroom. Disruption of medicalized framing of disability; reference to social model of disability.
“expansive views of literacy”	“Shaking up expectations” of what literacy expectations are; instructional deviations from traditional print-based focus
Gholdy Muhammad	Reference to Gholdy Mohammed’s frameworks

“criticality”	• Reference to fostering critical reflection in teacher candidates
“communities of belonging”	• Inclusive practices with a purpose to cultivate learner agency and increase access to learning environments
translanguaging	• Drawing from translanguaging pedagogy as a framework and/or pedagogical move in coursework,
justice	• Reference to college, program, and/or course mission anchored in justice orientations
connections	• Organizational code to help me identify explicit points of connection across participants
collaboration	• Reference to working with directors and faculty across programs to cultivate alignment
future learning and directions	• Descriptions of opportunities to continue advancing program aims and building cohesion across programs
fostering teacher agency	• Examples of activities and/or assignments designed to promote teacher candidate agency
“it doesn’t make sense to me we’re preparing them separately”	• Reference to siloed spaces
multilingual learners- strategies	• Reference to strategies and approaches explicitly to support multilingual learners
“language as an asset”	• Examples of language ideologies that reflect an asset orientation
Universal Design for Learning	• Examples or reference of UDL from embedding into coursework

Note. Phase One a priori descriptive codes and in vivo codes

Developing, Reviewing, and Revising Themes

Throughout the coding and analytic memoing process, I continuously analyzed the data by exploring how themes varied across cases. For instance, in Phase One I observed a theme of asset framing of students which showed up across participants, but from somewhat different perspectives- disability focused from within SPEPP personnel participants, and multilingual focused from EPP personnel participants. However, when probed, one personnel participant also delved more explicitly into the intersection of multilingualism and disability. Additionally, I considered how the interview

data for one case was reinforced or varied in relationship across the inquiry sessions. To answer research question one, data was analyzed to consider similarities and differences across programs to provide rich contextual descriptions and surface major themes related to the preparation of teaching literacy to multilingual learners labeled as disabled. I also relied on artifacts to triangulate interview data.

To answer question two, interview and inquiry session transcripts were coded for patterns and themes of how teacher candidates define and talk about literacy instruction, specifically to consider what they know and how they know it, including underlying ideologies about language and literacy. Data was also analyzed to explore how teacher candidates talked about multilingual youth with disabilities identified as “struggling” readers both within the context of an individual interview and how that carried through to inquiry collective sessions. To expand further, I considered how teacher candidates made sense of the intersectionality between language and disability.

To address research question three, data was analyzed to consider how teacher candidates made sense of their roles and instructional pedagogies they had been learning about, and field experiences. I also explored how teacher candidate sense-making was extended or challenged in collaboration with teacher candidates from different programs. Analysis explored changes in approaches, ideologies, and/or views of their roles. Finally, to answer research question four, data was analyzed for examples of insights, tensions and/or contradictions that surfaced for teacher candidates throughout the process of the inquiry collective related to literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities.

I returned to the critical sociocultural framework I drew upon that considers micro and macro level influences on learning (Lewis & Moje, 2003). Souto-Manning (2014) also highlights the importance of examining individual and interpersonal interactions and discourses as they are taken up within broader institutional contexts and puts forth the importance of centering the meaning making of participants. I examined how teacher candidates were communicating and collaborating around the needs of multilingual learners with disabilities.

To support interpretation and sense making of dialogue captured within the inquiry sessions, I drafted memos following each session as well as conducted transcript analysis. Attention in memos focused on identifying patterns, similarities and differences between participants or contexts, and to make connections and comparisons to previous comments or conversations (Emerson, et al., 2011). For example, in session two I asked the teacher candidates to surface some of their underlying beliefs about literacy. The prompt I gave was:

Think about a child that has significant meaning for you and then think about what goals and dreams you have for this person as you think about cultivating their literate identities. Just sort of hold that in mind for a minute... What do you hope they learn?

The candidates each responded, and I captured their comments on post-it notes to reflect back to them what they noticed (revisit Figure 3). This is an excerpt from an analytic entry I later made when I compared how Brittany & Madison responded:

Both responses indicated critical self-reflection and development of their own teacher identity and the ways in which they view the purpose of schooling and

learning. They also described literacy as a means to empower oneself, make a difference, and tell their own story. They described literacy in expansive terms- it being about interacting with people, books, navigating their environment. Both responses also spoke to the need to foster individual learner agency- how will they use literacy to figure out what you need and to attain it.

Descriptive fieldnotes and in process memos served as important catalysts to ensure that the inquiry collective experience was responsive to teacher candidates' questions and sense-making as well as informed session planning activities that served to confirm, modify, or extend different interpretations that surfaced. Analysis entailed considering lines of interconnectedness within the participants across time as well as surfacing insights, tensions, and contradictions.

In the current study, I intended to follow other scholars contributing to the research on multilingual youth with disabilities (e.g. Cioè-Peña, 2017; Kangas, 2021, Phuong, 2017) signaling how turning toward theories on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) supports a multidimensional understanding of how these children experience systemic marginalization in the U.S. educational system. Cioè-Peña (2020a) astutely noted the opportunity for integrating both Raciolinguistics (Flores and Rosa, 2015) and DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) frameworks to advance a Critical Disabilities Raciolinguistics (CDR) perspective to account for the specific experiences of linguistically minoritized youth of Color with disabilities. A CDR lens argues that people are “not only racialized but also pathologized on account of their linguistic practices” (Phuong & Cioe Pena, p.130) and acknowledges that “this pathologization happens not on the basis of an individual or community’s language practices but instead on others’

perceptions... who enforce the values and perspectives under a white normative gaze” (p.130). This often leads to the discounting of the language practices of MLLs labeled as disabled, regardless of their actual linguistic practices. A CDR perspective centers the process of how language practices are manipulated to serve as indications of a disability, a response to a disability, and a barrier to inclusion, regardless of whether a disability classification is present or not (Cioè-Peña, 2020). In this way, a CDR perspective helps consider the ways that multilingual children labeled as disabled are susceptible to being educated in bilingual education, or special education, but not both (Kangas, 2021) and how they become positioned as “struggling” based on these points of convergence. From this lens, we can account for the ways that linguisticism and ableism are entangled with racism and can push for more transformative teacher preparation. While ultimately an explicit incorporation of a CDR lens was not explicitly applied during analysis, the current study challenged teacher candidates to move away from thinking about how to identify and remediate deficits, fixing students or teachers, or thinking about instruction in isolation. Instead, I aimed to encourage teacher candidates to consider the ways that broader systems are reinforcing dominant narratives and teachers’ roles within those systems and approached analysis from a critical sociocultural theory framework. Further consideration of applying a CDR lens is addressed in the discussion section.

Researcher Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

The findings section in the next chapter addresses the research questions by including descriptions of major themes characterized by rich detail and supported by examples, subthemes, and quotations. To consider the ways my identity markers and

experiences informed the design and the interpretation of data, I needed to engage in an ongoing process of critical reflection in my biases, theoretical predispositions, and preferences (Kleinsasser, 2000). In my field notes, I drew from Patton (2002), “Reflexive Questions: Triangulated Inquiry” (p.66). My interpretation of the data was informed by the positionality and experiences that I have described in the positionality section above.

To enhance trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014), I conducted member checks by providing descriptive summaries of individual interviews to participants. Most participants did not provide any feedback. Feedback I did receive from three participants confirmed agreement with the descriptive summary or suggested minor updates to the participant context info that had changed over time. I also employed a variety of data collection methods across different contexts (Glesne, 2016). I used a rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973) to convey findings, by offering detailed descriptions of setting and context, providing multiple examples and perspectives about a theme that arose from the data across sessions.

Chapter 4: Findings in Teacher Education

To explore how an interdisciplinary inquiry group contributes to the ways that teacher candidates think about supporting multilingual learners labeled with disabilities which I will explore in detail in the following chapter, I first needed to situate the participants in the context of their preparation programs. Preparation programs function as key learning environments that shape teacher candidate's pedagogical knowledge, development of their teacher identity, and provide a foundation for making sense of how schooling is enacted. In this chapter, I explore findings gathered in phases one and two of data collection related to how the two preparation programs within one School of Education prepare teacher candidates that may lead to implications for their work with dual identified students. I also delve into the ways the teacher candidates were understanding themes of literacy instruction, multilingual learners with disabilities, and collaboration at the early stages of their programs.

Justice Oriented Foundations Across Pathways

Across Phase One interviews and review of mission statements, educational justice provides the School of Education's teacher preparation pathways an anchor. In an interview with a SPEPP personnel member, she connected to the Dean's vision:

Every student deserves outstanding teachers. Every teacher deserves powerful supports from their practice, and every school deserves effective leaders. If you're passionate about social justice, opportunity, empowerment, the School of Ed is the place for you to become a catalyst to change. Like, that's her pursuit of equity.

She goes on to further link the SPEPP pathway as directly situated within this mission:

That's every student. It's not an additive of like, 'oh, **and** students with disabilities'.... the way we tell our students to, like, universally design for learning from the beginning and not retrofit through accommodations and modifications. We want the same in terms of, like, how our college is thinking about the special ed teacher ed pathway.

SPEPP's conceptual framework is grounded in framing disability as a normal variation of human difference and preparing teachers to plan for this difference from the onset. A SPEPP personnel member further elaborated:

We strive to prepare teacher candidates who have a commitment to educational justice. We also talk a lot about a commitment to the disability community and thinking about disability justice. So, a lens on what it means to have meaningful, inclusive education, to create like communities of belonging for students with disabilities.

An EPP personnel member, also explicitly connected to the School of Education's mission and justice orientation in the ways EPP is committed to diversifying the teacher workforce:

And so, when they said, we're here to diversify the educator workforce, when we are here to dismantle injustices in education. I'm like, that's what I got to do. That's what I'm here for.... so, I see us as instruments of doing that. We are always thinking about educational justice.

Personnel from both programs communicated the importance of recruiting and retaining teachers of Color as a form of pursuing educational justice. An EPP personnel member, states, "Our students also deserve to see people that look and sound like

them and think like them and have had similar life experiences. So, I think we are on our way to enacting what the school says we should be doing.” She connects here to the importance of the need for diversifying the coaching and instructional faculty working within EPP as well.

Drawing on critical frameworks is an important lens for enacting justice orientations to teacher preparation and supporting people in becoming good teachers.

An EPP personnel member elaborated:

I would say that our theoretical framework in terms of our teaching philosophy in terms of our program philosophy, is rooted in critical practices, critical humanizing pedagogies, critical race theory...lat crit, black feminist theory. So, these are the things that inform how we set things up in EPP. So, we believe that everybody that we have admitted is in our program because we expect them to be successful teachers, and our job is to help them get there.

Drawing from critical frameworks promotes a critical orientation to teaching that seeks to transform classroom spaces into communities that interrogate power, privilege and systems of oppression. This orientation provides a backdrop for the messaging around fostering an understanding of diversity as the norm. The message to teacher candidates is that:

The norm in our schools is diversity. You are not going to teach to a monolingual English, white, middle class, cisgender norm. That's not who we are. Diversity is the norm. Your job as a teacher is to know your students and to teach towards their identities.

An EPP personnel member also reflected on her own lens as an educator and scholar focused on multilingual education as an essential driver to frame linguistic diversity as the norm:

We emphasize from day one, even before day one, before they come to the program that we live in a multilingual environment in (name of city), we teach kids in the multilingual environment. The world is a multilingual environment, and we recognize and celebrate people's full linguistic abilities.

This was reinforced by another EPP personnel member who emphasized critical language awareness and language as an asset. The EPP personnel member above extended, “all of our instructors also understand language acquisition and the importance of teaching for multilingualism- language as a resource, not as a problem.” The programs both adopt a proactive stance to prepare teachers to plan for diversity in which multilingualism and a difference in ability are viewed as the norm. Not only are disability and multilingualism viewed as the norm, but they are also viewed as assets and resources. Across the two programs and bilingual endorsement, teacher candidates are tasked to challenge dominant discourses of students with disabilities and multilingual students and to reimagine accessible, culturally and linguistically affirming learning environments. This anchor theme provides the foundation for the coursework, seminars, fieldwork, and coaching support that teacher candidates engage in during their enrollment in the programs. EPP and SPEPP support teacher candidates in understanding justice as an ideological orientation as well as support practical application by informing the ways that teacher candidates make instructional decisions and interact with colleagues, students, families, and community members. We turn next

to the critical role that fostering teacher candidate identity and agency play in the programs.

Fostering Teacher Identity and Agency

An important factor in educational justice is the role of teacher identity (e.g. Boylan & Woosley, 2015; Pugach et al., 2019; Varghese, 2016). A major focus across the teacher preparation programs is cultivating teacher identity, critical awareness and self-reflection, and fostering agency. Flores and colleagues (2019) identify this phenomenon of drawing upon one's teacher identity and critical consciousness to enact change as *critical efficaciousness*.

Across the programs, teacher candidates are supported to interrogate their own identities and positionalities in ongoing ways. For instance, personnel from both programs indicated that all teacher candidates participate in race-based caucusing. Importantly, these affinity spaces promote belonging and sustain teacher candidates of Color as indicated by an EPP participant. She added, "that is something that they have found grounding for them and sustaining for them" and is a site for critical interrogation of structural racism for white teacher candidates. Across affinity spaces, race-based caucusing affords teacher candidates the opportunity to develop their racialized identities in relation to their own experiences in schooling with the pursuit of disrupting assimilation into dominant norms in school contexts (Varghese et al., 2019).

There are additional opportunities woven throughout coursework and seminar for teacher candidates to investigate other intersecting markers of their identities and engage in self-reflective practice. For instance, an EPP personnel member referred to a teacher candidate who hadn't previously viewed themselves as bilingual. She stated:

I had someone walk up to me the second day of orientation and say, 'I didn't realize that what I can do has a name. I can't speak Tagalog, but I understand Tagalog, and you just told me that I'm bilingual. I'm a receptive bilingual.' 'Yes, you are bilingual.'

This EPP participant went on to say, "It's helping people understand how they got to where they are as language learners. The opportunities they were afforded and the opportunities that were taken away from them, is also key. That criticality around power, hegemony and language". This concept was reinforced in my interview with another EPP personnel participant who reflected on the ways that teacher candidates continued to make sense of their linguistic identities in her seminar:

You know, the majority of my Spanish speaking students are heritage learners, so they were not given the opportunity to go to school in Spanish. So many of them feel this sense of inferiority- their Spanish is not good enough...And so much of my focus is on really diminishing that sense of shame and positioning them as still highly capable learners.

A similar connection was made by a SPEPP personnel participant speaking to literacy methods coursework in the SPEPP program. This SPEPP personnel member highlighted how an assignment about the strategic use of technology in literacy instruction ended up being especially meaningful for a few of the teacher candidates who have disabilities:

One of the outcomes that I was actually trying to accomplish, and I did, I was so happy, was they realized assistive technology that would work for *them*. We have quite a few teacher candidates with disabilities, and I'm not sure that they always

realize how much assistive technology there is out there to help them be more successful. And there's two students in particular that really blossomed after that- because they found tools that worked for them.

These examples point to the ways that the preparation programs are committed to supporting teacher candidates' sensemaking of *themselves* as they develop their teacher identities and start to envision themselves as change agents, the area I explore more in detail next.

Fostering Agency

Problematizing schooling practices can be a familiar and pervasive experience for veteran and novice teachers alike. To prevent teacher candidates from getting stuck in this narrative, the preparation programs focus on fostering teacher agency. SPEPP adopts an explicit stance of dismantling problematic hegemonic schooling practices “from within”. A SPEPP personnel member stated, “we very much have an eye on or a vision to like the schools we imagine that can be not necessarily teaching to the schools that exist. I always tell our students that you have to learn how to work in the system to change the system.” SPEPP is also focused on redirecting teacher candidates to focus on being a part of the solution rather than getting immobilized by critique as indicated by her comments here:

I think our mission is to prepare reflective educators that recognize like the tensions that exist in schools. We talk a lot about teacher agency, and that folks have agency at, like, all their roles. And so what are some of like, the small moves they make inside of spaces that then lets them become those agents of change?

In SPEPP, this looks like a lot of interrogation around what inclusive classroom spaces *could look like*. Teacher candidates are encouraged to consider the ways that the environment can be structured to be more accessible to a variety of learners and to draw on inclusive pedagogical frameworks including universal design for learning and person-centered planning, which will be explored more in a subsequent section. This framing helps prepare teacher candidates to exert agency in their collaboration with general education colleagues to support students with disabilities in inclusive contexts.

A SPEPP personnel participant elaborates:

Maybe some of that requires, like some peer educating. And so you have them listen to like different podcasts and folks are problematizing like, why, it's sitting in the chair like, why does it have to be learning happens in this very particular way, and try to engage in some of those conversations. And then also thinking about like, okay, I know my learner....My learners could be holding, or like experiencing if they got to draw while they listened.

Importantly, the SPEPP personnel participant, highlights how “problematic practices are going to go on” and seeks to promote agency in the ways that teacher candidates can choose to show up in these spaces by staying committed to critically interrogating how to remain centered on learners and creating access.

Learning From Our Students

Another throughline across the programs was the stance on viewing learners and families with asset-based lenses and centering their experiences in curriculum. In EPP, teacher candidates complete an ethnographic study assignment early in the program to deeply understand the community context in which they are working. The EPP

personnel participant in referencing Gloria Ladson-Billings said, “Good teachers, culturally competent teachers, study the students, because they know that these are people that they can learn from. So, their job when they go in September is to study the students, study the school, study the school community.” Another EPP personnel member echoes this sentiment as well and attempts to orient teachers to the stance that “each kid comes with deep knowledge of something-- themselves, you know principally, and that utilizing that as the starting point for educating them is what is the best way to approach that child's learning”. Learners and communities are positioned as valuable sources of knowledge that teachers are expected to draw and learn from to inform classroom practice.

Extending on the value of students and communities, a SPEPP personnel participant also points to the ways the traditional role of teacher is being challenged:

Really thinking about creating those communities for the learners that they're supporting, the communities that they are teaching in and they belong to as well, and like bringing in the voices and expertise, like of those family members, community members, and like decentering the teacher as the expert, and really recognizing that there's a lot to learn from children.

In SPEPP, teacher candidates are encouraged to imagine themselves as *facilitators of learning* and not only to enact their own agency, but also to learn how to promote learner agency. Later, I explore in more depth how learner agency presents in the context of a teacher candidate's exemplar lesson.

Disrupting Deficit Thinking

Multilingual learners and students with disabilities are often framed by educators in deficit ways (e.g., Valencia, 1997). The EPP and SPEPP programs not only adopt asset-based framing while explicitly rejecting deficit tropes. For instance, an EPP personnel participant hopes that teacher candidates learn to disrupt these narratives throughout the program. She shared:

So...you know, to really, really dismantle these deficit ideas, 'Oh, this kid can't speak English.' 'Well, no, it's because they speak another language', you know, or, like, 'this kid has executive functioning problems', 'yeah, but they're actually on the flip side, they're incredibly creative'... So it's like learning how to capture the gifts of every student that you have, and to see everything as a gift with kiddos. So that's what we are hoping that they leave with.

In this excerpt, she offers insights to the counternarratives used to reframe common deficit-based tropes that teachers can easily subscribe to for multilingual learners and/or students with disabilities. Below, she continues by arguing that the job of justice-oriented educators is to reject these deficit portrayals of students and focus on assets that students bring to learning spaces. She elaborates:

The school will do everything they can to beat that out of them, you know, to see these kids as being not enough, you know--not on standard, not on grade level, not on this. Okay, well, what are they? So... that's really what we're trying to do. And I think that encompasses kids who are labeled as having disabilities, kids who are labeled as ML, all of that is--what are the gifts that they're bringing into this space? And how can we utilize those for their self-actualization? You know, during the year that you have them.

These beliefs and asset-based orientations to the work form the fabric of the programs that weave throughout coursework as well. A SPEPP personnel participant talked about how she encourages teacher candidates to avoid deficit framing in IEPs. She elaborated:

We spend quite a lot of time focusing on what kids can do. What do they like?

What do they enjoy about school? What are they good at? How can we analyze data to show what their strengths are? Talk about this first and then areas for growth.

Teacher candidates across the programs are consistently being asked to positively situate their students against harmful dominant deficit framing. This is critical as teachers are in the emerging stages of developing their teacher identities and the beliefs teachers hold about students can have significant impacts on student outcomes. Beliefs shape the instructional decisions that teachers make and expectations teachers have for their students (Pajares, 1992).

Inclusive Pedagogies Across Pathways

Three personnel participants across SPEPP and EPP each described efforts to collaborate and learn from each other to incorporate inclusive pedagogies. Across programs, there are multiple examples of the ways that culturally sustaining pedagogies and asset-based approaches are used to reject dominant deficit narratives of students with disabilities and multilingual students. For instance, Gholdy Muhammad's historically responsive literacies framework (Muhammad, 2020) is drawn upon in both pathways in the lesson planning template and in the EPP literacy methods courses to balance "identity, skills, intellect and criticality". Additionally, SPEPP draws on person-centered

planning (O'Brien & O'Brien, 2000) and identity sustaining inclusive practices (Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). Per a SPEPP personnel participant:

They will inventory students. They'll like, interview them, interview their families, and learn what are the things that are interesting or exciting to them. And then how do you meaningfully integrate that into your, the way you design a classroom and you design lessons, and then how do you let students lead? So instead of all things being teacher led direct instruction, how do you provide like learning opportunities for kids to engage in their learning?

Disability affirming practices allow students to acknowledge the myriad ways their experiences with disability shape who they are and how they experience the world. This orientation disrupts ableist notions of disability that tends to lead to individuals distancing themselves from their disability (Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). There is cohesion across the program in focusing on assets that students bring as beliefs and then support for teacher candidates to leverage students' linguistic and cultural identities for learning.

Translanguaging

Translanguaging is offered as pedagogy and embedded as a programmatic practice across all five of the interviews. "We've learned a lot from collaborating with EPP around translanguaging," stated a SPEPP personnel participant. Teacher candidates learn about translanguaging and are encouraged to incorporate translanguaging opportunities in their lesson planning, but there is also robust application within coursework. Across the programs, teacher candidates are invited and

encouraged to submit assignments in the language of their choice. An EPP personnel participant specified:

We don't care what language you turn your work in in this program. Any class, you are welcome to turn your work in in the language of your choice, because we want to model that practice for our students so that they can turn around and do it for their students.

Additionally, prior to orientation, teacher candidates in EPP are asked “to write an essay to introduce themselves to the other folks in the cohort about how they got their name, and we invite them to write that essay in the language or languages that best tell the story.”

EPP also employs strategic grouping of teacher candidates by shared language to promote translanguaging collaboration within coursework.

We are going to group our Korean speakers together, our Mandarin speakers together, our Spanish speakers together, so they can work together and plan together. When they're writing lesson plans, they can help each other. They can leverage the linguistic resources between them.

This is another example of aligning to program values of multilingualism as a resource (Ruiz, 1984) to influence teacher identity grounded in asset orientations of learners.

Another example of strategic modeling with teacher candidates occurs within EPP's math methods course. An EPP personnel participant teaches a lesson or two in Spanish to help teacher candidates experience the strategic moves of scaffolding content with comprehensible language input. She stated:

The whole cohort's like, 'whoa. I just I couldn't access this' or we begin to break down, okay, how do you support multilingual learners when it's not just a language focused class? Like, how do you think about language in math?".

She talked about the affordances of co teaching with the program faculty in pursuit of fostering alignment and getting everybody on the same page about how to teach ML strategies. She added that students start to see "this is how you scaffold for language. Okay, I get it. This is, this is how you use gestures. This is how you use visuals. This is how you use translanguaging, you know?"

Throughout both programs, there is a strong commitment that instructors need to model practices that teacher candidates are expected to enact in classrooms. Overall, there is a shared theme that translanguaging is identity affirming, instructionally effective, and disrupts monolingual English norms.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is used as a framework for anticipating barriers and proactively planning for inclusion rather than retrofitting with accommodations in similar ways to translanguaging. UDL is presented as pedagogy as well as embedded as programmatic practice across pathways. A SPEPP personnel participant clarifies how she draws on UDL to inform her own course design, "I use UDL in the class explicitly and overtly for students... There's a lot of choice involved. There's multiple means of representation, multiple means of expression." She also referred to UDL as pedagogy that she wants teacher candidates to consider when planning for writing instruction for students with disabilities "to support writers where they happen to be. And so we focus on ways to support drafting, ways to support planning, ways to

support organization.” Importantly, this attention to modeling the pedagogies they are teaching was visible to one of the SPEPP teacher candidate participants. During our individual interview she commented, “One thing that's been very helpful that I've experienced already is... I really enjoy all the different ways that I can participate with the content. So audible submissions, art submissions, like it's clear that they're trying to embody some of that theory, and that's been really fun.” While there was acknowledgement from EPP personnel members that UDL can be further developed in EPP, the UDL guidelines are linked in the EPP lesson planning tool.

Both pathways incorporate extensive fieldwork and coaching support to hold teacher candidates accountable to enact these practices. EPP, SPEPP, and the Bilingual/ML endorsement all have provided thorough structured lesson planning templates that draw upon tenets identified above. Ongoing seminars throughout the programs are important spaces for teacher candidates to integrate theory and practice. Coaches use structured observation and debriefing protocols to guide teacher candidates through critical self-reflection and planning for next steps. Across the pathways, there is coherence in centering students' and teacher candidates' lived experiences, planning for access, and plans to hold teacher candidates accountable for enacting learning in practice. Additionally, teacher candidates from all programs take a foundations course focused on inclusive education together in the fall of year one. This sets a clear tone from the onset of the programs that collaboration is an expected and critical part of teaching.

Literacy Coursework

I interviewed two literacy methods instructors, one from each program, and reviewed course syllabi from the courses they teach. It is important to note here, an exhaustive review of the entirety of the literacy coursework is beyond the scope of the current study. My purpose was to better understand key ideas and framing that may inform the way teacher candidates engaged in conversations about how to design literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. A brief description of the literacy coursework reviewed for each program follows.

SPEPP Literacy

The first literacy course SPEPP candidates take in their program focuses on how young children learn to read. This course is open to anybody in the School of Education and is largely enrolled by SPEPP candidates but has also enrolled students from other departments such as school psychologists and speech and language pathologists, for example. In the course, teacher candidates consider the role of a young child's home linguistic experiences and community cultural wealth on reading development, but "main focus is on supported teaching experiences". According to the syllabus and interview with A SPEPP personnel participant, teacher candidates explore instructor created lesson plans for a read aloud, phonological awareness and letter identification, and phonics, and then they deliver the lesson. In addition, teacher candidates explore choosing anti-bias children's books. In alignment with broader program aims outlined above, principles of UDL and translanguaging are embedded within the course structure. For example, a SPEPP personnel participant stated, "they're explicitly encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoire in that class." There is a lot of embedded choice and opportunities to access multiple means of engagement,

action/expression, and representation. Similar to descriptions provided other School of Education personnel participants, this participant also stated, “disability is framed as a variation of human difference”. The other course is a SPEPP specific course focused on reading and writing for students with disabilities. The course includes assignments such as designing and teaching reading and writing lessons and gathering information about a focal student. SPEPP teacher candidates also take a reading comprehension course in year two.

Across the two SPEPP courses, teacher candidates learn about two different conceptual frameworks of reading. The first is Linnea Ehri’s phases of word reading (Ehri, 2005) and the second is Scarborough’s reading rope (Scarborough, 2001). Course design draws on sociocultural theory to inform teaching reading. During my interview with a SPEPP personnel member, she clarified courses are “not theory heavy”; rather theory is used as an anchor for teacher candidates “to hang conceptual understanding on”. A six-trait framework for writing “leads to important insights for teacher candidates that writing is not just about spelling or punctuation; instead, focused on composition and ideas”, she noted. A stance of “data to inform instruction” is presented as is assessments “as a tool to understand what kids know, not to label or categorize”. Overall, teacher candidates learn about planning for explicit instruction using hands-on approaches and develop an understanding of the important role language development plays in reading while fostering reflective practice. Another aim described by a SPEPP personnel participant in relation to the second course was to reframe deficit language that can be pervasive in IEPs and to practice making sense of many characteristics of a learner by inviting teacher candidates to reflect on what

strengths learners bring and where their interests lie. A limitation named was the need to cover such a depth of content in only two introductory courses.

Interestingly, this SPEPP personnel participant described advocating for a collaborative structure to literacy methods that blended teacher candidates from across SPEPP and EPP. She stated, “It doesn’t make sense to me that we’re preparing them so separately.” Another future desire for this participant would be to see teacher candidates more confidently taking up strategies to engage students with complex support needs.

EPP Literacy

For the EPP literacy methods coursework the participant spoke from her experiences as a teacher candidate coach and teaching assistant for all the literacy courses. She also redesigned and taught the summer literacy course. Additionally, she has taught the bilingual methods course and other courses within the reading endorsement series.

The literacy methods series in the EPP program spans three quarters and has evolved over time. The summer course offers a strong K–2 focus that emphasizes oral language development, phonological awareness, phonics, assessment, and early comprehension. Candidates engage in interactive read-alouds using identity-affirming texts and examine literature deeply while also participating in a site-based summer school component where they conduct a child-study and apply weekly thematic readings, according to the syllabus and interview. The fall reading course has “undergone the most significant shifts”, moving from a guided-reading and leveling orientation toward a more comprehensive approach to reading instruction for grades 3

and up. This includes site-based work in elementary classrooms, reading assessments, small-group instruction, and readers' theater, alongside engagement with chapter books and YA literature by BIPOC and queer authors. Candidates also participate in their own book clubs and draw on frameworks such as Gholdy Muhammad's historical literacies (Muhammad, 2020). Again, alignment to program and college wide commitments is noted where translanguaging practices are woven throughout all coursework according to the instructor and fall quarter syllabus. The winter writing course, redesigned in 2019 "from a translanguaging stance", is grounded in a writing-workshop model in which candidates both create their own writing and design a series of process-based writing lessons for their placements. Collectively, these courses aim to prepare teacher candidates to become literacy educators "who center identity, intellectual development, skill building, and linguistically responsive practice" according to the interview.

The EPP personnel participant's hope is that teacher candidates come away with a deep understanding that inclusive literacy and language instruction requires thoughtful assessment, intentional small-group planning, and a commitment to honoring students' full linguistic and cultural identities. Like the description offered by the SPEPP personnel participant, this participant recognizes that assessments are valuable, "but always incomplete" tools, and that meaningful instruction depends on slowing down, "analyzing what assessments reveal *and* what they obscure", and using that information to design responsive lessons. Through child-study work, phonics assessments, running records, and comprehension tasks, teacher candidates learn to identify specific student needs and plan targeted instruction rather than relying on computerized measures or predetermined levels.

Aims for the literacy series discussed in the interview include developing teacher candidates' confidence in forming and leading small groups, using whole-class data to make instructional decisions, and understanding their responsibility to teach all learners, including those who struggle, rather than assuming someone else will. Equally important, the EPP personnel participant hopes they internalize "the program's strong emphasis on multilingualism and translanguaging", recognizing that "students' languages are assets" and that classroom libraries and texts "must reflect students' identities". Ultimately, the aim across the courses is for teacher candidates to see inclusive literacy as a practice that blends culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies, responsive assessment, and intentional instructional design to create classrooms where every child is seen, supported, and challenged.

Our conversation also led to consideration of opportunities to evolve the courses moving forward. During the interview, the EPP personnel participant noted that there was not currently a strong integration of UDL or much emphasis on disability or special education in the literacy courses. Ideally, the courses would continue to be redesigned to be in full alignment with program mission and vision as well as align to the body of evidence on teaching reading and writing recently popularized as the "science of reading".

The EPP personnel participant emphasized the need to ensure clear attention to the reciprocal nature of reading and writing development. She also sought to help teacher candidates make sense of the socio-political landscape of literacy instruction to avoid falling into media traps that suggest false binary thinking of teaching reading as *either* phonics *or* comprehension and reinforced all five pillars of literacy are critical.

Interestingly, in our conversation, this participant pointed to the changes over the past few years of teachers seemingly “providing less small group instruction.” She believed this warrants examination and serves as opportunity to develop critical thinking around the pros and cons of other teachers or paras providing small group instruction, becoming increasingly common within Multi-tiered Systems of Support frameworks.

Critically, this EPP personnel participant acknowledged that it is not possible to prepare teacher candidates with absolutely everything they need to be an expert related to teaching literacy in three quarters, a similar sentiment to what the SPEPP personnel participant also shared. However, the course series and the program are designed to set teacher candidates up to be prepared for their future placements. The ultimate aim, according to the EPP participant, is to “cultivate critical readers of curriculum to implement it well”, and “be able to hold tenets of social justice education, teaching for multilingualism, and drawing on the science of reading.”

While the EPP and SPEPP personnel participants and their courses operate in separate programs, there are many examples of similar commitments, approaches, and assignments.

Teacher Candidate Literacy Conceptualizations

In this next section, I draw primarily from the individual interviews with the five teacher candidates to explore research question two, *how do teacher candidates across these different programs understand literacy instruction for multilingual youth labeled as disabled?* These interviews occurred on zoom during the first few weeks of fall quarter 2025. This was the first quarter for the SPEPP teacher candidates, who at the time of their interview had attended two to three sessions of their first literacy course. In

contrast, the EPP candidates were in the second quarter of their program, having completed the first course in the literacy sequence in the summer. See Table 6 for more detailed synthesis of themes by teacher candidate.

Table 5*Example of Comparative Analysis Across Participants by Theme*

	Jocelyn	Melissa	Ethan	Brittany	Madison
Language & Literacy Conceptualizations	• Difficulty defining literacy; frames reading primarily as phonics and "putting sounds together" • Literacy knowledge shaped by prior on-the-job expectations rather than coursework • Strong justice-oriented stance informs interest in literacy equity	• Frames literacy largely through assessment and routines drawn from coursework (running records, retelling, think alouds) • Difficulty articulating how to teach language • Coursework perceived as early and incomplete	• Views literacy and language as inseparable • Prioritizes family communication and home language maintenance • Draws on own early experiences as multilingual learner-employs visuals, groupings, and one-on-one supports	• Solid grasp of role of explicit, systematic literacy instruction (UFLI, dialogic reading) alongside expansive framing • Values student agency and observes where it seems missing in coursework thus far • Strong justice-oriented stance informs interest in literacy equity • Concerned about overly auditory instruction	• Adopts a view of literacy that incorporates phonics, comprehension, writing, & identity • Strong appreciation for explicit strategies and five pillars of literacy drawn from coursework • Clear articulation of literacy as meaning making process
Multilingual Learners Labeled with Disabilities	• Frames disability as difference rather than deficit • Draws on personal disability identity and family history • Limited explicit strategies and experience with multilingual learners	• Inclusion framed as a moral imperative ("you can't exclude kids") • Limited exposure to ML students with disabilities • Notices absence of inclusive design in classroom spaces	• Deep engagement with dual identified ML students (ML + autism) • Actively interrogates difference vs. disability • Resists English only approaches; supports biliteracy despite disability label • Seeking concrete strategies	• Limited direct experience with multilingual learners • Sees overlap between ML learners and other students with access barriers • Inclusion framed through UDL and accessibility	• Strong stance against pull out and exclusion • Sees home language use as foundational for literacy development • Actively questions how to support students whose languages she does not speak

Ethan

Across the candidates there was shared demonstration of equity orientations to teaching and literacy, but the conceptual clarity of literacy instruction varied widely and was mediated by prior experiences. For example, teacher candidates with linguistic knowledge or engagement with ML communities articulated a more integrated understanding of language and literacy. Ethan and Madison both speak a language in addition to English and referenced their connections and observations within multilingual communities when discussing literacy. Ethan drew from his experiences as a bilingual paraeducator pointing to the importance of fostering family communication in his role bridging languages between children and their caregivers. He stated, “so I, you know, help translate for parents as well, and I help try to bridge... I do have certain families that they can't even communicate with their kids.” Ethan also talked about his efforts to foster home language development alongside English in his role as paraeducator. He stated, “research has shown that good grasp of one language, you're gonna have good grasp of another, and so on and so forth, so still supporting that as well. We don't want to lose the language as well.” He clearly connects to the EPP and bilingual endorsement program commitments of honoring and sustaining all a child's languages to facilitate learning and to prevent language loss. Furthermore, Ethan strives to enact agency as an educator in this area by establishing a Vietnamese club for heritage speakers and their families. In our interview, Ethan introduced the focal learner who he returned to a few months later in the inquiry group, which I will explore in more detail in the next chapter. He was perplexed by this learner's difficulty with the sound structures in both of his languages affecting intelligibility. Ethan described

proactively seeking to learn as much as possible about this child's schooling experiences in his home country, demonstrating a deep commitment to understanding as much as possible about students to gain a complete picture before arriving at any conclusions. He stated, "we've been trying really hard to do a deep dive in just how they did it back in Vietnam. And trying to further support in that regard, while trying to combine that with a lot of...what we're doing here." He offered his own reflections on the importance of the home-school connection for himself as a multilingual learner and identified several strategies he wants to employ in his practice, such as strategic grouping, one on one support, assigning group roles, and incorporating visuals.

Throughout our conversation, he also weaved in connections to the importance of collaboration in a variety of ways. He described the need to collaborate with the Speech Language Pathologist to better support the focal learner. He also positioned school counselors as resources not only to provide SEL support, but another opportunity for providing authentic language development. He stated, "we figured out that there's so much that we could teach through SEL, especially across language."

Ethan also referenced how his interpretation services were used to facilitate collaboration with families with their Autistic students and put him in relationship with the special education team. He admitted, "I don't know much when it comes to working with SPED as of yet," but then went on to make several observations about how some students with complex support needs were provided inclusive opportunities and described challenges the special education team were facing. He also described working with the special education team as productive because:

We still have this common ground....No matter what differences there may be, or no matter what disagreements... Even a few steps towards the target is a few steps towards the target, and we all understand what our goal is, and we all understand our roles, and no matter how difficult it is, we all, you know, do the best we can to support each other and support them [students], and though it might not feel like it all the time. Yeah, like, we're a team. Like, that's just how it is.

These examples highlight how much Ethan *has* been learning about supporting multilingual students with disabilities through his job over the past couple of years as a bilingual paraeducator even if it doesn't seem to him like learning in the traditional sense.

In describing his aspirations for joining the group, Ethan was hopeful for the opportunity to get increasingly specific. He was candid in highlighting the strengths of the EPP program, especially the endorsement seminar thus far, "what's really great about EPP is that they've given us opportunities to, I mean, we have assignments to get our hands dirty, and to interact with other teachers to gain more resources, to gain more knowledge. We have supported each other." However, in addition to this enthusiastic feedback, he followed up with the caveat of seeking more clarity. He stated:

EPP can't teach me anything and everything...there hasn't really been, like, a sit-down and, like, okay, here are some things that you should absolutely do when it comes to students who are multilingual, let alone students who are multilingual with, you know, who qualify for disability services... A lot of it is just gonna be acquired on the job.

While he acknowledges he will continue to learn well into early years in the field, it was interesting here that he didn't seem to make explicit connections to the summer literacy coursework as his other two EPP counterparts did.

He extended further:

We have a lot of questions that have not yet answered. Like, you know, how would we go about it? What would the first day look like? What are some issues that we get into when, the language is just not... you know, the language immersion is there, and it's happening, but, like, I guess, like, acclimation isn't necessarily going well. What happens when multilingual students are kind of performing low in the native language as well as the English language? Like, what goes on from there?

These are complex questions that even experienced teachers ask years into their careers. Ethan's depth of questions attending to both language and disability needs this early in the program signal that he is seeking concrete strategies and direction in very explicit formats.

Madison

Madison, a traditional, or "non-school employed" student, studied education in undergrad. She was currently placed at two different sites, one of which was for the place-based methods course for EPP. She described several different approaches to literacy instruction that she has been trying to implement as well as observe across the two settings. In 3rd grade at one site, she works with small groups and incorporates SIPPS, phonics, and comprehension-based strategies (e.g., prediction, visualizing) into small group. In the other setting, she mentioned starting with an interest survey as an

opportunity for students to reflect on their own literacy experiences and identities. Across settings she described multiple ways to engage learners by using think-pair-share and whole group sharing. She described doing reading interviews/inventories as an informal assessment.

Madison referenced learning about the pillars of literacy and needing to teach to all of the pillars, not solely focusing on one pillar, an important point that an EPP personnel named. She especially found beneficial the opportunity to learn about practical strategies to build a toolbox to draw upon in the future. Regarding language support, Madison shared that it has been eye-opening to learn more about the benefits of providing opportunities for multilingual learners to draw upon all of their languages and incorporate their home language into their learning. She described this contrast to what she observed growing up in a bilingual community where most of her Spanish speaking peers were not afforded those same opportunities. In addition to being able to support Spanish and English-speaking learners directly with their language development, she also mentioned other strategies that you can draw upon for multilingual learners of all languages like including a multilingual word wall and inviting students to use their home language to label specific vocabulary. Articulating these strategies was stark contrast to Ethan's interpretation of the coursework thus far in that she was able to clearly name specific strategies to draw from while Ethan couldn't recall having learned any.

Brittany

Brittany, another 'traditional' student, was placed in an elementary school for the first quarter of the program. She drew on her background in arts integration and

behavioral support and previously worked in a variety of higher ed and public-school contexts across a few states. She is interested in looking at equity and culturally relevant pedagogy through an arts integrated lens and applying a critical lens to special education. These are important to name here as they become themes explored in further depth in the following chapter. Brittany was quick to point out that since data generation coincided with the beginning of the school year, there had been a lot of shadowing. At the time of the interview, she started teaching University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) curriculum lessons and was finding success with them. She described dialogic reading, a strategy presented in the SPEPP literacy methods course, as impactful on her thinking as well as learning about the role of phonological awareness and phonics. Interestingly, she pointed to a gap in criticality and thought student agency and voice have been somewhat void thus far in relation to literacy. She signaled drawing on integrated arts and looking for ways to incorporate tangible and kinesthetic learning opportunities in an “otherwise entirely verbal process”. She also referenced the UDL framework, which she clarified was prior knowledge, as an important framework for creating access points to a wide range of learners.

Brittany’s goals for the inquiry group included a hope “to store a variety of tools and resources” to draw upon in the future with the intention of becoming a “master facilitator of learning” and providing access points for all kids. She sees teacher preparation and the experience of observation as opportunities to grow her “catalogue of resources” that she can then become skilled at drawing upon for instruction and matching the correct tool or strategy with the instructional targets. For Brittany, literacy instruction includes a wide range of activities, skills, and purposes.

Jocelyn

Jocelyn, a SPEPP candidate, drew largely from her prior AmeriCorps experiences where she was “thrown into it” and tasked to execute worksheets. She described the experience of having to “teach one kid how to read” largely by noticing how he was practicing “to sound words out”. She also referred to a summer school internship during undergrad being the first experience with children with autism. While she had a bit of difficulty articulating her thinking about what she had been learning about literacy so far, “there's just so many different components that go into it. I mean, depending on the student or the individual,” she quickly pivoted to her passion about addressing “surprising” adult illiteracy rates and her desire to learn, “I'm so passionate about it”. Later in the conversation, she returned to another justice orientation in disrupting “the school to prison pipeline.” She connected to an activity in the SPEPP literacy methods course that entailed teacher candidates to apply a critical lens to children’s books. She added:

We had to read them to our classmates and figure out what were some like biases...These are so many things that I wouldn't have noticed, or my colleagues may have not noticed if we read this on our own, or to our student if we weren't challenged to think in the ways that she would want us to look at it right? So that was something that I thought was really interesting.”

She referenced the course session in week two addressing community cultural wealth and selecting anti-bias books. She made another connection to coursework, this time seminar, when thinking about multilingual learners. She reflected, “language is just so broad...who makes the rules of what's deemed right and wrong for a specific child?”

Despite being early on in her program at the time of the interview, Jocelyn was making sense of her prior work experiences and layering in connections to coursework to begin conceptualizing her purpose for literacy instruction.

Melissa

Melissa, a traditional student in the EPP program, is in a fifth-grade classroom and had not yet started teaching her own lessons at the time of data collection. She described her orientation to working with students as drawing on student's background knowledge, interests, and ideas to cultivate a classroom culture of inquiry. She is also likely to plan for explicit instruction with word level skills as well as strategies to support comprehension.

At the time of the interview, Melissa provided a lot of evidence that she was engaging deeply with coursework and thinking about how to apply it to practice. She described some basic principles of learning to read such as the important role language plays and helping students connect the sound system to letters. She had also learned about reading records and described the process of listening to students read and look for patterns in their errors to plan instruction. She also talked about read alouds and think alouds. She mentioned that throughout the program there is an emphasis on drawing on information and texts that are reflective of students' identities and interests. Melissa was the only teacher candidate to mention the inclusive education course and was looking forward to learning more about how to be an inclusive educator. She noticed books in Spanish in her placement classroom but couldn't yet recognize or describe other examples of designing for an inclusive space. She also talked about the

importance of fostering well rounded individuals and helping students problem solve and learn to work together.

Summary Across Teacher candidates

Across teacher candidates, they all identified literacy as important, but conceptual clarity about language and literacy conceptualizations varied. Early into the program, it was not surprising that teacher candidates were emerging in their abilities to articulate language and literacy practices. Jocelyn and Melissa were still developing foundational definitions of language and literacy while Ethan, Brittany, and Madison were able to demonstrate somewhat more depth related to how they conceptualized language and literacy broadly. Melissa, Brittany and Madison clearly referenced key concepts they had learned in coursework. Ethan was very clear in describing his orientations to language and literacy but had more difficulty explicitly connecting to coursework or identifying implementation steps.

Chapter 5: Diving Into the Inquiry Group

Over the span of approximately four months between the winter and early spring of the 2025-2026 academic year, the teacher candidates and I met a total of six times in our collaborative inquiry space to explore topics related to collaboration, literacy and supporting multilingual learners with disabilities. In this chapter, I explore how this inquiry space contributed to the ways that teacher candidates were developing insights into supporting multilingual learners with disabilities (research question three). In this chapter I also present findings that illustrate the affordances of an interdisciplinary collaborative space as supportive sites for teacher candidates to unpack collaborative practice, conceptualize their identities, foster teacher agency, and extend their course and fieldwork. The chapter also provides an in-depth account of one teacher candidate's application of key concepts and themes from their preparation program to a literacy lesson for middle schoolers in a resource setting. Finally, the chapter concludes by exploring tensions surfaced across the sessions (research question 4)

The conceptual framework for the sessions was an iteratively designed process anchored in the literature explored in chapter 2 and further enhanced by the individual teacher candidate interviews. Collectively, we sought an inquiry space to point us toward productive conversations, shared learning, building out a professional network, exploring tools and resources, and considering application to practice. One of the most common threads across the teacher candidate interviews was the interest in concrete strategies and actionable items- resources they could return to, instructional moves to implement, and some brainstorming of solutions. As a result, no two sessions were completely alike and were a mix of responding to in-the-moment needs driven by

teacher candidates, and me offering them resources based on their collective requests while aligning to the overall vision and purpose of the group.

Inquiry Space as a Meaningful Site for Professional Learning

Setting the Stage: Defining Collaboration

In the very first session I invited the teacher candidates to consider their orientation to successful collaboration and anticipate barriers. This served two purposes: to probe teacher candidates to consider how they could approach collaboration moving forward in their careers, and to help them frame collaboration for the purpose of the inquiry group. In a Padlet generated during the session (see Figure 5), the teacher candidates identified several factors that contribute to successful collaboration such as respect, open mindedness as a theme, accountability, healthy boundaries, and the need to build an equitable and sustainable environment to safely and efficiently share skill set knowledge both interpersonally and disciplinarily.

Figure 5

Session One Padlet



The specific language around *safety* that was named here becomes an important throughline across the sessions that will be explored more in depth in the next section.

In the follow up discussion, teacher candidates each drew from their lived experiences to elaborate further. TC 1 drew from her prior experiences in marketing. Melissa, a career changer, reflected on previous work serving on boards and stated, “Part of being collaborative is knowing that you’re not going to be able to make everybody happy 100% of the time... you have to learn to be okay with that.” Jocelyn resonated with this comment stating, “I’m sensitive, so that’s a good point to make. Thank you for making me think that way... You have to be okay with like, maybe this time it didn’t, but maybe another time your idea will be go into fruition.” She continued by reflecting on her own characteristics:

I’m very much an over communicator, and I’m okay with that. To be honest with you, some people are probably like, you should shut up. And I’m like, people want to know why. I want to know why. So I’m telling people why. Like giving them the backstory. It’s easier to digest when you have more information than less.

Jocelyn affirmed this description by stating, “I’m an over communicator when I feel passionate about something. That’s a good point to make.” In this exchange, we observe a glimpse into the ways that teacher candidates were quickly engaging in self-reflective practice to consider the ways they show up in collaborative spaces and demonstrating benefits from the opportunity to learn within this inquiry space as indicated by Jocelyn’s statement here, “Thank you for making me think that way.”

Later in this session I presented two different tools for the teacher candidates to explore, one of which was from the TIES Center (TIES Center, n.d.). According to the syllabus for the inclusive education course reviewed during phase 1 of data collection,

this was a resource explored during week seven. In fact, two sessions during that course were focused on “Teaming and Collaboration for Inclusive Education”.

Interestingly, none of the teacher candidates referenced that course or having been familiar with the resource prior which leads me to wonder how teacher candidates are learning how to integrate their knowledge across settings and contexts.

Emotionally Safe Learning Space

A culture and climate of trust was established in the first session that contributed to the conditions allowing teacher candidates to openly share facets of their histories, emerging views, beliefs, and knowledge informing their teacher identities and how they were continuing to grapple with their new roles as “novice” teachers in application to practice. I posit that this was likely due to a few factors. For one, I had met individually with each candidate prior, so while they didn’t all know each other, they did have the chance to meet and ask questions of me to better understand the aim of the group. This could have created an established sense of trust, even if small. Additionally, I spent the first 23 minutes of our first session framing the purpose of the group, offering shared commitments to our space (drawing on the work of Andratesha Fritzgerald, 2020), and offering my own introduction and purpose for the work- entering teacher preparation and an interest in literacy for multilingual learners with disabilities. Finally, I contend that the shared commitments in both programs to cultivating critical self-reflective teachers also facilitated their ability to transfer this to a new context with relative ease. For instance, in the very first session during an introductory task, teacher candidates introduce themselves to one another by connecting to their purpose for becoming a teacher, joining the group, and their literate identities. Jocelyn reflected on the impact of growing

up in a bicoastal family and acquiring her own disability. She disclosed, “I had a hard time, like I wasn't really stable....I picked up my own disability of emotional disabilities, and so that was really hard for me.” She went on to connect this to her purpose of wanting to pursue special education as “a way of understanding myself and other people that have different disabilities and how I can show up in this world.” Jocelyn also interwove the influence of having an educator mom on her literate identity and described reading as a “way to stay connected” to her while on separate coasts. She elaborated further, “she instilled in me how important literacy is, not just for everyone, but specifically people like me that are marginalized.” Here she is tying beliefs about literacy to identity and empowerment.

Another teacher candidate, Madison from EPP, revealed her own complicated history with literacy in a formal schooling context. “I feel like it's important for me to mention that I really struggled to learn to read.” She went on to describe the ways that her relationship with reading and writing have evolved over time including how she “found my voice through writing” in secondary schooling and now enjoys 600-page fiction and non-fiction books “that I never thought I'd be reading”. While not directly named at the time, her openness to sharing her story not only helped create trust within the group and demonstrate her growing capacity to be a reflective educator, it also provided the group an important counternarrative to the notion of “once struggling, always struggling”, a common harmful trope that can be placed on students through their schooling careers. These personal stories of agency and resilience point to the ways these Teacher candidates are making sense of their teacher identities and

foreshadow how they continue to make sense of literacy as nonlinear and closely tied to identity.

Importantly, this sense of openness and vulnerability traveled across sessions and the teacher candidates even when the format (in person v zoom) or the teacher candidate participants changed from session to session. This allowed for the teacher candidates to be honest in acknowledging challenges they were experiencing and willingness to ask questions of one another about what they didn't know or understand. For instance, in session 4, EPP candidate, Ethan, posed a problem of practice to the group that resulted in a lot of important dialogue around unpacking the "disability v language" conundrum (explored further in a subsequent section). Brittany offered several questions they had regarding whether the student should be considered for special education evaluation, and Ethan admitted, "I feel kind of ashamed for not asking about it." Ethan has been steadfast in his commitments to upholding biliteracy and bilingual instructional opportunities and framing students in asset-based ways. As such, he may have been experiencing internal tension around whether those beliefs are at odds with considering potential disability related needs. Having a teacher candidate colleague from SPEPP openly ask the questions he was having too, but afraid to ask, affirmed there will be students that will be dual identified and require services to address the complexities of their language and disability-related needs.

Problems of Practice

Across the sessions, collaboration surfaced as a compensatory mechanism for emergent skills and knowledge for teacher candidates. Melissa pointed to this directly in the very first session, "I really like doing collaboration, because I don't know all of it." In

a feedback survey the three participants who responded all selected the problems of practice as the most supportive feature of our group. Three of the sessions provided opportunities for Teacher candidates to bring a dilemma to the group following a modified problem of practice, or consultancy, protocol (Center for Leadership and Equity, nd). These sessions allowed for teacher candidates to surface challenges they were facing in their field placements related to supporting literacy for multilingual learners with disabilities. This dialogue led to productive conversations and insights for all teacher candidates, not solely for the dilemma poser. However, the problem of practice sessions also highlighted the need for facilitation that mediated learning.

What Do I Do?

In the first problem of practice session, Melissa, an EPP teacher candidate placed in a fifth-grade classroom, brought her dilemma to the group seeking input for how to better engage three multilingual students in beginning states of English acquisition during whole group instruction. She posited:

We have a pocket talk that we use, but it's not like I can, I mean maybe I can, and maybe I just haven't thought that this is an option...like, I can't give a lesson and then, like, every sentence try to translate it. So I don't know how to keep them engaged. Yeah, that's what I need.

Here, Melissa seems to be trying to make sense of the role of the translation device in whole group instruction. She intuitively troubles the practicality of this approach while also signaling that she isn't sure what else to do. The other two Teacher candidates in this session were SPEPP Teacher candidates and initially had some difficulty entering into this conversation, even with the support of the problem of practice protocol. They

both responded, “no, I don't have any questions” and didn't seem to know how to proceed. As the facilitator, I asked some follow up questions to probe for more information about the learners; however, the discussion initially remained centered on translation and personnel limitations, “the lack of translators”. Melissa elaborated that her mentor teacher:

Gives a pocket talk to someone sitting next to the individual who speaks Dari, and every once in a while you'll hear it go off. So she's trying to help do that, but I'm not sure I feel like that's really their responsibility. So I'm trying to figure out how to take more of that on, but also still teach.

Importantly, Melissa is questioning the instructional practices of her mentor teacher and the reliance on a pocket talk managed by a peer to make instruction accessible. The other TC participants remained challenged by this problem of practice unsure about how to support the dialogue but echoing the wondering. Brittany was connecting to ideas of translanguaging but unclear about how to proceed in practice. They said:

But this idea that, you know, there's home language, and then there's literacy instruction happening.... but when there's a large gap, how do we close that gap? So, I don't have anything right now, but it's also something I'm deeply thinking about.

Ultimately, in this session, as facilitator with breadth and depth of knowledge about this topic I walked teacher candidates through some considerations about how and when to incorporate peers to facilitate learning in response to Brittany's explicit question about this technique, “Is that appropriate, or does that put, like, undue labor on some of those other students?” I also helped offer guiding considerations for working with multilingual

learners such as learning about their prior schooling history. Then we talked about additional strategies such as identifying key vocabulary and concepts essential to the unit, selecting high utility words and phrases, using sentence stems, visuals, and graphic organizers to help scaffold the content.

Critically, at the end of our session, Melissa offered her final takeaways and indicated that her preconception about the need to translate had been disrupted. She shared:

I guess in my mind, originally, I was thinking like, every single sentence that I say then has to be translated. And I was like, that's so overwhelming. How do I make that happen? But I, as the instructor, I'm not feeling like I have to give every single sentence translated.

Melissa gained an essential insight that her role is to focus on emphasizing key ideas and focusing on making those accessible. This problem of practice example provides important insights into the ways that fieldwork experiences and what teacher candidates observe from their mentor teachers can overshadow coursework. This example points to the need for a space like the inquiry group to surface exactly these types of questions and identify coursework to practice gaps. This session occurred in January 2026 about halfway through EPP for Melissa. My own preconceived notions about what teacher candidates would be able to apply to practice from coursework at this point was challenged.

Disrupting “Is It Language or Disability?”

The second problem of practice dilemma ushered us into the language or disability topic. This conversation could have funneled Teacher candidates into

perpetuating binary thinking but instead served as an opportunity to grapple with the complexities of supporting multilingual learners with or at risk of disabilities. Ethan, a Vietnamese bilingual paraeducator, presented a case of a fifth grade student who immigrated from Vietnam two years ago and is showing slow language development in both of his languages, “whether it’s in Vietnamese or English, they’re dropping, like the ending sounds for certain words, and they’re also struggling with other sounds as well.” Ethan added, “he has a low amount of words in both languages, so it’s difficult to communicate with him.” Despite having been in his current school for two years, “he’s still in between, like, a stage one or stage two acquisition of language.” He also noted that the student was retained twice in his home country and the student has been working with the speech language pathologist (SLP), though does not have an IEP with special education teacher services. Importantly, embedded within this overview of the dilemma of trying to understand what else to do to advocate for this student, Ethan situated him with an asset-based frame, “he’s engaged. He wants to learn. He is a very bright and brilliant student who shows exquisite curiosity.” This seemingly innocuous move communicates a clear commitment to resisting harmful deficit labeling while still naming a concern, a core professional stance of the EPP and bilingual endorsement programs.

As the conversation unfolded, we were able to narrow in on the primary concern of Ethan’s for this student, which was about his social skills. Ethan stated, “He struggles to communicate with his peers. He struggles to make friends...He’s very playful in a childlike way, and it tends to get annoying [as viewed by peers].” In contrast to the first problem of practice example, the other teacher candidate participants immediately

started asking follow up questions looking for more clarity around intervention services and were able to engage more deeply in the discussion than they were in the first dilemma. Perhaps having experienced the structure and format before had helped them feel more settled, or perhaps the scenario opened up the possibilities for everybody to access in a more concrete way. Melissa, an EPP TC also working in fifth grade, offered an example of how she is working to support social skill development with a student in her class. She concluded her comments with the disclaimer, “I don't know if I have solutions with regards to them dropping sounds...that's out of my expertise, but we just try our best to tell them all to just be friendly. You know, it's hard. I don't know if I helped at all.” While signaling she is unconfident in her suggestion, her contribution to the problem of practice points to an opportunity for collective sense-making and exploring her own professional judgement.

Next, Brittany suggested lunch bunch, an approach that she had observed in her prior elementary school placement. Ethan responded that was something the student participated in last year, “and then weirdly, it kind of like he kind of stopped using the skills that was given to him, and it almost seemed like he forgot them.” This regression stood out as a warning and led to Brittany also providing rationale for explicit literacy instruction that could help this student learn to read in English and eventually wondered about making a special education referral after the group had thoroughly considered the opportunities for learning and the amount and type of support provided to this student over time. Like Melissa, she also concluded with a disclaimer for her suggestions, “I'm so new into this field, and so I'm very hesitant to like, speak with any sort of authority”.

Instead of pivoting to another topic, the teacher candidates preferred to linger on this dilemma for the entire session because there was so much for them to unpack. The group surfaced a host of questions related to expectations for rate of language acquisition, “where you would think that their conversational language would be at a higher level?”, when and how to make a special education referral, “because I haven’t talked about that in any of my classes, and it’s a great question, and I haven’t really like articulated that before”, and the importance of parental involvement, “getting parents support, I was thinking was probably a good idea, like, how are they feeling about this?” As a facilitator, I helped them unravel these complicated topics drawing from my understanding of the relevant literature as well as my personal experience working in public schools as a bilingual special education teacher and inclusion coach. It was clear that they were looking for answers to these questions beyond the scope of what they could offer one another at this point in their educator journeys.

The productive conversation that ensued addressing the questions above, as well as naturally creating an entry point into exploring Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), signals the benefit of the inquiry group space as a generative site for professional learning related to how to provide practical support for the unique issues that arise related multilingual learners and the IEP referral and evaluation process. Melissa acknowledged how this conversation within the inquiry group contributed to her learning explicitly, “So focusing on specifically children who might have some disabilities is something that I will have to encounter, but I’m not at this point at my placement school dealing with that.” The benefits of the interdisciplinary nature of the group are evident in this statement. It also prompted this teacher candidate to more clearly

investigate which of her students have IEPs, because presumably in a class size of 24, there would be at least one student.

This problem of practice example provided important opportunities for the teacher candidates to try to make sense of the experiences and anchor abstract issues that they learned about in coursework within a concrete student's trajectory. Instead of narrowing the issue prematurely to being about speech only or language acquisition, they were able to collectively hold many possible hypotheses in tension and consider the multitude of factors contributing to the initial concern that Ethan surfaced. In this way, disability identification was discussed as a layered process, particularly for multilingual students. Again, the inquiry space serves as a safe emotional space for teacher candidates to grapple with complex issues related to fear of mislabeling students, exploring when and how to suggest an evaluation, and consider uncertainties about the intersections of language acquisition, articulation, differences in cognitive processing, and social emotional development. The group was cautious about pathologizing this learner while also surfacing risks of under identification, particularly as this learner approaches middle school.

Engaging Reluctant Writers

The final problem of practice session during session five was around engaging reluctant writers, a topic that both Brittany and Madison coincidentally brought to explore. Brittany was thinking about this in broad terms within the context of her middle school resource placement while Madison had a specific third grade Spanish speaking multilingual student with "suspicions of dyslexia or possibly dyslexia and ADHD" in mind. An important insight that Brittany was developing is that strategies that may apply

to multilingual learners may also apply to reluctant writers for a variety of reasons. In this example, she is referring to her non-ML students that “that won't produce anything with a pencil” and acknowledges that they may benefit from similar approaches.

Madison wondered how to support her student with writing, “because the zone of proximal development is very slim with her. She gets pretty frustrated and shuts down really easily, um, when she's pushed too far.” She elaborated further by weaving in the added demands of language, “the writing is already hard enough in or like seems hard enough for her, but translating alongside it is hard.” Madison framed her question about how to consider providing the elusive “right” support, “where we're pushing her just enough that she's still engaging in the class lessons and learning more and doing more, but also not getting so burnt out of school that it becomes unenjoyable.”

Madison, who speaks some Spanish, also added that her focal learner refuses to speak Spanish at school. Interestingly, this detail inspired critical reflection for Brittany that enhanced her ability to interrogate the reasons behind her own students' resistance to writing in a different way. She shared:

I don't know if you experience, but sometimes I get into a dangerous place if I just think it's about motivation, and I don't, and it stops me from being creative and like generative about other ways to like (facilitate) access, because I'm just like, they just don't want to right? Which is like, I know intellectually that's not true and that like behavior is communication and like, I know these things from a theoretical perspective, but I'm noticing in my own practice, once I put the capital M (motivation) on it, I get kind of, you know, I got to, like, do my own work, to take myself out of that.

This excerpt from Brittany demonstrates an incredible ability to disrupt her own tendency to fall into deficit thinking about her students. This kind of vulnerability can also invite others to admit the same and unveils the tensions that many teachers experience as they strive to put theory into practice. Brittany went on to explain how the detail of the student resisting Spanish at school was:

Flagged as an interesting like point of inquiry for like, building the relationship and trying to get at kind of like, source barriers that might be easier to remove than, like, some of the bigger ones, of like, well, 'she just doesn't have the language', or she, you know, or 'she's not motivated', right? Like those, to me, don't generate a lot of solutions. But this idea of, like, 'Ah, she doesn't want to speak in Spanish in school. I wonder why that is!' That to me, feels like juicy, right?

Brittany acknowledged how falling into deficit thinking can prevent her ability to stay focused on removing barriers and seeking to understand deeper meanings behind student behaviors. Like the previous example, having a specific student to anchor the conversation in affords teacher candidates the ability to maintain attentive to individual children's needs.

Interestingly, Brittany's connection to Madison's focal learner helped her offer suggestions that she could apply to her own context. For instance, she wondered, "if you've observed places that she is feeling more successful, and then trying to identify, like, what it is about those situations or interactions or places that could be useful in a writing situation, right?" This helped her eventually arrive at the insight about how

engaging reluctant writers at any age requires drawing on success and about how teachers can skillfully frame the task in accessible and meaningful ways. She stated:

They've already been through five years of like narrative of like, 'you're bad at this, like we got to get better at this'. And so, like, I can't really look at any of my learning or practicing from like these, like traditional avenues, because they smell it, and they'll stop right? And so I have to get, like, a little bit, I have to go through the side door and, like, try some other ways, so that they don't immediately clock it as like, "and now I'm practicing my writing, and I'm bad at that", and so we're just not going to do that, because I won't be successful.

In this excerpt, Brittany seems to be answering her own initial question which Madison affirmed with, "Yeah, that was incredibly both helpful and just like, insightful. Thank you." While they both had similar dilemmas, being able to anchor the discussion in a concrete example helped Brittany realize what she already knew about how to proceed. She stated, "the real scenarios really do help, and it does really help to talk to other people." In this example, the inquiry space served as a vessel for Brittany to surface her own understanding of the issue, fostering a sense of agency and self-efficacy. This was a turning point for Brittany in this discussion as she transitioned to positioning herself as more confident and agentic. Whereas in prior sessions, she positioned herself as more of a novice and did a lot of the question asking, in this session, she began to demonstrate more command of the conversation.

As we proceeded, Madison walked us through an example of what her focal learner's writing looked like and what supports had been tried. She gave us information about how her student will engage with copying tasks, "She will write, but it has to be

pre like, scribed for her. So, like, if I write something on a sticky note, she can rewrite it in her notebook, because she's copying it." She described how that progressed to using a brainstorm web to complete a sentence frame with scaffolded highlighting supports leading to "most writing I've see her do on her own" treating this observation as meaningful progress rather than insufficiency. Madison continued to make her own insights as to how to increase demands while appealing to interests by encouraging her learner to draw pictures to go with the sentence "because she likes art". This conversation affirmed for Madison that partial and supported forms of expression are legitimate.

Brittany bridged this conversation to her own fieldwork experience and a debrief conversation with her coach that she was still thinking about. She shared:

One of the things that my coach said to me, that I thought was a little bit profound, he was, like, 'Start smaller. If there's that much resistance and you find that they're successful in one thing, do that three or four times until that really like becomes accessible, and then build off that.' And this idea of like, starting smaller and just focusing on the wins, and like stabilizing and like making those wins predictable, right?

Again, Brittany points to the ways that she is making connections across her preparation experiences to help address this question around writing engagement.

The next part of the conversation moved us into making explicit connections between reading and writing as both teacher candidates wondered how much their students would be able to write on their own due to their reading levels. Madison stated, "I'm not even sure exactly what sight word she has; she can recognize letters" and

Brittany added about her seventh grade student, “is reading at a third grade level...the work that I want to do with her is, like, on affixes and compound words and like starting to like, because...she's only got single syllable”. The inquiry group conversation served as an authentic way for teacher candidates to make connections between the reciprocal nature of reading and writing and the need to consider their students’ reading and writing development together, providing an extension for their learning from session 2 where the same two teacher candidates unpacked what they understood about language and literacy acquisition. These insights also helped them see the ways students are likely to be able to engage orally with much more complex language and topics than they can demonstrate in writing and the importance of establishing a clear lesson objective while considering a broader definition of literacy to include oral language participation. They considered how the purpose of the lesson informs the way they think about focusing on language, reading, and/or writing and the critical importance of making it relevant. With some guided facilitation, conversation naturally evolved from “how do we ‘get students to write’” to a focus on removing barriers and designing access points. In these ways, the teacher candidates are demonstrating a developing understanding of inclusive lesson design and the role of teaching as facilitators of environments and learning opportunities rather than fixing students.

Incorporating Resources

Across the problem of practice sessions, it became apparent through the questions they were asking that the teacher candidates could benefit from more guidance around how to plan for instruction for MLs with disabilities. Teacher candidates also asked for resources in our individual interviews. The first planning tool I

shared was the Advancing ALTELLA Language & Disability Needs Framework (Leech et al., 2022). Advancing ALTELLA is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and a collaboration between the WIDA Consortium, Minnesota Department of Education, Texas Education Agency, and housed within the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Advancing ALTELLA is interested in providing multilingual learners with complex support needs access to content instruction. We explored the framework together to inform uniquely planning for language and disability related needs. I shared the critical data matrix (Gill & Nanayakkara, 2025) with teacher candidates to use as an example of a tool several school districts in our region use to help their teams think about language considerations that would point toward more instruction versus evaluation. When I presented this to the teacher candidates, I was careful to highlight the pitfall of how this could be used inadvertently to reinforce the notion that needs were either disability related or language related, when in reality, it is both. The purpose of the tool is to be a guidance document for school teams to consider when and how to tailor language services to meet student needs while avoiding over referrals to special education. I also shared the WIDA ELD Language Charts (WIDA, 2025), a tool that can help break down what WIDA scores mean in a way that feels useful, and the WIDA ELD Standards Framework (WIDA, 2020) as a resource for helping teacher candidates identify language objectives for their lessons. Madison referenced EPP sharing “a satchel that combines both the Common Core State Standards and the WIDA standards.” The resources explored throughout the sessions were designed to provide teacher candidates with access to practical references to inform collaborative instructional decision-making teacher candidates will encounter in their roles in schools.

Fostering Agency and Developing Critical Self-Reflection

The inquiry space served as a site to explore agency and foster critical self-reflection, in alignment with the program aims. The space became an extension of coursework and fieldwork to explore unique implications of working with multilingual learners with disabilities. For instance, in one session when asked to share about a bright spot for the week, Melissa framed one of her “bumpy” lessons as a learning opportunity. She stated,

So, I did a lesson today and it was a little bumpy. And the reason I say it was a bright spot is because the other couple that I've done and been observed, they actually went pretty well. But I'm glad this one kind of did not go so well because it gave me some time to reflect and really think about what I need to change and how I need to adjust, and I realized that things aren't going to go right all the time. It was nice to experience that because, like I said, I can learn from it. So that made me happy. Well, I don't know happy, but it was something to think about.

This framing indicated how Melissa is making sense of challenges in practice as opportunities for learning, rather than as failures. These are important insights for all teachers to develop and particularly for novice teachers.

In Their Own Words

Throughout the sessions, the teacher candidates expressed in multiple ways the benefits they were experiencing to participating in the inquiry group. I invited the teacher candidates to share their reflections more directly during session five. Brittany and Madison were present in person and Melissa followed up electronically. Teacher candidates also were offered opportunities to provide feedback in an exit ticket after

each session. Being in a space with multiple perspectives was beneficial to teacher candidates and helped them clearly connect to the benefits of collaboration. Madison stated,

I think the open mindedness and cross school or district collaboration has been unbelievably helpful, and it's inspired me to seek out more collaboration in my career, to just collect a diverse amount of ideas to address my teaching needs and make me a better teacher. I think it really opened my mind to different solution possibilities. And I had never really thought about how deep my echo chamber might be being in just one school, but it allowed me to kind of break through that echo chamber, which I really appreciated.

Brittany shared this sentiment, "I thought that the multiple perspectives, helped me to, like, generate ideas, identify different access points, surface assumptions that might be ingrained into my own specialty, like, kind of just shift things up a little bit." In an exit ticket, Ethan shared similar beliefs to Brittany and Madison, "I do like that all programs are included and have a voice here so I am learning things that I wouldn't normally learn and thinking about things that I normally wouldn't necessarily think about."

In session five, Brittany also connected to the ways that this group is informing the way she approaches working with multilingual learners with disabilities in the future. She stated:

I just don't have a lot of experience working with multilingual learners, and so using the language, hearing the language, listening to the description of learners, their effort, their context, has been super helpful to build my own confidence, and even in just selecting language, right? So like, I yeah, I think that that's really

helpful. It's something that I want to get better at, and I, and I, I want this to be a larger focus of my practice moving forward. And so, this is a great start.

She elaborated on the impact of the inquiry group on literacy instruction by sharing how she has started viewing the importance of oral language and language development as a part of literacy which is transforming her thinking. She shared:

A lot of the learning has come around our conversations highlighting language as its own domain that's necessary for literacy, right? Whether it's reading, writing, comprehension, so thinking about that separately, but interrelated is not something I've been asked to do yet. How do we leverage one to support the others? So that felt really profound in these conversations... would love more work, reading, studying of this explicitly.

She continued, “how to engage L1 and English in learning— designing lessons that are really explicit in goal may help create room for integrating the two while building literacy skills.” She connects here to translanguageing approaches despite calling it out explicitly as well as signals the need for both language and content objectives. Melissa commented the inquiry group “has really helped me think about how I can lean on the other departments/specialists in the school to help get the students what they need most.... There is no "one size fits all" approach when it comes to getting students what they need.”

Overall, the collective inquiry group was a safe professional learning space to promote collaboration, foster agency, deepen growing conceptualizations of literacy, connect to practice, and perhaps, most importantly, center a population of students that isn't often centered. The teacher candidates generally expressed positive feedback from

the experience as demonstrated by their comments in the session transcripts as well as in the exit ticket feedback. In the concluding section of this chapter, I explore themes of tensions that arose across the group space. First, I highlight an exemplar lesson shared by Brittany in our final inquiry session.

Reading the World and Bad Bunny: Putting Arts Integration and Universal Design for Learning in Conversation

By the final collaborative inquiry session, Brittany was invited and eager to share about the ways that she had been integrating her prior experience working in schools with an arts integration lens into what she had been learning in SPEPP coursework and fieldwork related to literacy instruction and universal design for learning principles. In this beautiful synthesis in a middle school special education setting, Brittany showcases how expansive literacy practices and inclusive pedagogies are not separate, but rather, mutually reinforcing ways of designing learning that center meaning, relationship, agency, and access.

Arts Integration

Brittany opened by providing an overview for our group of key tenets of an arts integration framework she had learned about in a previous program based on the work of Project Zero out of the Harvard School of Education (Project Zero, 2026), and shared how she was making sense of these alongside UDL to create access points for learners. She started by reviewing the 8 “studio habits of mind”, or “SHoM” which are focused “on the different temperaments of the different like literal habits that studio artists have and use to engage in their craft....We've got develop craft, understanding

art worlds, engage and persist, stretch and explore, envision, reflect, express and observe.” She elaborates,

These are very specific habits to teach, to access content, that I think stretch across languages and stretch across ability levels. They are flexible enough in structure that they are kind of like student-centered, inherently, right? So like, what one student might be working on to engage and persist could be very different than (from what) another student is working on.

Brittany clearly draws a connection here to “SHoM’s” flexible methods, student-centeredness, and being transferable across languages and ability levels which all map to universal design for learning principles. She states, “it’s looking at mapping those artistic habits, right, across all educational inquiry for students, right? So, basing for us as teachers, basing our like facilitation of understanding into these habits of mind.” Her precise language choice of “facilitation of understanding” is also an indication of how she is cultivating her own teacher identity while integrating program concepts as this was word choice used during SPEPP director, Sam’s interview.

Brittany proceeded to highlight for the group how she is also connecting Project Zero’s *Thinking Routines* to Universal Design for Learning guidelines. She said:

So, these are some of the ways that we’re highlighting how an artist is moving through their thinking, right? Is it that there’s a kind of an emphasis on iteration, there’s an emphasis on kind of like a cyclical process that you’re repeating over and over and over again to kind of deep dive, discover, explore and then create a product.

In this quote, Brittany is drawing connections to the intentions behind UDL guidelines to design options for sustaining effort and persistence, expression and communication, and building emotional capacity (CAST, 2024). She elaborates,

It's also focusing on, kind of the metacognition that goes along with understanding and kind of driving your own inquiry... Then from the like the ML lens, right? I think this is really interesting, because a lot of these thinking routines are, are very, very simple, and so in terms of like building language knowledge and then being able to access something that's repeated over and over, it engages a student in their own language, while also building their language, right?... And so, it's something that everyone is using and kind of engaging with them in their own way. And so, there's a lot of different thinking routines that are mapped on to the distinct artistic habits.

In these ways, Brittany is drawing from multiple frameworks simultaneously to consider ways to design instruction that creates meaningful learning opportunities for multilingual learners with disabilities. Next, Brittany made visible the myriad ways she has drawn from these frameworks alongside her own growing conceptualization of literacy to create a literacy lesson for learners in a middle school special education setting.

Putting Frameworks into Practice

Brittany walked us through a lesson “with the studio habits of artists in mind, with the thinking routines in mind, as it relates to UDL and incorporates a literacy Common Core standard, socio emotional goals, right? So, this is kind of an example of like, how this work can kind of come together to create something real.” In her lesson, Brittany connects to the “SHoM” core tenet of “looking at the art world as a place for social

justice” to guide her students’ interrogation of the multiple symbolic meanings of Bad Bunny’s 2026 Superbowl LX halftime show. The remainder of this section will explore the many ways that Brittany is demonstrating a strong grasp of core principles of the college of education’s and SPEPP’s educational justice orientations and how she is developing agency in her own teacher identity.

Expansive Literacy and Students as Agentic Learners

The ways that Brittany has conceptualized her lesson to anchor critical thinking and community signal an adoption of an expansive framing of literacy as she develops her emerging teacher identity. Brittany clearly connects to the UDL guidelines (CAST, 2024) to design her literacy lesson for multiple means of representation by selecting the Bad Bunny Superbowl Video, an NPR article about the Grammy Awards (in which Bad Bunny won the award for album of year preceding the Superbowl performance, the first for a non-English album), and a PBS video “deep dive into what Bad Bunny is doing and why it’s so important.” In her framing of the lesson, she points to an expansive literacy stance in that, “I was setting them up to think about how artists use platforms and space, colors, symbols, sounds, to inspire change. And what that means is in terms of, like, using your voice for something.” Here, Brittany is signaling to learners that literacy practices extend far beyond word reading or reading to answer specific questions.

Brittany draws on an arts integration lens that she brought with her into SPEPP to frame the performance. She says, “So that’s another like, art piece, right? That is a choreographed piece of work. It’s all in Spanish. We’re looking at the symbolism inside of Bad Bunny’s, like, actual representation.” By choosing an anchor source in Spanish, Brittany also signals that literacy is a culturally and linguistically situated practice.

Expertly, she positions students' home languages, popular culture, and prior knowledge as entry points to academic literacy. Taken together, these are examples of how Brittany is strategically integrating what she has been exploring in coursework, seminar, fieldwork, and her prior experiences to apply to her practice and construction of her teacher identity as it directly relates to the college's mission for educational justice. She further elaborated:

So like, as they're watching or reading or engaging with these the sources, like the content sources, they are cataloging things that they see. They're cataloging things that they're thinking, and they're cataloging questions, right? So, this is a direct nod to a literacy practice of making our thinking visible as we work on comprehension. And so, we did this on laptops. Some students did it in their journals.

There are several examples throughout the lesson of Brittany signaling to students that literacy is a collaborative meaning making endeavor, and that all student voices were valued. She proactively planned for and responded to student needs to reduce barriers for written production. For instance, she designed opportunities for multiple means of expression and communication by providing student journals, described here:

So, one of the things that we think about when we're in content learning, right, is this need to kind of be fidgeting, be kind of in movement. I know that I'm thinking a lot better when I'm like manipulating and kind of making my understanding, or like representing my understanding in a different way. And so, one of the things

that we did during all of the lessons, this was like a five lesson unit, was we created and mapped all of our work in our journals.

Brittany showcased how she used journals to model various ways to engage with the content and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding by doodling, highlighting key words and phrases. Later she also pointed out how students created collages in their journals.

Another example included inviting instructional assistants to scribe student input onto post it notes. She stated, “So these sticky notes are actually direct representation of student comments. You'll notice that a lot are in IA handwriting. There's a lot of resist...that's just a barrier that a lot of my students have is like, physically writing. And so this is just another way to say, like, look at all the student input might not be in their handwriting, but it was theirs, right?” Strategically utilizing additional adults to support access to a written task helped everybody stay focused on the end goal which was capturing the sensemaking of the students. This signals to students that their input and voices matter more than their ability to spell or handwriting. Interestingly, she also pivoted midsentence in her framing of students. She started by calling it student resistance and caught herself to reword to identifying writing as a barrier. In the following excerpt, she highlights the creative and in-the-moment way she was able to pivot to accommodate a student who may otherwise have been excluded from the activity:

I had IAS walk around the room and, like, pick up the sticky notes as they were being generated, as the content was going and we'd stick them and physically sort them on the board. I also had a student that wasn't really engaging. And so I

actually had that student do the sorting. And so he was, you know, reading and organizing them into the different places. And so he was still involved in in the literacy work, just kind of in a different way.

Again, in this example, Brittany highlighted the importance of involving all students and finding ways to create meaningful participation activities. In this move, she strategically communicates that this learner has value to contribute to the collective work, but it might look different than it does for the group. She also signals how she followed student preference by saying, “that student decided that they wanted to do just a graph. They didn't want to do sticky notes; they didn't want a collage. They just wanted to write it down. And so that that's an example of their work.” One student chose to represent thinking via a graph, another via collage, someone else orally, and another through writing, yet each was treated as legitimate literacy work. Importantly, in these seemingly simple examples, Brittany highlights how she remains focused on reducing barriers and facilitating sensemaking and participation of *all* her students. She is communicating in these moves that literacy is a multimodal endeavor, and the voices and meaningful engagement of all students is expected and creatively adapted for in the moment. She is finding ways to promote learner agency while establishing her teacher identity as student centered and rooted in facilitation of learning practices.

Thinking Routines

Brittany also incorporated a 3-2-1 thinking routine to facilitate sense making while supporting language development, engagement, and scaffolding accessibility. She states, “3-2-1. So, like three things that you know, two things or two questions that you have, and then one metaphor. So again, just the idea of like, keeping routines, learning

the practice, keep building kind of that language in the class, and building the strength to like, deepen that inquiry as you use the routines more.” Brittany used another thinking routine, “I see, I think, I wonder” to facilitate sense making while going through the Bad Bunny Super Bowl video. Taken together, in these ways, the *3-2-1* and *I See, I Think, I Wonder* routines allow students to engage with literacy through observation and questioning, which are being positioned as literacy practices even when not primarily reliant on written text. These are representative of an expansive framing of literacy as well as supportive metacognitive scaffolds for multilingual learners with disabilities.

Pause & Repair

Brittany frequently discussed pivoting in response to her students’ needs. By creating a “pause & repair” strategy centered on belonging and well-being as prerequisites for learning, this created an entry point for students to pause and ask questions interrupting patterns of exclusion, conflict, or disengagement. This strategy also redistributes responsibility from teacher control to community accountability. She shared her use of this practice, “So this is something we created because we’re doing a lot of work on social, emotional stuff. And so this is an example of, like, a student driven, like, call out or dialog to, like, do a full stop and get into something if they’re realizing that, like, someone is themselves or someone else is being, like, left out of the learning.” She goes on to elaborate while walking us through her lesson slides (see Figure 6).

These were all the different things that, sorry, like they’re the different steps broken down into physical posters. And so, when someone calls called pause, we would distribute the posters so that everybody knew what their prompt was and we knew what the steps were. So again, another UDL example. Ideally,

these would be recreated in student art pieces, right? And represented in their own way. But we didn't have time.

Figure 6

Pause and Repair Slide



Brittany described modeling this strategy multiple times and in addition to fostering clear purpose and establishing a relationship of trust, students were able to independently initiate the pauses and complete the repair process with the support of visuals, sentence stems, and clearly structured steps.

These moves are demonstrative of inclusive practice that is iterative based on ongoing responsiveness to student needs. Pause and Repair facilitates learner agency as the students are tasked to self-monitor their own sense-making and the onus is on them to identify when learning is inaccessible and to advocate for their needs. "Pause and repair" also provided a formative data point on where breakdowns occurred for students and helped inform Brittany's ability to adjust instruction. In these ways, creating

an inclusive classroom environment is not something that teachers solely create *to* or *for* students, but in collaboration *with* students.

Importantly, the Pause and Repair strategy piqued the interest of the inquiry participants and provided meaningful context for the teacher candidates to explore their emerging teacher identities with one another. Melissa asked,

I'm interested in this pause and repair part that you're mentioning. I'm a really huge advocate of speaking up if something's not working, because I want to be able to make it happen if it doesn't work...did you find that it became like everybody all the time had to do a pause and repair? Or was it like very appropriate times? Because I could see myself trying to do something like this in the moment, and it just being like every kid saying they have a pause and repair because they want to avoid doing the work. It's like when you start to do the work, suddenly they all have to go to the bathroom at the same time, you know!?

Did it...was it... was it used in the right way? Or what did you experience in that?

Here Melissa is signaling her commitments to designing rituals and routines that are conducive to learning and promote learner agency, but is expressing concern about effective implementation, a common experience for novice teachers. Brittany explores her own developing teacher identity in the supportive context of the inquiry group space as she provides an example of exhibiting her own agency in creating the strategy, and then through her response of how she explored implementation dynamics in practice.

She states,

It's something that I made up. I want to name that. It's not like, based in research, it's not based in any academia stuff. It's just like, I knew that we needed a

system, because we couldn't get to anything because of what you're talking about. People just had problem after problem, and it was arguing and arguing. And so I was like, we need a way to do this that's agreed upon, right, and that feels a little bit more equitable instead of like, picking on each other.

In describing how she modeled it a few times, she goes on further to say,

They took it up very appropriately. I mean, it wasn't abused at all. And I think what was really incredible is that it actually repaired and allowed us...like the whole goal is, like, this is something that we do to support our community. This is something that we do to get back to the mission, right? It puts the onus back on the student to be like, what do you need? And let's have a conversation about it, right? It removes, like, the power, right? So it's not just me calling pauses on everyone. And I think the students are respectful of that. I think that they saw that, and they responded appropriately, because it wasn't like a manipulation tactic.

In this way, Brittany situates her teacher identity in a *facilitator* role, something she described in the opening of her share. She then goes on to reference Carla Shalaby's key ideas in *Troublemakers* (Shalaby, 2017), a reading from the inclusive education course, by articulating the importance of centering students in the learning process and understanding learner behaviors as important forms of communication.

Whenever the behavior gets in the way of the teaching, right, this idea that like, the goal is, well-being. The goal is community belonging. When any, any time there's something that, like, gets in the way of teaching, like, we have to go back

to, like, what is the point of what we're doing? And I think that I base a lot of my teaching in that, right?

Expansive Framing of Literacy

Throughout the inquiry sessions, there were several examples where literacy was defined as multimodal, interdisciplinary, social, and cultural, rather than narrowly as decoding or print-based reading/writing only. In Brittany's exemplar lesson, students demonstrated comprehension through collage, journaling, discussion, movement, and visual and musical analysis, not only written text. In these ways, the teacher candidates framed literacy as multimodal.

Brittany strategically selected resources and a topic that were socially and culturally relevant because this lesson occurred shortly after the Superbowl. Whether or not individual students were into football or even watched it, they were likely to have heard about Bad Bunny's performance. She explained, "And through it we had lots of music, lots of art, lots of different voices talking about what was going on. It's all current events." She attributes this connection to their lives as a source of their engagement and persistence with this lesson over the course of five days, "I think we were working on enough that was relevant to them that, like, they were able to stick, stick with it." Brittany also reflected on the affordances to using art and popular culture to appeal to multilingual learners. She shared:

When you focus exploration around art and artists.... you can bring in so many different languages, so many different cultures. And so, when we're looking for, like, really direct representation, especially across languages, it's a really, like,

that whole lesson was in Spanish, you know what I mean? So, like, I just think it's a really great way to bring other languages into the classroom, too.

In this excerpt, we see how Brittany is creating translanguaging opportunities in the learning space and positioning Spanish speaking students as knowledgeable.

Literacy As a Social Practice

Brittany's lesson points to an expansive framing of literacy in which meaning is co-constructed as a social practice. Literacy is not framed as an individual interaction with reading and writing tasks but is framed as participation in shared meaning-making practices. For instance, sticky notes were collected, sorted, and reorganized as a community. These notes were then used to collaboratively construct a sentence claim tied to common core standards. Brittany expands:

And then we took it back to the Common Core standard of like, using direct evidence to then come up with a claim, right? Or come up with kind of, like a summative sentence. And so, this is something I had to deviate (from) ideally, they were going to do this independently, but we're not really in that space. And so, we dialoged. And we had a conversation. The things that we noticed are on the left-hand side of the screen. And then together, we came up with that one summative sentence.

Through this co-constructed dialogue, the group was able to apply critical thinking and analysis to the Superbowl performance, the Grammys article, and the PBS video to claim, "The theme of the halftime show is the government isn't helping, and they decided that they deserve to be represented." In this example, Brittany clearly applies an expansive framing of literacy and connects to the overarching goal of UDL to "foster

learner agency that is purposeful and reflective, resourceful and authentic, strategic and action-oriented” (Cast, 2024). The studio habits of mind, “SHoM”, and thinking routines drawn from an arts integration framework, taken together with universal design for learning, support planning for multiple means of engagement, representation, and action/expression. The emphasis on iteration, metacognition, and visible thinking aligns strongly with executive functioning and SEL goals and fostering student agency. Students demonstrated engagement through choice, agency, and multiple modes of engagement rather than individually or via a single output. All of the strategies and approaches described by Brittany are supportive for multilingual learners with disabilities.

Tensions

To this point, I have outlined many of the ways the collaborative inquiry space supported teacher candidates’ sensemaking of literacy instruction for multilingual learners with disabilities. In this final section, I explore some of the tensions and contradictions that surfaced for teacher candidates as they participated in the interdisciplinary critical inquiry group designed to support literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities (research question four). The tensions that emerged included teacher candidates referencing burnout; having difficulty applying discussion concepts to their context; seeking role clarity; and grappling with the tension between creating access points and delivering specially designed instruction.

Foreshadowing Burnout

Turnover in the teacher workforce is common, and even more pervasive in special education (e.g. Mason-Williams et al., 2020) to the tune of a 17-29% loss

annually (Sullivan et al., 2017) due to attrition. While I am not suggesting a clear link to predicting exiting the field or leaving special education for general education, at times, teacher candidates, particularly the SPEPP teacher candidates, made comments that may foreshadow their susceptibility to future burnout. For instance, during our connection to shared commitments at the framing of every session, Jocelyn expressed, “if we could touch the blue one (about not being articulate all the time), I've noticed I've been having a hard time articulating certain things, like, because there's so much information being...we have to process so much.” Brittany also referred to the amount of information being presented to them as a lot when she was orienting us to arts integration. She suggested:

I mean, not that we need more frameworks and more pedagogies. So, I, you know, I want to acknowledge that there's a little bit of burnout when it's like, “here's another way to think about being as inclusive as possible”, right? But it's basically one of those.

Both examples could simply signal a saturation point that is not uncommon in graduate school, especially in the spring for those working in schools. However, Jocelyn vulnerably shared in another session about the positive change to her recent placement she stated, “I'm just grateful that I'm getting a lot of feedback and it's positive because before I was getting a lot of negative feedback, and just I felt like I wasn't doing anything right. And honestly, I almost felt like quitting.” While she largely described her new placement in a positive light with “*a good relationship*” with her mentor teacher, she also pointed to challenges with workload. In sharing with the group about how she had been working to foster trusting relationships with her students she added, “so it's been a quite

a bit of a challenge, because I have so many students. I'm working with so many different grade levels." In her first placement and during our individual interview where she referenced her job prior as another challenging site, it occurred to me that this teacher candidate, a BIPOC woman entering special education, is at higher risk to leave the field within five years than her white general ed counterparts.

Variability in Application

Access to learning about multilingual learners with disabilities varied for the teacher candidates by context. In large part, the teacher candidates described the benefits of thinking about students they may not currently be working with. Some of these examples have been highlighted throughout the findings chapters. However, there were instances that signaled difficulty applying the topics or conversations for two of the teacher candidates. For example, on two occasions Jocelyn indicated that she didn't have anything to contribute or surface as a problem of practice because she "wasn't working with any multilingual learners". She stated, "I'm actually in a resource class right now, so I'm not really dealing with anyone that's English as like a second language at the moment." These comments were said in a way that suggested, "Thanks, but no thanks, I'm all good." Jocelyn's interest in joining the group, commitments to educational justice, and general engagement during sessions indicate that this learning was important to her, so it seemed surprising that she was having difficulty making connections in the ways that others seemed to be. These comments stood in contrast to others who clearly expressed the benefits they were gaining and the ways they were thinking about how they might be able to apply to multilingual learners in the future, even if they, too, weren't currently working with ML students, or students with

disabilities, in their placements. As in this example from Brittany where she offered, “There’s things that come up, and I’m like, ‘Oh, this would be a really easy way to address this for like, you know, multilingual learners’.”

Another example arose from Melissa whose problem of practice dilemma suggested she was having difficulty drawing from coursework and seminar to apply in our inquiry group. The dilemma itself about engaging ML students in a fifth-grade class was not surprising for a novice teacher to pose, but it was how she engaged with the dialogue throughout that was of interest. She didn’t seem to “pick up and run” with any of the strategies that we talked about, which was later reflected in follow up. In session six, nearly three months later, teacher candidates were asked to share updates about what they had previously shared, and her response to the topic didn’t reflect any additional insights gained either from what I had shared and presumably what had been discussed in her coursework. In the initial dilemma session, she talked through her use of translation as a primary strategy and it surfaced again. She explained, “We have a translation device for an individual who speaks Dari” and “I’ve been translating myself to create a second worksheet so that individuals who speak primarily Spanish can use it.” She concluded with, “So it’s probably just the same as I was used to before.” Similar to Jocelyn, Melissa has been enthusiastic about learning, collaboration, and naming benefits to the group. These examples suggest that some teacher candidates may need more support than others when it comes to applying learning in novel contexts.

Role Clarity

The problem of practice dilemma about the fifth grade Vietnamese speaking student steered us into a rich conversation about roles. The teacher candidates

explored the tensions between how various people provide support within an MTSS framework. For instance, when considering whether the specific student in the problem of practice could benefit from targeted social emotional and reading instruction, Brittany asked, “And does that have to be, or should that be a special education teacher?” This is a conundrum for many experienced educators in schools. Melissa also connected to observations of additional adult support she has observed in her placement, “maybe it is specifically like an interventionist with a certain title that I need to obviously learn, but I don't believe so. I think it was just someone who was coming in and helping and kind of does that around the school with lots of things.” The teacher candidates were making important observations and asking critical questions to try to make sense of complicated systems.

A bit later into the conversation, Brittany returned to this topic and expressed her concerns more directly. She wondered:

Where do we point our focus at? Like, who do we ask for support? Who do I?...

What parts are my responsibility? What parts can I get assistance from somebody else? What parts rely on somebody else to take that, to take that step and move forward from there?

Here she anticipated future needs for collaboration and identifies a key insight to effective teaming- understanding roles and responsibilities. When teacher candidates were asked to consider the possibility of collective accountability for all students, they affirmed the idea but continued to probe for how that looks in practice. Brittany elaborated further:

It's really important for me to understand the dimensions of my job, right? And then I can identify what it is I do need to be accountable for, and can take on kind of this collective project, because I believe in both. And I've been asking some of these questions in my own program. And I think the natural instinct is to be like, 'No, it's everybody's job', which is helpful. But also I do want to know, where are my domains? Like, what am I really, truly responsible for? So I'm not dropping an assumed ball, right? And so it's interesting, because there's this idealistic kind of, like, vision and theory, which I subscribe to, but then there's the practice.

And so this is really helping me, kind of, like, it's just great. This has been a really helpful session for me, personally.

This conversation, in which Brittany clearly signals how she is attempting to consolidate messaging across her learning environments, exposed a tension with an “all of us” approach to supporting students. Collective responsibility can blur individual accountability. In the exit ticket for the session, Melissa echoed this was a topic that she continued to grapple with, “Trying to wrap my head around the appropriate paths to getting students the right kind of assistance they need. There is a lot involved and it is a delicate subject.” The teacher candidates are trying to situate themselves within an ecosystem of adults to discern where their roles lie-- they are seeking clarity of their professional boundaries.

Creating Access versus Specially Designed Instruction

In the session where Brittany and Madison explored writing instruction and engagement, a tension emerged around the nuance between creating access versus delivering specially designed instruction. This is a topic that I frequently observe in my

roles as an inclusion specialist and administrative intern even among the most experienced teachers and leaders as they grapple within their pursuits of fostering more inclusive learning environments. Brittany questioned,

It's complicating to me that, like, if a student is proficient in this one mode of expression, but that might not translate through life and the goals that they have for their life, right? It's like, if you can't write legibly, right, that's going to change how you're interacting in the world outside of school. And so, and I don't know at what point you just say, like, you know the student can only do written expression if it's speech to text. Like, at what point is that okay versus not okay?

Here Brittany questions whether to lean into accommodations exclusively versus continuing to provide explicit instructional to develop skills. Brittany surfaces a dilemma that many educators, particularly those in secondary contexts like herself, often face about the balance of providing accommodations to facilitate access to learning, while also continuing to deliver targeted instruction. She continued,

This is a conversation I have with my mentor teacher a lot...When do you decide to focus on the skill building versus sense making, You know what I mean? It's like, how do you balance the goals?

Brittany is thoughtfully trying to make sense of the student's lifelong goals and consider her role in creating and supporting progress toward meaningful goals while accounting for the need to facilitate meaningful access to learning. This is a complex quandary that often gets positioned as either/or instead of both/and. This also is also reflective of how teacher candidates are becoming aware of the multiplicities of their roles and wondering where their role boundaries lie.

The tensions that emerged for teacher candidates across the six inquiry sessions included burnout, difficulty applying theory to practice, navigating uncertainty around role expectations, and negotiating the balance of providing access and delivering specially designed instruction. Explored together, these are themes that are representative of common challenges that educators face. In the final discussion chapter, I explore how the collaborative inquiry sessions functioned less as sites of resolution; rather, they made visible the contradictions inherent to navigating the institutionalization of formal schooling that positions inclusion and access as competing priorities with special education mandates.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This qualitative study sought to understand how teacher candidates across two preparation programs (EPP and SPEPP) within one college of education were making sense of their coursework, fieldwork, and prior experiences to support literacy instruction for multilingual learners with disabilities. A brief review of the programs revealed many examples of intentional programmatic moves to disrupt traditional siloed approaches to teacher preparation. In the individual interviews and across the collaborative inquiry sessions, teacher candidates drew from their prior experiences and emergent experiences in coursework to build conceptualizations of literacy instruction that pointed to the importance of culturally relevant text and contributed to their understanding of the critical importance of language as part of literacy development. The depth of their conceptualizations varied based on prior experiences and time in the program but indicate a need to continue fostering teacher candidate sensemaking of the role of explicit instruction alongside expansive framing of literacy instruction. Finally, across the collaborative inquiry sessions, teacher candidates demonstrated they were grappling with complex issues related to supporting multilingual learners with disabilities in schools and served as a supportive and meaningful site for professional learning in myriad ways. In this chapter, I explore how these findings extend or contradict current literature, highlight relevant implications for the field, offer implications for future research, and address limitations to the current study.

Shared Commitments to Justice

Despite teacher candidates being prepared in largely parallel program structures, there was notable alignment across the programs in their mission and vision,

pedagogical approaches, asset-based framings of students, emphasis on cultivating reflective practitioners, and commitment to fostering a critical orientation to teaching. This alignment complicates dominant narratives in the literature that position teacher preparation programs as largely siloed (Artiles et al., 2006) and instead reflects what Blanton, Pugach, and Boveda (2018) identify as a necessary disruption of the historically separate preparation of general and special educators. In this sense, the convergence across programs offers a concrete example of how preparation programs can work toward coherence by integrating shared commitments to inclusive practice, even within enduring structural constraints.

Across both programs, teacher candidates were consistently encouraged to disrupt deficit-oriented narratives about culturally and linguistically diverse learners and students with disabilities. Through racial caucusing, coursework, and seminar, candidates were afforded repeated opportunities to interrogate their own identities and positionalities and to examine how these shape their instructional decisions and professional roles. Research on racial caucusing suggests that these affinity based spaces support deeper critical reflection by creating environments in which participants can engage more authentically with issues of race, privilege, and oppression while reducing the performative pressures and risks of perpetuating harm often present in mixed group settings (Singleton, 2014; Varghese et al., 2019). Within preservice preparation, such structures are particularly impactful for identity development, as they allow candidates to surface assumptions, confront deeply internalized white supremacist beliefs, and build intersectional competence as part of their emerging professional identities (Boveda & Aronson, 2019).

Importantly, when considered through a Critical Disability Raciolinguistics lens (Cioè-Peña, 2020a), these opportunities for reflection also support teacher candidates in recognizing how deficit framings of students are co-constructed through the intersections of race, language, and disability. This perspective challenges candidates to interrogate how normative assumptions about language and ability are racialized and unevenly applied, particularly for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. Engaging in this kind of analysis within caucusing and seminar spaces positions candidates to move beyond viewing student needs as individual differences and instead understand how institutional practices and ideologies produce marginalization.

This emphasis on structured critical self-reflection aligns with Blanton and Pugach's (2017) call for teacher preparation models that move beyond discrete preparation toward the development of adaptive, reflective practitioners capable of navigating the complexity of inclusive classrooms. Identity development is central to this process as preservice teachers come to understand how their identities intersect with broader systems of power, including raciolinguistic and ableist ideologies, they are better positioned to enact culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies. Given that teachers' beliefs significantly influence instructional practices and expectations for students (Pajares, 1992), these opportunities for sustained, intersectional reflection are essential for disrupting deficit orientations and preparing educators who can recognize and challenge the racialized and ableist assumptions embedded within schooling practices.

Further, both programs demonstrated a shared commitment to conceptualizing disability as a natural form of human difference, disrupting traditional medicalized

framings that have historically defined special education (Martínez-Álvarez, 2023). This stance aligns with Critical Inclusion frameworks (Siuty, 2019) and reflects the kind of epistemological shift that Blanton and Pugach (2017) argue is necessary for advancing inclusive teacher education. By foregrounding disability as part of human diversity, rather than deficit, the programs support candidates in developing more expansive and justice-oriented understandings of learners. At the same time, candidates were encouraged to critically examine hegemonic policies and institutional structures, positioning them to recognize and challenge practices that perpetuate marginalization among youth experiencing intersecting forms of oppression (Picower, 2013). Such preparation reflects a move toward what Blanton, Pugach, and Boveda (2018) describe as rethinking the foundations of teacher education to better address the interconnectedness of disability, language, and race.

Importantly, both programs are situated within broader critical and transformative justice-oriented approaches to teacher preparation. Program leaderships' shared commitments to collaboration enabled what Waitoller and King Thorius (2016) describe as "cross-pollination" of core pedagogical stances and practices, creating increased coherence across preparation pathways. This collaborative alignment reflects key elements of Blanton and Pugach's (2017) dynamic model, particularly the emphasis on bridging boundaries across disciplines and fostering learning opportunities that are responsive to context and complexity. These efforts support teacher candidates in developing the capacity to design accessible learning environments for a wide range of learners. As EPP seeks to deepen its integration of Universal Design for Learning principles and SPEPP expands its focus on multilingual learners, this intentional

collaboration holds promise for further advancing integrated, inclusive models of teacher preparation that resist fragmentation and better prepare educators for the realities of diverse classrooms.

Literacy Conceptualizations

Similar to findings highlighting shared commitments and approaches across the programs, there was notable alignment within literacy coursework. In both programs, teacher candidates engaged with foundational components of literacy instruction, including the role of language development (Snow et al., 1998), the use of culturally and linguistically responsive children's literature (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Muhammad, 2020), and the five pillars of reading (NRP, 2000). At the same time, candidates were introduced to literacy as a cultural, historical, and political practice (Greene, 2008), reflecting broader efforts in teacher education to integrate skills-based and critical approaches. However, consistent with the tensions observed in the inquiry sessions, teacher candidates demonstrated variability in their ability to articulate these frameworks in practice. While some candidates were able to name and integrate multiple perspectives on literacy, others defaulted to more binary or simplified understandings particularly when navigating the tension between structured, skills-based instruction and more critical approaches.

This variability reflects well-documented challenges in teacher preparation related to translating theoretical knowledge into practice (e.g., Grossman et al., 2009), as well as the persistence of competing and, at times, conflicting literacy discourses within the field (Janks, 2009). Although both programs emphasized drawing on learners' identities, linguistic repertoires, and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; González et

al., 2005), candidates' uptake of these ideas alongside foundational understanding of the linguistic features required of literacy instruction varied. These tensions suggest that exposure to multiple frameworks, while necessary, is insufficient on its own; teacher candidates require sustained opportunities to approximate practice (Grossman et al., 2009) and receive feedback about how to integrate approaches in context.

Both programs explicitly acknowledged the limitations of preparing teachers for the full complexity of literacy instruction within the constraints of preservice preparation. In line with Blanton and Pugach (2017), these findings underscore the need for preparation models that support the development of adaptive expertise rather than discrete competencies. The variability in candidates' articulation and enactment of literacy approaches highlights the importance of ongoing, practice-based learning opportunities and collaborative inquiry spaces that support candidates in navigating tensions and developing integrated and context-responsive approaches to literacy instruction. Time constraints within teacher preparation programs also point to the need for school districts to continue providing support for novice teachers into their first several years of teaching to continue honing their craft and developing the expertise needed to become effective literacy teachers. The teacher candidates' conceptualizations of literacy instruction for *multilingual learners with disabilities* also varied. One teacher candidate drew on expansive literacy conceptualizations, which were made visible through Brittany's Bad Bunny lesson. The lesson aligned with critical literacies scholarship defining literacy in expansive ways that accounts for myriad ways that we enact literacy practices, and engage with a wide variety of materials, including viewing our environments as texts (Vasquez et al., 2019). Brittany's incorporation of arts

integration aligns to Mosley Wetzel and colleagues' (2019) framing that literacy is anchored in sociocultural and political understandings of using language and literacy as tools for critical analysis. Brittany's inspiration of Bad Bunny's Superbowl performance enabled the young people in her classroom an opportunity to critically "read the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987), disrupting traditional framing in the special education literature that literacy instruction in self-contained settings is solely skills focused or decontextualized (e.g., Klingner et al., 2007; Morrison & Epps, 2002; Ordoñez-Jasis & Jasis, 2011).

Both EPP and SPEPP draw from critical frameworks to inform program design. Further consideration of what is meant by the role of literacy curriculum within an inclusive agenda could be an area for further study within teacher preparation programs focused on advancing critical inclusion. For instance, Pugach and colleagues (2020) point to the need of not ceding to general education curriculum as the default and preparing special education teachers to not assume "the unquestionable value of the existing general education curriculum and treating it as such" (p. 95). Placement based definitions of inclusion largely have focused on identifying pathways for individual students identified as having disabilities to gain access to it. Far less attention has been paid to asking questions about what that curriculum is in the first place, or its underlying worth, both of which lie at the heart of theoretical curriculum considerations. It is not that access to the general education curriculum is unimportant for students who have disabilities. Rather, an access perspective is insufficient to support inclusive practice, making it more critical for special educators to be prepared to engage directly with the substance of curriculum and bringing that same sense of agency to bear in terms of

curriculum to their future collaboration with general education colleagues. While it appears that both programs were fostering critical engagement with literacy and promoting expansive framing of literacy, it was unclear how teacher candidates are being prepared to grapple with this potential tension in future practice.

Finally, across the interviews and inquiry sessions, teacher candidates demonstrated ongoing efforts to make sense of multiple approaches to literacy instruction and to apply their learning in context which created authentic opportunities to surface pedagogical dissonance. For example, during a problem-of-practice session focused on writing engagement, Brittany and Madison grappled with the tension between systematic, explicit skill instruction and authentic meaning-oriented scaffolds. This tension reflects a broader dialogue in the literacy field between structured literacy approaches which emphasize explicit, cumulative instruction in foundational skills such as transcription, spelling, and sentence construction (Moats, 2020; Spear-Swerling, 2019), and process and meaning-focused approaches that foreground student agency, authentic composition, and engagement in purposeful writing (Graves, 1983; Graham, 2018). Additionally, the tension connects to findings in the field about the eclectic ways in-service elementary teachers combine skills and process-oriented approaches in instruction and a need to spend more time supporting preservice teachers in how to devote time to both (Cutler & Graham, 2008).

Importantly, Brittany questioned when to prioritize explicit skill-based instruction and when to focus on facilitating access to meaningful literacy opportunities through accommodations. This discourse signaled that both teacher candidates were aware of the multidimensional nature of writing development. Writing research underscores that

skilled writing requires the coordination of lower-level transcription skills and higher-order composing processes (Graham et al., 2012), yet novice teachers often experience difficulty integrating instruction across these domains in responsive ways. The discourse between Brittany and Madison suggests that they were not only recognizing these distinct strands, but also actively negotiating how to align them within instruction that is both equitable and responsive to learners' needs.

Such grappling is well-documented in teacher learning literature, which highlights how candidates frequently encounter conceptual and practical challenges when reconciling explicit instruction with more flexible, student-centered pedagogies (Grossman et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2010). In this instance, the candidates' inquiry into their fieldwork reflects a shift from viewing these approaches as mutually exclusive toward exploring integrative possibilities. For example, their sensemaking of the ways to incorporate skills instruction with process-oriented approaches, therefore, represents an important developmental step in learning to orchestrate balanced literacy instruction that attends both to the systematic development of writing skills and to the cultivation of meaning-making, engagement, and agency. However, this may also point to a need identified in the literature for more explicit and ongoing attention to the teaching of writing in coursework which is an area that is often identified as minimally addressed in preparation (Myers et al., 2016). Cutler and Graham (2008) also argue that without ample support in this area, teachers are at risk for over emphasizing skills instruction at the expense of process instruction and opportunities for written production in the classroom.

Although not used as a framework for design and analysis, this tension can also be interpreted through the lens of Critical Disability Raciolinguistics (Cioè-Peña, 2020a). This tension reflects how dominant literacy frameworks often position skill acquisition as a prerequisite to participation, reinforcing learning trajectories that can marginalize disabled and racially and linguistically minoritized learners. Applying a critical sociocultural lens, rather than signaling an individual pedagogical dilemma, the exchange surfaced an underlying tendency toward an either/or framing-rather than both/and- as reinforced by Brittany's acknowledgement that this was an issue she was frequently surfacing with her mentor teacher. This tendency, if left unexplored, obscures possibilities for strategically integrating skill development with culturally sustaining, access-oriented literacy practices grounded in learners' social, linguistic, and cultural repertoires.

Benefits to Collaborative Inquiry Space

The collaborative inquiry space served as a supportive and meaningful site for professional learning in myriad ways. It is well established that providing links between fieldwork and coursework is one of the most effective ways to support new teacher learning (Darling Hammond, 2006). Like other studies documenting the affordances of critical friend groups with preservice educators (e.g. Behizadeh et al., 2019; Franzak, 2002), the teacher candidates in this study brought dilemmas and reflected on the ways that their emerging teacher identities were coming together in practice. The inquiry space provided a safe entry point for teacher candidates to grapple with sensitive, delicate, or hard to navigate topics related to what literacy instruction for multilingual learners with disabilities may entail. Following Behizadeh and colleagues (2019),

teacher candidates in social justice-oriented programs need frequent and ongoing opportunities to challenge traditional schooling practices that they themselves were likely steeped in. Behizadeh and colleagues (2019) go on to argue that time and space for critical reflection is not sufficient and that “collaborative structures and scaffolds for criticality are required” (p. 283). Layering in a critical sociocultural theory lens highlights the ways that the collaborative inquiry space demonstrated how teacher candidates were navigating the coursework, the collaborative inquiry space, and their fieldwork while integrating the influences of microsystems and macrosystems simultaneously.

The need to foster critical reflective practice in teaching has been studied for a long time and thus is a core part of many educator preparation programs (Dewey, 1933; Zeichner & Liston, 2014). Like Freirean culture circles (Freire, 1970), the collaborative inquiry space organized around problems of practice offered a structured yet flexible scaffold for productive professional dialogue and facilitating reflective practice. This space legitimized teacher candidates’ experiential knowledge and positioned it alongside theoretical and research-based perspectives. The problems of practice also supported participants in holding complexity without pressure for immediate resolution. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, the inquiry groups disrupted professional “echo chambers,” surfaced assumptions, and helped build confidence for working across unfamiliar roles, disciplines, and learner populations. In these ways and consistent with existing research, the interdisciplinary inquiry group served as a critical bridge between the theoretical and pedagogical tools engaged within the preparation programs and their enactment in school-based contexts, where misalignment frequently occurs (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010). Through dialogic inquiry participants were afforded space not only to

surface and interrogate these dynamics, but also to imagine alternative pathways for practice, collaboration, and advocacy. In alignment with Artiles and Kozleski (2007), this is particularly consequential as teacher candidates prepare to enter professional learning communities that will continue to shape their instructional decisions, professional identities, and understandings of equity over time.

The inquiry group surfaced persistent tensions rooted in working conditions rather than individual shortcomings, with burnout framed as a consequence of institutional constraints rather than personal failure aligning to scholarship (e.g., Appiah-Odame & Frempong, 2025; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). For instance, participants grappled with ambiguity in professional roles, particularly the tension between delivering specially designed instruction and providing accommodations, which made visible broader systemic challenges within how roles are defined in schools. These tensions revealed less about teacher candidates' preparedness and more about the structural barriers educators face, underscoring the need for greater role clarity and sustained interdisciplinary spaces for collective sensemaking and affirmation of teacher identity (Gomez-Najarro, 2025; Grossman et al., 2009).

The inquiry space functioned as a site to surface questions about roles, offering structured opportunities for candidates to collectively reason about problems of practice. This is consistent with practice-based teacher education research, which emphasizes the importance of collaborative learning opportunities where candidates can interrogate instructional dilemmas and focus on decision making toward transforming knowledge to action (Cohen & Ball, 1999; McDonald et al., 2013). In particular, the group surfaced challenges related to supporting multilingual learners with disabilities, reinforcing the

well-documented gap between coursework and practice-based understanding in this area (Artiles et al., 2005; Klingner et al., 2015). Participants' discussions illustrate how developing expertise at the intersection of language and disability requires more than discrete coursework; it necessitates ongoing opportunities to connect theoretical knowledge to the complexities of real schooling contexts.

Additionally, the inquiry space supported teacher candidates in conceptualizing disability identification for multilingual learners as a layered, contextualized process. This perspective aligns with critical sociocultural approaches that emphasize the interplay of language, context, and systemic inequities in shaping identification processes (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Lewis & Moje, 2003; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). The facilitated group space scaffolded how teacher candidates learn to reason professionally about complex learner profiles by considering multiple sources of data, considering contextual factors, and designing responsive, equitable supports. These opportunities position learning as a process of ongoing sense-making rather than static application of knowledge (Grossman et al., 2009).

Finally, participants navigated the tension between addressing student needs and resisting deficit-based or pathologizing narratives, concerns across both critical special education and multilingual education. Their efforts to engage in productive problem-solving without marginalizing learners align with asset-based perspectives that emphasize the importance of recognizing and building on students' linguistic and cultural resources (Paris & Alim, 2017; González et al., 2005). This raises critical questions about how teacher candidates are being prepared to engage in future productive problem-solving conversations without marginalizing learners.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from the current study signal the need for interdisciplinary spaces within teacher preparation. Continued research is needed related to how teacher preparation programs may intentionally integrate critical special education, literacy instruction, and multilingual learner education into cohesive experiences for teacher candidates. For instance, future research could explore the benefits of co-taught literacy coursework across programs and the incorporation of strategic inquiry spaces designed to facilitate teacher candidate sensemaking across disciplinary boundaries. Additionally, more research is needed related to how teacher candidates navigate the complexities of competing frameworks for literacy instruction for multilingual learners with disabilities, such as structured literacy and critical literacy. This research should consider how teachers attend to the needs of providing explicit, systematic language and literacy instruction while also considering culturally and linguistically sustaining literacy practices. Furthermore, there is a need to further explore how special education teachers learn to make decisions about accommodations versus specially designed instruction. Finally, there is a need for longitudinal studies that follow teacher candidates from teacher preparation spaces into the first few years of their practice exploring how teacher candidates' preparation experiences inform their practice over time, particularly their participation within professional learning communities.

The study sought to understand how a critical inquiry collective fostered collaboration across teacher education programs toward the pursuit of justice-oriented literacy practices for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. Graduate students in education often receive siloed training which can perpetuate siloed practices and

cultures of exclusion in schools. Additionally, this siloed programming can reify overreliance on trying to answer the question, “is it language, or is it disability?” (Kangas, 2020) resulting in placement-based decisions rather than attending to individual instructional needs. My hope is that findings from this study inform course or program design that strategically creates opportunities for trans departmental collaboration to address literacy planning and instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities on a broader level. This study offers insights into tensions or contradictions that may be reflective of *in-service* teachers and systemic barriers that perpetuate cultures of exclusion warranting attention in future research.

Finally, given EPP and SPEPP’s explicit commitments to educational justice, critical frameworks, and use of racial caucusing, it was somewhat surprising that more overt attention to systemic racism, ableism, and linguicism didn’t surface in this space for teacher candidates. Further research more explicitly addressing how teacher candidates are learning to identify and confront these issues in practice is warranted.

Limitations

Several limitations were present in this study. This study was somewhat limited by scope with one bounded case within one large urban university, and limited depth of review of the preparation programs. Findings in this study supported some high-level claims about areas of convergence across the programs, but drawing from Blanton and Pugach’s (2009) five program dimensions could lead to more extensive review of the programs’ collaborative efforts to prepare inclusive educators.

Another primary limitation was the degree of teacher candidate participation across the sessions. Despite shared commitments to the work and expressed interest in

the study, teacher candidates had difficulty attending inquiry sessions. They cited scheduling conflicts, regardless of my repeated attempts to schedule convenient times for all. Despite the seemingly simple structure of the collaborative inquiry group, the complexities of engaging in interpersonal focused work means that size, stability and group dynamics are all at play (Carlson, 2019). As such, inconsistent attendance may have disrupted the teacher candidates' abilities to engage in the depth of critical reflective practice necessary for transforming practice. This points to the need for an interdisciplinary inquiry group to be situated within the requirements of the programs, and not something additional that teacher candidates need to make time for (Boveda & Aronson, 2019). It is also unknown how the hybrid/virtual format, while allowing for access, may have also contributed or detracted from the richness of the inquiry space. Moreover, as a facilitator within these dynamics, my own employment of a flexible use of the consultancy protocol may have also limited the degree to which the participants explored with more critically provocative questions. Combined, these factors likely contributed to the lack of explicit attention to how interlocking systems of oppression such as racism, ableism, and linguicism were at play which started as an initial aim for the study.

While beyond the scope of the current study, a deeper investigation into the programs' literacy coursework could be of interest for future study. Descriptions of the teacher candidates' literacy conceptualizations were limited to interview and session participation data. Observations of the teacher candidates in their coursework and fieldwork contexts would have enhanced credibility (Stahl & King, 2020) augmenting my ability to make more in-depth claims about the ways teacher candidates were

understanding literacy instruction and applying their understanding to practice.

Additionally, reviewing samples of the teacher candidate's assignments or lesson plans could have helped me further develop descriptions of their understanding.

Finally, while participants and I worked to center student strengths and assets, student voices were not directly captured or included in this study. Student voice is a crucially important component of justice-oriented literacy practices.

Conclusion

"I do like that all programs are included and have a voice here so I am learning things that I wouldn't normally learn and thinking about things that I normally wouldn't necessarily think about." -Ethan

The current study offers insights into the ways that even teacher preparation programs operating in paralleled spaces can disrupt siloed practices. I drew from critical sociocultural theory to enhance my argument for interdisciplinary collaboration spaces within teacher preparation to advance critical inclusion and expansive literacy for multilingual learners with disabilities. A critical sociocultural perspective foregrounds literacy as socially situated, power-laden, and embedded within historical and cultural contexts in which SPEPP exemplifies a special education program premised on critical inclusion principles that challenge teachers' tendencies to perpetuate decontextualized and skills focused literacy instructional practices. The combined EPP and SPEPP inclusive education course provides one important, yet bounded, opportunity for teacher candidates to grapple with critical issues related to supporting students with disabilities. Importantly, the interdisciplinary collaborative inquiry group served as a site to extend learning and pointed to the need for providing more explicit learning opportunities for

teacher candidates to explore the complexities of supporting literacy instruction for multilingual learners with disabilities. The inquiry group extended beyond a space for technical problem-solving to function as a dialogic and relational space where teacher candidates engaged in literacy teacher identity development, negotiating how to enact responsive, justice-oriented practices to support multilingual learners with disabilities. In alignment with an expansive framing of literacy, teacher candidates were encouraged to recognize and build on students' diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires, rather than treating differences as deficits.

These findings underscore the need for intentionally designed interdisciplinary collaborative inquiry spaces in teacher preparation- spaces that bring together perspectives from special education and multilingual education to disrupt reductive frameworks of literacy and cultivate more holistic understandings of learners. Such spaces offer teacher candidates structured opportunities to draw on intersectional and critical frameworks to reimagine literacy instruction that is inclusive, culturally and linguistically sustaining, and responsive to the complex needs of multilingual learners with disabilities. In these ways, findings reinforce the importance of providing sustained, dialogic learning environments that support the multidimensional nature of teaching multilingual learners with disabilities, while also preparing teacher candidates to navigate and productively engage the inherent tensions of equity focused practice.

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Appendix A Consent Form

Information About a Research Study

Disrupting Siloed Spaces in Teacher Education: Collaborative Learning in Pursuit of Critical Inclusive Literacy for Multilingual Learners Labeled with Disabilities

What is this study about?

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research study about how different teacher preparation programs within the college of education are supporting teacher candidates to collaborate to support multilingual learners labeled with disabilities in literacy instruction. The study also seeks to understand how a collective inquiry group contributes to the ways that teacher candidates think about supporting multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. It is up to you to decide whether you want to participate. If you decide to enroll, you can stop participation at any time.

What will you be asked to do?

(Directors) If you agree to be in this study, I ask that you participate in one individual interview for approximately 30-40 minutes via zoom. I may also ask you to refer me to other participants with information about literacy preparation in your program.

(course instructors) If you agree to be in this study, I ask that you participate in one individual interview for approximately 30-40 minutes. I may also ask you to share course or coaching artifacts. For example, these could include: a course syllabi, assignment directions and/or exemplars, or observation protocols.

(teacher candidates) If you agree to participate in this study, I ask that you participate in one individual interview for approximately 45-60 minutes. I also ask that you commit to attending 4-5 synchronous small group collaborative inquiry sessions. These are likely to be a hybrid format and approximately 90 minutes each. Dates and times will be determined based on participant availability.

What will happen to the information you provide?

The information you provide will be kept confidential. I will store the data with a code instead of your name. I will keep a list that links the code to your name and will store it securely and separate from the data. Pseudonyms will be used for all identifiable information.

What can you do if you want more information?

Talk to me! *Rebecca Ray* is the lead researcher at the University of Washington for this study and can be contacted at (email redacted) or by cell (number redacted).

Talk to someone else. If you want to talk with someone who is not part of the study team about the study, your rights as a research subject, or to report problems or complaints about the study, contact the Human Subjects Division at (information redacted).

Print name

Date

Signature

Date

Appendix B

Data Collection Sources

Item	Name	Description	Source
1	College website	Overview of the college's mission and program information	Website
2	SPEPP Literacy course syllabi	Two literacy course syllabi detailing course objectives, description, policies and procedures, assignment overview, scope and sequence	Course instructor
3	SPEPP literacy course canvas screenshots	19 Screenshots of the two course canvas pages that overviewed workflow, readings, and format for each week	Course instructor
4	EPP literacy syllabus	The first literacy course syllabus detailing course objectives, description, policies and procedures, assignment overview, scope and sequence	Course instructor
5	EPP literacy course google drive folder	Google folder with materials for the EPP literacy course. These included: folders for individual assignments, scope and sequence overview, readings, and slides for course meetings	Course instructor
6	Reading endorsement overview	Scope and sequence of the requirements for the reading endorsement	SPEPP director, Sam
7	Inclusive course	Course syllabus detailing course objectives, description, policies and procedures, assignment overview, scope and sequence	College faculty
8	SPEPP lesson plan template	Lesson planning template used across program for coursework assignments	SPEPP director, Sam
9	EPP lesson plan template	Lesson planning template used across program for coursework assignments	Course instructor
10	SPEPP fieldwork observation and debrief materials	Look fors and guiding questions for debrief conversation	College faculty
11	ML endorsement fieldwork observation and	Look fors and guiding questions for debrief conversation	ML/bilingual endorsement coordinator

	debrief materials		
12	Graphic Organizer	<i>Collaborating for Inclusion</i> template completed by teacher candidates during session one	Adapted from local school district
12	Exit Tickets	Completed by teacher candidates after each inquiry session	Researcher created
13	Anchor Charts; group notes	Anchor charts and notes generated during two in person inquiry sessions	Inquiry Session generated
14	Demographic Survey	Demographic survey info sent to participants	Researcher created Participant info
15	Reflections	Handwritten and email reflections shared by three teacher candidate participants	Participant info

Appendix C

Program Director Interview Protocol

Participant:

Date:

Program:

[The following interview protocol will be used to help me generate some initial impressions about the mission, vision, and aims of the preparation program. It will help provide contextual background to inform my understanding of teacher candidates' experiences as well as will inform what data and artifacts may also be helpful in answering my research question. The interview is also meant to be an opportunity to gather input from directors about what they would be curious to know more about]

RQ 1:

How do different teacher preparation programs within one institution prepare teacher candidates to support multilingual youth labeled as disabled in literacy?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. As you know I'm interested in learning about how the different programs within the college prepare teacher candidates to become inclusive educators and the ways our programs prepare them to support literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. The next phases of my study will include recruiting a small group of Teacher candidates across programs to participate in an inquiry collective group. I will start by interviewing each of them to better understand how they are making sense their roles related to supporting literacy instruction for multilingual students with disabilities and then we'll iteratively design a collaborative working and inquiry space. This first phase of the study helps me understand more deeply the different programs that teacher candidates are learning within. We'll start our conversation with some (brief) questions to help me get to know you and your programs. Then I will ask you some more specific questions related to course of study and related fieldwork experiences. Finally, I will inquire about your interests in the study. Your responses to these questions will help me think about how to plan for future inquiry sessions as well as provide a rich backdrop of the various contexts that our teacher candidates are learning in. Your personal information and any personal information will be deidentified. Before we continue, I want to confirm that I have your consent to record this conversation

Questions

1. Can you start by providing a very high level overview of the type of program you direct and how long you have been in your current role?
 - a. Is there a pattern to the demographic of students you enroll?

- b. Upon successful completion of the program, what are your graduates prepared to teach?
2. Think about when you're asked at a conference about your particular preparation program, how would you describe the mission, vision, and aims?
 - a. What are some throughlines that you hope/expect present throughout the coursework and fieldwork experiences?
 - b. Are there any additional core values that you want to name that may not have come up yet?
3. How is literacy instruction to multilingual students with disabilities a part of _____(connect to previous response)?
 - a. Can you offer some key aims for what you hope teacher candidates leave the program understanding related to literacy?
4. Collaboration is such a significant part of the role of working in schools. How does your program support development in collaborative practice?
5. What other information should I look at to better understand your program mission, vision, and aims?
 - a. What else should I look at to better understand the literacy aspect of the program?
 - b. What other knowledgeable folks might I want to talk with? (perhaps a coach or an instructor?)
6. What are you curious about understanding of the teacher candidate's experience?

Appendix D

Literacy Course Instructor Interview Protocol

Participant:

Date:

Program:

[The following interview protocol will be used to help me generate some initial impressions about literacy instruction preparation. It will help provide contextual background to inform my understanding of teacher candidates' experiences as well as will inform what data and artifacts may also be helpful in answering my research question.]

RQ 1:

How do different teacher preparation programs within one institution prepare teacher candidates to support multilingual youth labeled as disabled in literacy?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I am interested in learning about how the different programs within the college prepare teacher candidates to become inclusive educators and the ways our programs prepare Teacher candidates to support literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. The following phases of my study will include recruiting a small group of Teacher candidates across programs to participate in an inquiry collective group. I will start by interviewing each of them to better understand how they are making sense of their roles related to supporting literacy instruction for multilingual students with disabilities and then we'll iteratively design a collaborative working and inquiry space. This first phase of the study helps me understand more deeply the different programs that teacher candidates are learning within. We'll start our conversation with some (brief) questions to help me get to know you and your course/role. Then I will ask you some more specific questions related to your course and/or related fieldwork experiences. Finally, I will inquire about your interests in the study. Your responses to these questions will help me think about how to plan for future inquiry sessions as well as provide a rich backdrop of the various contexts that our teacher candidates are learning in. Your personal information and any personal information will be deidentified. Before we continue, I want to confirm that I have your consent to record this conversation.

Questions

1. Can you start by providing a very high-level overview of the type of course(s) you teach and how long you have been in your current role?
 - a. Is there a pattern to the demographic of students you teach/support?
2. Think about when you're asked at a conference about your particular course or role, how would you describe it?

- a. What are the major course objectives? OR What do you see as the purpose of the coaching relationship?
 - b. IF coach, can you describe the outline of the focus of coaching observation cycles. In what ways do they align to coursework?
 - c. How did you come up with the reading list? OR How do you support Teacher candidates in developing their literacy instructional practices?
 - d. How is supporting multilingual learners with disabilities a part of the course? OR fieldwork?
 - e. How does this course fit within a larger program scope and sequence designed to prepare Teacher candidates to teach literacy?
3. Collaboration is such a significant part of the role of working in schools. How does your course OR coaching relationship/fieldwork experience support development in collaborative practice?
4. By the end of this course/year, what do you expect Teacher candidates to be able to do in relation to their literacy instruction?
5. What do you anticipate Teacher candidates will need continued support in?

Appendix E

Teacher Candidate Initial Interview Protocol

Participant:

Date:

Program/Year:

[The following interview protocol will be used to help me generate some initial data about how I could answer the following two research questions. This interview is also meant to be an opportunity to gather input that will help inform me how to initially organize the inquiry space]

R Q 2:

How do teacher candidates across different programs understand literacy instruction for multilingual youth labeled as disabled?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. As you know I'm interested in learning about how teacher candidates are preparing to become inclusive educators and the ways they are thinking about supporting literacy instruction for multilingual learners labeled with disabilities. We'll start our conversation with some questions to help me get to know your learning and teaching contexts. Then I will ask you some more specific questions related to language and literacy teaching. Finally, I will inquire about your interests in the study. Your responses to these questions will help me think about how to plan for our initial session as well as learn about your context, interests, and needs related to this work. Your personal information and any personal information will be deidentified. Before we continue, I want to confirm that I have your consent to record this conversation.

Part 1

Let's get a little acquainted first.

1. Can you start by telling me a bit about your current school-based placement?
 - a. What kind of program/classroom are you working in? School?
 - b. Describe some of the duties that fill your time throughout the day.
 - c. Looking to get at current experiences with literacy instruction for multilingual learners with disabilities.
 - d. Do you feel like this experience is a good "fit". Why/ why not?
2. Can you tell me a bit about what brought you to the program?
 - a. Have there been any key take away concepts or courses that stand out to you as you reflect on your time in the program at ____? (Why? Tell me more)

- b. What has been one of your most impactful experiences working in education thus far?
 - c. What kind of position will you be working in (or looking for) next year?
- 3. What comes to mind for you when I say, “inclusive education”? How does this relate to your overall commitments as an educator?
 - a. What does that mean to you?
 - b. What practices or pedagogies have you learned about that you might draw upon?

Part 2

Let's steer toward literacy.

- 4. Describe how you think about literacy, or rather, how would you define literacy?
 - a. Is the way you are thinking about literacy similar or different from the way literacy is often framed in your school context?
 - b. Are there specific skills or components that you think of in relation to literacy?
 - c. Can you talk a bit about how you are understanding the role of language development in literacy acquisition?
 - d. How have you come to know about literacy? ...what books, scholars, experiences, and/or courses have informed your thinking?
- 5. Talk me through what your literacy instruction looks like or would look like in your ideal classroom?
 - a. What resources might you use?
 - b. How would your time be structured?
 - c. What skills or strategies do you see yourself working on?
 - d. How might you assess progress?
- 6. In what ways have you been trained to support multilingual learners develop literacy skills?
 - a. What does this instruction entail?
 - b. What about MLLs with disabilities?
 - c. What experiences have you had in working with multilingual learners with disabilities? What have you learned about that? What questions comes up for you?
- 7. Knowing you are still on your journey in becoming a literacy educator, just think about this moment in time
 - a. What areas do you feel confident about?
 - b. What do you wish you knew more about?
 - c. What questions or concerns do you have in this area?
- 8. When you think about collaboration to support literacy for a multilingual learner who is identified as struggling, what experiences have you had or observed?

- a. How do you think about your role?
- b. How do you think about others' roles?
- c. What challenges have you faced? Or what might you anticipate?
- d. Talk about any background knowledge or experience you have with co-teaching.

Part 3

Finally, let's wrap up by uncovering any questions or concerns that you may have and may wish to see addressed in some way during our time together moving forward. This will help inform how I'm thinking about organizing our first session and in possibly offering some options of conversations or activities that we could engage in.

- 9. What questions or concerns do you have about moving into a cert position in relation to literacy instruction?
 - a. Supporting multilingual students with disabilities?
 - b. Collaborating with your colleagues?
- 10. What do you hope to gain from participating in this project?
 - a. What are some questions you think would be interesting to address?
 - b. Or what are some activities that you would love to see us address knowing that the intention is to be able to learn more about collaborating and learning with and from your general education/special education teacher peers?
 - c. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your candor and your time today! I really appreciate it and I'm looking forward to continuing our conversations and learning together in our group space.

Appendix F

Example Agenda Inquiry Session 1

- I. Introduction
 - a. Welcome and grounding
 - b. Brief overview of purpose of study and purpose of the space
 - c. Commitments
 - d. Intention setting for the day
- II. Getting to know each other in relationship to our own language, literate and dis/abled selves.
 - a. Names, pronouns, program, type of job placement
 - b. Sharing about role of literacy in your life.
- III. Purpose of the space- deeper dive
 - a. What is collaboration and why should we be talking about?
 - b. High level summary sharing of themes of interests or questions that were surfaced in the interviews
- IV. Exploring collaboration
 - a. Choice of resource: Collaboration for Inclusion: Getting to know your team fillable document OR TIES Center
 - b. Independent processing time and group reflection
- V. Planning Ahead
 - a. Offering of a few suggestions for consideration of how to spend our time, that may include the following (review high level description of what this would entail):
 - i. Shadow a learner
 - ii. Conduct an equity audit of school site
 - iii. Problem of practice or “dilemma” protocol
 - b. Invite participants to suggest other ideas (maybe they prefer to read something, watch something, listen to something, and discussion; something else)
- VI. Closing
- VII. Follow up with a 2-3 question feedback survey
 - a. What was an insight that you had today?
 - b. What was something that worked well?
 - c. What is a suggestion or a hope for something different next time?

Appendix G Problem of Practice Protocol

Step 1 (~3 min)	Presenter provides a 2-3 minute overview of the dilemma. Group listens.	Guiding questions: What are you grappling with? What is a question you are hoping to gather insight to solve?
Step 2 (~2-3 min)	Group asks clarifying questions (this is NOT the time yet for suggestions or feedback).	Think questions that provide brief and factual information.
Step 3: (~7-10 min)	Group discusses what they have heard. The group makes sense of the dilemma and frames possible next steps as “open suggestions”. The goal is not to solve the problem, but to offer some additional clarity around the dilemma. The presenter listens in and might even take notes, but doesn’t actively participate. Listen for new ideas and approaches. Avoid listening for any sort of judgement about yourself or your role in the dilemma.	<i>Possible questions to frame the discussion:</i> • What did we hear? What didn’t we hear that might be relevant? • What assumptions seem to be operating? • What questions have been raised for us? • What meaning are we making about the dilemma and what we heard? • What haven’t we considered/thought about?
Step 4: (~5 min)	Presenter reflects on what they heard and on what they are now thinking	Share anything particular that resonated during the consultancy and any relevant action steps
Step 5: (~2 min)	Facilitator lead debrief	Summarize key take aways

Adapted from CLEE consultancy protocol

Appendix H

Collaborative Inquiry Group Session Exit Ticket Example

Critical Inquiry Group Session 1

Please take a moment to provide some feedback

This form is automatically collecting emails from all respondents. [Change settings](#)

What is a take away you are having after our meeting today?

Long answer text

What topic or question would you like to see next time or in a future session?

Long answer text

What questions do you have about our group?

Long answer text

Appendix I

Final Reflection Prompts

1. How has participating in a critical collaboration group helped you think differently about designing inclusive literacy supports for multilingual learners with disabilities, and how might you plan to apply this learning in your student teaching or early career practice?
2. What beliefs or assumptions about multilingual learners with disabilities were challenged or affirmed through collaboration with peers, and how might this shape your instructional decisions moving forward?