

How K-12 Educators of Color Enact Technology-enhanced Multiliterate Curricula to Create
Reciprocal Learning Environments for Multilingual Students

Ying-Tung Lin

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Lakeya Afolalu

Betina Hsieh

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University of Washington

Abstract

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Ying-Tung Lin

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Lakeya Afolalu

College of Education

In light of the urgent need for teacher diversity in the multilingual and multicultural contexts of the United States, this phenomenological research collected insights from K-12 educators of color regarding their experiences with ethnically diverse students to illuminate various ways of knowing in language and literacy. Drawing on a multiliterate, sociocultural approach to teaching and learning for multilingual students, it demonstrates how multiliteracies and digital technologies can serve as mediums to empower them. Data include semi-structured interviews and are analyzed through interpretative phenomenological analysis, which collectively generate the participants' narratives in relation to their knowing and being. Findings indicate that educators of color who bring their intersecting identities into their teaching and enact technology-enhanced multiliteracies approaches to connect with students from diverse linguistic

and cultural backgrounds can foster their students' agency and build reciprocal relationships. The role of a teacher transitions from being above students to collaborating with them. During a time when the field of teacher education lacks representation of teachers of color, this study advocates for an increased, diversified teaching workforce and ongoing reflection on teaching practices to align with the evolving landscape of 21st-century education.

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Introduction

Purpose

The demographic composition of schools in the United States has changed rapidly, now including a growing number of students from abroad alongside the existing domestic student population. This shift includes international students on visas, as well as immigrants, asylees, and refugees. Furthermore, there has been an increase in emergent bilingual and multilingual students, including international and domestic. As the student demographic has become more diverse through immigration, the enrollment of English learners in U.S. schools rose by 2.3 percentage points from the 2000-01 school year to the 2019-20 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Newly arrived multilingual students come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Despite the rich linguistic and cultural strengths that they possess, they often face several challenges, including navigating different cultural norms, overcoming language barriers, and dealing with a lack of teacher diversity. Even in public schools with predominantly non-white student populations, most teachers are still white (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). These students are identified as needing to acquire English skills to participate effectively in educational programs in the U.S. The English-dominant curricula and learning environments create barriers for these students, labeling non-English speakers as outsiders (Cepeda Paulino & Alvarado Lopez, 2024; Manspile et al., 2021; Olsen, 1997).

Moreover, the beliefs, ideologies, and perspectives that exist related to multilingualism hinder access to educational opportunities. For instance, to enroll in a high school Journalism and Publishing class, multilingual students must show their ability to create academic content in English, yet this language proficiency requirement may overlook their actual performance.

According to Romero-Little et al. (2014), “These culturally and linguistically gifted learners (CLGLs) are invisible to the mainstream educator, whose expectations for learning and of learners are based on their own monocultural and monolingual background and experiences.” (p. 166). The purpose of schooling is to help students learn and grow, rather than forcing multilingual students to change their language and culture to fit into the dominant culture that emphasizes Eurocentrism.

Over the past three decades, critical educators and scholars have theorized and implemented asset-based pedagogies in education (Moll et al., 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017; Yosso, 2005). This stems from arguments that traditional literacy education is insufficient in a world increasingly influenced by new technologies (Gee, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011; Walsh, 2017). More recently, critical educators have also argued for a rethinking of literacy approaches to effectively engage students from diverse backgrounds and incorporate new literacies that broaden traditional forms of student participation (Afolalu, 2024a; Karkar Esperat, 2024b). For instance, digital technologies have transformed our lives, leading to new ways of thinking, doing, and being. This contemporary era emphasizes the need for educators to adopt a fresh mindset that recognizes the impact of digital technologies and multiliteracies on our world and on how we learn and acquire knowledge.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore how K-12 educators of color¹ enhance the learning experiences of all students, particularly multilingual learners, through their use of multiliteracies in teaching. Multiliteracies involve various modes of meaning-making, including linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial forms of representation. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; The New London Group, 1996). Building on existing scholarship, this study particularly

¹ The term “educators of color” refers to educators who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or individuals who are bi/multiracial of these backgrounds.

seeks insights and understandings from K-12 educators of color, inviting them to share their teaching and learning experiences with diverse student² populations. By drawing on their strengths and knowledge, and analyzing these experiences through an asset-based lens (Paris & Alim, 2017), we can highlight the various ways of knowing and being within the educational context. The research questions guiding my study are:

1. How do the identity and experiences of K-12 educators of color influence their enactment of technology-enhanced multiliterate curricula to support their diverse student needs?
2. What insights can teachers gain from observing and interacting with their students to transform their teaching practices?

Rationale

If multilingual and multicultural students effectively utilize tools such as multiliteracies—which include multimodal forms of literacy and communication—along with digital technologies to articulate their thoughts and connect with others, they can take an active role in their education while ensuring that their identities and voices are respected (Kalantzis & Cope, 2020; Karkar Esperat, 2024a). Language is more than conveying information; it is also about performing actions and embodying identities (Gee, 2015). Language performance and competence are dynamic during dialogues and interactions, influenced by the sociocultural settings and the different cultures and environments we have been exposed to throughout our lives. Language is fluid in shaping interactions, behaviors, and social structures, constantly evolving and adapting to changing social contexts and influences. It also serves as a tool to make an impact through speech, writing, and even silence within a social context. Thus, it is

² The term “diverse student” describes learners with a wide range of characteristics, including language, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, learning styles, and personal experiences.

imperative that multilingual students maintain their heritage languages while learning the dominant language spoken at school, as language is closely connected to one's identity. Lee and McCarty (2017) emphasize how learning an individual's native language fosters a sense of belonging. This enables students to feel more connected to their culture, take pride in their heritage, and understand the customs that define their identity.

To support multilingual students, educators need to create a learning environment that reflects and respects the sociocultural and linguistic diversity of multilingual students and values the complexity of their backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Students need to see themselves in the teaching and learning process and spaces, and feel a sense of belonging within the school community. This process should be rooted in individual experiences within real-world contexts to provide a more authentic learning experience.

Therefore, this study presents a multiliterate, sociocultural approach to teaching and learning for multilingual students, demonstrating how multiliteracies and digital technologies can serve as mediums to empower students to create a universal language that can overcome language barriers, revitalize heritage languages, advocate for themselves, and promote continuous self-directed learning. Additionally, it amplifies the narratives of educators of color.

Literature Review

Teacher Identities, Multiliteracies, and Technology

The Intersecting Identities of Educators of Color

The dominant presence of whiteness in educational systems often marginalizes the perspectives and experiences of teachers of color (Amos, 2016; Player & Irizarry, 2022). This systemic neglect not only hinders their professional growth but also undermines their

contributions and pedagogical approaches, ultimately impacting their ability to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Brown, 2022; Haddix & Williams Brown, 2022; Player & Irizarry, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to recognize and rectify this oversight by centering the perspectives of educators of color to cultivate equitable and inclusive educational settings.

Teacher identity is dynamic and evolves through past experiences and ongoing interactions with the surrounding environment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Haddix, 2010; Henry, 2016; Hsieh, 2016). The identities of educators of color are shaped by their unique and intersecting social, cultural, and historical experiences, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class (Burkhard et al., 2022; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Haddix, 2010). For instance, multilingual teachers of color possess hybrid identities shaped by their experiences as multilingual individuals, as well as their connections to cultural heritage, personal histories, and professional roles (Barriot & Gonzales, 2024; Haddix, 2010). These hybrid identities reflect a blend of influences from diverse cultures, languages, and contexts, helping educators bridge their backgrounds and those of their multilingual students and instructional contexts (Hsieh, 2015, 2016).

In multilingual research, teachers' personal experiences with different languages, their attitudes toward these languages, and their beliefs about multilingualism influence their classroom practices, pedagogical choices, and interactions with multilingual students (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Haim & Tannenbaum, 2022; Hsieh, 2016; Morea & Fisher, 2023). When monolingual teachers adopt a monolingual approach in a multilingual classroom, they often view students' native languages as potential sources of interference, perceiving multilingualism as a problem (Haim & Tannenbaum, 2022; Morea & Fisher, 2023; Nilsson et al., 2023). Therefore, monolingual teachers need to critically reflect on their traditional monolingual perspectives to develop an identity that embraces linguistic diversity (Morea & Fisher, 2023).

This transformation prepares them to work effectively in multilingual environments and encourages a shift from deficit-based models to understanding multilingualism as a valuable asset (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Educators of color bring unique experiences, insights, and approaches that positively influence teaching and learning (Haddix, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Their perspectives stem from their own experiences as learners, teachers, and members of communities of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Their intersecting and hybrid identities can enrich educational experiences and outcomes for diverse student populations (Haddix, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). When given adequate support, recognition, and autonomy, critical educators of color demonstrate a keen awareness of the inequalities in the education system related to race and class (Bailey, 2023; Blazar, 2021; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Karkar Esperat, 2024a). They take proactive steps to empower marginalized students across diverse communities to advocate for equity and social justice through their teaching practices, which include leveraging technology and a multiliteracies approach that addresses disparities and confronts oppression (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Garcia et al., 2018; Karkar Esperat, 2024a).

Educators of Color and Multiliterate Pedagogies

Engaging with multiliteracies pedagogy serves as a critical framework that helps teachers of color reevaluate traditional literacy practices while sustaining students' identities and experiences both in and out of school. (Karkar Esperat, 2024a; Karkar Esperat & Stickley, 2024; Nash & Skerrett, 2025; Skerrett, 2011). The concept of multiliteracies was coined by the New London Group in 1996. This framework broadens the definition of literacy to include not merely traditional reading and writing, but also a diverse array of modalities for meaning-making and expression, including linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial forms (Cope & Kalantzis,

2016; Karkar Esperat & Stickley, 2024; Skerrett, 2011; The New London Group, 1996).

Multiliteracies approach emphasizes the necessity for a more holistic comprehension of literacy to effectively respond to the growing cultural and linguistic diversity, globalization, rapidly advancing technologies, and the emergence of various subcultures (Jewitt, 2008; Karkar Esperat & Stickley, 2024; Skerrett, 2011; The New London Group, 1996). Multimodal practices can serve as a decolonial approach (Campano et al., 2020), building on students' prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds while celebrating and honoring the diversity among individuals (Afolalu, 2024a; Campano et al., 2020; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). These practices empower marginalized communities to express their identities and amplify their voices, making their strengths more visible rather than fully transparent to others (Afolalu, 2024a; Afolalu, 2024b; Campano et al., 2020; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023). Multiliteracies approach shifts the focus from learners as passive recipients of information to active creators of meaning and empowers students to become agents of their learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kosnik & Menna, 2013; Lim et al., 2022; Skerrett, 2011; van Haren, 2015).

Moreover, digital technology enables students to create and interact with multimodal presentations in electronic formats, such as images, audio, video, and interactive components (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; Gee & Hayes, 2011; Karkar Esperat, 2024; Unsworth, 2001). This encourages students to process multiple modes of communication simultaneously and broadens the participation structure (Afolalu, 2024a; Afolalu, 2024b; Gee & Hayes, 2011; Unsworth, 2001; Walsh, 2017). In such technology-enhanced learning settings, multimodal presentations can promote critical engagement that helps educators transform learning experiences, aligning with the resources and skills that students already have (Bezemer et al., 2016; Bruce et al., 2015; Jewitt, 2005, 2008; Neville, 2015; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). Creating and analyzing multimodal

presentations requires students to actively engage with power dynamics, ideologies, and perspectives (Bruce et al., 2015; Jewitt, 2008; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). Moving beyond surface-level comprehension and a language-centric view of literacy enables individuals to construct meaning across various modes and enhance their critical thinking skills (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Gee, 2012; Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011; Skerrett, 2011; Walsh, 2017). The integration of digital technology and multimodality offers teachers a richer and more versatile repertoire. Educators are evolving from simply delivering knowledge to becoming facilitators and collaborative learners (Karkar Esperat & Stickley, 2024; Kalantzis & Cope, 2023; Limone & Pace, 2015). In this study, I highlight the strengths of educators of color's intersecting identities and technology-enhanced multiliterate curriculum and instruction to articulate that these two critical aspects can bring equitable learning experiences for diverse student groups.

Perspectives from Educators of Color and Reciprocal Interactions

Educators of color who embrace a culturally relevant approach connect with students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), nurturing a reciprocal relationship that supports students' social and cultural development as well as educators' "transformative experience" (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). When educators of color see themselves in their students, it motivates them to support their students' growth (Alcalá et al., 2022). These reciprocal interactions between teachers and students can influence teachers' identities and transform their perspectives and beliefs about teaching and learning (Finau, 2021; Haddix, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

The following studies highlight the perspectives of educators of color, researchers, and scholars, illustrating that transformative teaching and learning is a collaborative effort. Kiramba's

(2017) case study acknowledges the invisible literacies of a 12-year-old student from Kenya named Mosi. Kiramba provides a unique perspective on recognizing Mosi's talents and strengths, highlighting how Mosi demonstrates his creativity through music, drawing, and technical innovation (Kiramba, 2017, p. 267). Mosi's narrative provided Kiramba with valuable insights into the resilience of students who face systemic barriers. This underscores the need to re-evaluate literacy education in multilingual contexts and appreciate the richness of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Similarly, Afolalu (2024b) illustrates the digital literacy practices and ethnoracial identity formations of a 13-year-old Nigerian girl named Isioma, who migrated to the United States (Afolalu, 2024b, p. 268). Afolalu draws on her own identities, background, and insights to shed light on the nuances of diverse identities, languages, and literacies among African immigrant youth. Through a collaborative narrative with Isioma, Afolalu examines the role of digital literacies in shaping the richness and complexity of Isioma's identities within the context of racialization processes. Furthermore, Player (2021) highlights the critical role of multimodal literacies in storytelling and relational literacies in the lives of Asian American girls. Player's identities, lived experiences, and aspirations provide a vital lens to understand the challenges Asian American girls face and counter prevalent stereotypes about their girlhood. Chappell and Faltis (2013) showcase the shared insights and knowledge of educators and artists, illustrating how art cultivates narrative, resistance, and transformative experiences for emergent bilingual youth. Gonzales and Ybarra (2020) examine how transfronterizx youth, who navigate life on both sides of the Mexico-US border, express their fugitive literacies through multimodal cuentos. Both researchers reflect on their identities, histories, and experiences, highlighting how diverse literacies of transfronterizx youth demonstrate a fluidity that transcends rigid national boundaries

in a nuanced manner. Sabzalian (2019) illustrates how Indigenous students and educators actively navigate and challenge colonial dynamics in public schools. Drawing on her own identities, lived experiences, and scholarship as a Native person, she shares stories of survivance to emphasize the intelligence, courage, artfulness, and resilience of Native students, families, and educators.

Despite the significant impact that educators of color can have on multilingual learning communities, they remain underrepresented in the teaching workforce at the national, state, and regional levels compared to the diversity of the student population (Elfers et al., 2020; Finau, 2021; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Taie & Lewis, 2022). During the 2020-2021 school year, educators of color made up only 19.7% of all public K-12 teachers in the United States and 16.7% of teachers in private K-12 schools (Taie & Lewis, 2022). In the Pacific Northwest, particularly in Washington state, the representation was even lower, with only 12.7% of educators being educators of color (Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board, 2021). Therefore, there is a pressing need for more literature that presents the perspectives of educators of color to highlight the reciprocal relationships between these educators and their students as they engage in asset-based approaches.

Relationship between Educators of Color and Multilingual Students

When multilingual newcomer students transition to an environment with different cultures, languages, and social norms, they often need to rebuild their social connections and communities (McInerney, 2023; Tsai, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These students, particularly English learners, may feel excluded or be perceived as less intelligent due to their language skills and accents (Cepeda Paulino & Alvarado Lopez, 2024; Manspile et al., 2021; Olsen, 1997). Although they enroll in English learning programs to enhance their

proficiency, they often get labeled as “other” within the school setting, which can lead to social isolation (Cepeda Paulino & Alvarado Lopez, 2024; Olsen, 1997; Tsai, 2006). Therefore, creating a safe space and fostering positive relationships in schools becomes a priority for students’ growth and healing.

Students tend to feel more comfortable interacting with individuals who understand their unique circumstances. Educators of color bring valuable lived experiences, knowledge, and diverse backgrounds that resonate with students (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). This understanding nurtures caring and trusting relationships with individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (D. Robinson, 2022; J. Robinson & Gonzalez, 2022). Educators of color can leverage their cultural insights and knowledge of students’ backgrounds to implement culturally relevant teaching methods, materials, and perspectives into the curriculum (Blazar, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). This approach provides scaffolding for students and connects lessons to their personal experiences and backgrounds (Birman & Tran, 2017).

Furthermore, educators of color in leadership, management, and teaching roles positively influence students from marginalized communities and serve as role models and advocates (Blazar, 2021; Egalite et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The attitudes of educators of color can greatly influence students’ social-emotional development, academic performance, behavior, and overall school experiences (Blazar, 2021; Gist & Bristol, 2022; D. Robinson, 2022). A diverse teaching workforce brings unique strengths to schools and helps address the achievement gap related to race and ethnicity (Egalite et al., 2015; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I draw on culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP; Paris & Alim, 2017) to understand the perspectives of educators of color and how their perspectives enabled them to enact technology-enhanced multiliteracies approaches as asset-based pedagogies for diverse student groups. CSP builds on critical asset pedagogies that challenge the deficit views often associated with multilingual students and people of color, while also acknowledging their cultural and linguistic repertoire (Paris & Alim, 2017), which includes raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015), cultural modeling (Lee, 2001, 2006, 2007), funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally sustaining pedagogy centers and sustains the social identities of individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, along with the ways of knowing and practices of historically marginalized communities.

Paris and Alim (2017) suggest a fundamental reimagining of the educational system's objective, advocating for a shift in focus from critiquing young individuals to challenging oppressive structures through CSP. Enacting CSP in the critical learning process fosters a sense of completeness rather than a deficiency (Paris & Alim, 2017). For instance, standardized linguistic practices and ideologies often undermine the language skills of English learners, leading to a perception that their multilingualism can negatively affect their academic performance. However, "Good English" is defined from the perspective of white speakers and listeners (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). In their critique of language education, Flores and Rosa (2015) argue that raciolinguistic ideologies marginalize language-minoritized students. These ideologies overlook the richness and proficiency present in their linguistic repertoire (Flores & Rosa, 2015). To move away from a monolingual perspective, current

educational settings need to challenge standardized linguistic practices and resist raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017), recognizing that students who possess their home language practices are natural language architects (Flores, 2020). Each individual and household has a unique set of historically accumulated knowledge, known as “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992). This knowledge is reflected in their daily activities and practices, offering diverse learning strategies and skills that can be applied to various school subjects (González, 2005). CSP enhances individuals’ capabilities by expanding their current assets instead of addressing or substituting perceived weaknesses in a standardized framework (Paris & Alim, 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

CSP attends to the emerging, intersectional, and dynamic ways young people live and engage with cultural and linguistic practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). When individuals interact with social language or canonical texts, their way of speaking or writing is fluid and reflects their identity (Lee, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2017). As Morgan (2001) states, “Choosing AAE or AE (American English) invokes alternative cultural, social, and linguistic home environments ... and therefore ideologies” (Lee, 2006; Morgan, 2001, pp. 136–138). Thus, it is essential to connect students’ lived experiences and practices as cultural data sets to the classroom (Lee, 2001, 2006). When students are encouraged to participate in classroom dialogue and debates using their everyday texts and the language from their cultural communities, these cultural data sets create links between their tacit knowledge and academic content (Lee, 2006, 2007). This cultural modeling framework enhances critical thinking and fosters a more inclusive learning environment (Lee, 2001, 2006, 2007). Furthermore, it can restructure power relations between educators and students, signaling to students that educators hold high expectations and confidence in their potential to achieve demanding academic standards (Lee, 2007).

CSP places cultural, linguistic, and literary pluralism at the center of teaching and learning, acknowledging the hybrid and fluid identities of multilingual and multicultural communities (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). This reform transforms the educational space into a realm of liberation, where diverse communities, languages, practices, and ways of knowing are appreciated and sustained (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). In this environment, educators engage with how students construct meaning and prioritize the preservation of their heritages. When educators leverage students' knowledge to enrich their learning both inside and outside the classroom, learners become co-creators of knowledge.

By drawing on this theoretical lens, it allowed me to recognize and appreciate the approach that the educators of color took in their pedagogical approaches and relations to the cultural diversity of their students, fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Methodology

In this study, I used the phenomenological method to collect and analyze data. Through five individual semi-structured interviews, I listened to the stories of five K-12 educators of color and learned about their personal and professional experiences. Phenomenological research focuses on uncovering the “essence” of human experiences (Creswell, 2003). By gathering descriptions from participants and analyzing their narratives, researchers can gain valuable insights into how individuals perceive and feel about various phenomena.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), interviewing is a data collection strategy that directly addresses research questions. Semi-structured interview questions are open-ended, allowing interviewees to express their views on specific topics or issues. The data collected can

be compared across different respondents. Interviews are effective ways for researchers to clarify and gain deeper insights from the initial responses of interviewees (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Participants

I employed purposeful sampling to gain insights into the narratives of my participants. Specifically, I used criterion-based selection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to invite participants who integrate multimodal materials and digital technology into their teaching practices and student assignments. I recruited five K-12 educators of color from my graduate peers at the College of Education (see Table 1). All names used are pseudonyms. Three participants selected their pseudonyms, and I created two.

As an educator, student, and researcher based in the Seattle area, I had prior professional relationships with all the participants through our shared involvement in educational and community-based teaching spaces, which enriched the trust and depth of our conversations. I specifically invited teachers of color from immigrant backgrounds, as well as educators who work with marginalized communities to advance equity and social justice in various school settings. My goal was to include individuals whose voices are often underrepresented in discussions about race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, subject matter, socioeconomic status, and systemic inequities in education.

Grace

Grace was a 28-year-old Filipina American born and raised in Washington State. She identified as an able-bodied, cisgender woman and was bilingual in English and Tagalog. Her family originated from the Philippines, where she still had relatives. Grace had visited the Philippines several times and felt a strong connection to her roots. Coming from a low to

middle-income background, Grace had high expectations for her education because her family consistently stressed the importance of education in achieving success for both herself and them.

Grace worked at a technology company and was also the founder of a K-12 technology education academy. She had been teaching for seven years, starting in 2018. She provided computer science and technology instruction outside traditional classrooms through workshops, summer camps, and school clubs. Her courses incorporated discussions on a variety of topics connected to technology, including science, math, writing, and communication.

Grace worked with a diverse group of students ranging from six-year-olds to community college students in their thirties. She primarily focused on middle and high school students in the South Puget Sound region of Washington, where most students came from low to middle-income backgrounds and attended public schools. Her student population included Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, Southeast Asian, East Asian, and White students.

Juno

Juno was a 28-year-old African American/Black woman born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. She was neurodivergent and spoke multiple languages, including English, Latin, Spanish, and Korean. Juno attended public schools throughout her K-12 education and enrolled in a college preparatory high school, where she began her internships and teaching career.

Juno had been working with students for fourteen years, starting in 2011. Her journey began in an elementary school library and a newcomer high school in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus was a sanctuary city with a large population of asylum seekers, mainly from Somalia and some from Myanmar. After earning her bachelor's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), she moved to South Korea, where she taught English to kindergarten students and tutored middle and high school students for two years.

Juno then returned to the United States and started working for a remote education company that is part of Ohio's larger charter school system. Due to teacher shortages, they lacked enough qualified instructors to teach the subjects. Therefore, she collaborated with these schools, teaching English language arts and occasionally elective courses such as art history. She had taught students in K-12. In her most recent role, she was teaching fifth grade at a virtual school, which included a diverse group of students from different ethnic backgrounds, as well as a high school group at an African American school in the Cleveland area.

Kirito

Kirito was a 35-year-old Filipino American from the New Orleans area of Louisiana. He identified as a monolingual second-generation American and a first-generation graduate student. Kirito was a gifted and talented student who participated in a French immersion program during his K-12 education. He had a degree in neuroscience and anthropology from a major university in New Orleans and gained clinical experience while studying as a pre-medical student. Additionally, he had a master's degree in teaching and was certified to teach all sciences, social studies, math, and English. Kirito was able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, and vegetarian. He considered himself an anti-racist and was actively learning to address systemic biases within the education system.

Kirito began teaching in 2012 and spent six years working in public high schools. As a science teacher in Louisiana, he navigated the complex relationship between science and religion, where creationism is considered a viable alternative to evolution. Growing up in the New Orleans area, especially after Hurricane Katrina, he participated in the city's recovery efforts to improve education that the disaster had severely disrupted. The disaster led to the establishment of the Recovery School District and the rise of charter schools. He taught a wide

range of STEM subjects in formal and informal school settings, including environmental science, chemistry, physics, robotics, and debate.

His high school students in public schools were predominantly Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latinx. He also had exchange students from Norway. In his most recent role, he taught robotics and neuroscience in K-12 enrichment programs and summer camps.

Leah

Leah was a 34-year-old monolingual mixed-race American born and raised in North Carolina. Their father immigrated from Sri Lanka to the United States for his doctoral work, while their white mother was from the Bellevue area of Washington State. Leah's mother placed a greater emphasis on supporting her husband's cultural identity in Leah and their sister than their father did. He rarely talked about his homeland or passed on any cultural traditions because he had to flee the civil war in Sri Lanka. Consequently, Leah never learned their father's native language, Tamil. Leah identified as queer, which was an important aspect of their identity.

Leah started teaching at a K-8 public charter school in Bloomington, Indiana, in 2012, where they worked for nine years. Following that, they taught for four years at a K-8 private school in Seattle, Washington. Leah had experience teaching students from third to eighth grade and covered a range of elementary subjects, including reading, writing, science, social studies, and math. In their most recent role, Leah created and taught courses on social justice and sex education.

Leah's students at the public charter school were primarily White. Approximately 25% to 40% of them lived in poverty, while the remaining students came from middle-class backgrounds. Between 30% and 40% of the students were identified as needing special education services. In contrast, the student population at the private school included many mixed-race

students, specifically those who were mixed Asian and White. Among the parents were East Asian, South Asian, and second-generation immigrants. However, very few Black and Latinx families were represented. These students came from families with a socioeconomic status that allowed them to afford private school, granting them greater access to pursue their passions outside of school, such as taking theater classes.

Lupe

Lupe was a 27-year-old Mexican man fluent in English and Spanish and came from Arizona. Throughout his educational journey, he had no teachers who reflected his linguistic, cultural, national, or ethnic background. His personal history, immigration story, and his mother's hopes and dreams served as the foundation for his work in education.

Lupe began his practicum in a teacher preparation program at the age of 19 in Arizona, where he worked as a preservice teacher for four years. After that, he taught elementary subjects such as literacy, numeracy, science, and social studies to K-2 students in public schools for another four years in both Arizona and Washington. His most recent position was in a dual-language program on the Spanish track in South Seattle, Washington. Lupe also created and taught social studies and science courses for K-2 students in enrichment programs. His students came from diverse backgrounds, including White, Asian, African, African American, Mexican, Bangladeshi, and Central American communities.

Table 1*Participant Demographics and Teaching Experiences*

Name	Grace (she/her)	Juno (she/her)	Kirito (he/him)	Leah (she/they)	Lupe (he/him)
Age	28	29	35	34	27
Race/ Ethnicity	Filipina American	African American/ Black	Filipino American/ Asian American	Mixed Race/ South Asian and White American	Mexican
Languages Speak	English and Tagalog	English, Latin, Spanish, and Korean	English	English	English and Spanish
Years of Teaching	7 years	9 years of internship and 5 years of in-service	12-13 years	13 years	4 years of preservice and 4 years of in-service
Subjects/ Topics Taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer science • Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English language arts • Art history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental science • Chemistry • Physics • Robotics • Neuroscience • Debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary subjects (reading, writing, science, social studies, and math) • Middle school social justice • Sex education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary subjects (English language arts, math, science, and social studies) • Dual language program in Spanish track
School Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School workshops • School club • Summer camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber charter schools • Kindergarten • After-school institution • Summer camp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public schools • Extracurricular activities • Summer camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public charter school • Private school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public schools • Extracurricular activities
School Locations	Washington, U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ohio, U.S. • South Korea • Virtual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louisiana, U.S. • Washington, U.S. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indiana, U.S. • Washington, U.S. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arizona, U.S. • Washington, U.S.

Positionality Statement

I am a Taiwanese woman, a first-generation college student, and a multilingual educator. My intersecting identities and lived experience drive my commitment to advancing equity and justice in teaching and learning. I recognize the challenges faced by marginalized students and teachers, and I understand the difficulties of navigating systems that often overlook our cultural and linguistic strengths.

At the age of 15, I left formal schooling for self-directed homeschooling. This transition positioned me – both physically and explicitly through the verbal characterization of several conservative institution educators – as an outsider in the Taiwanese formal educational system because I could not obtain a high school diploma. Despite these challenges, my experiences strengthened my determination to overcome the limitations imposed by this negative perception. My academic journey has been long and solitary, heavily relying on open educational resources to navigate my path to higher education. As a first-generation college student, this aspect of my identity influences my pursuit of academic and professional goals, particularly my focus on advancing equitable access to education.

As an educator with a decade of experience, I counter deficit views that regard students' lived experiences, multilingualism, and cultural backgrounds as barriers. I believe an inclusive environment should recognize students as active contributors to knowledge, drawing on their personal experiences, language skills, and cultural assets.

Throughout my journey, I have also leveraged my multimodal skills and emerging digital technologies as a universal language for communication and learning, challenging traditional mainstream education. This approach has also allowed me to engage effectively with individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, in my research and teaching, I

advocate for technology-enhanced multiliteracies approaches that acknowledge and celebrate the strengths and contributions that students bring to the classroom.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with each participant, guided by ten interview questions (see Appendix A). The questions were provided to participants ahead of time for their preparation. Locations were selected based on the participants' preferences to ensure their comfort during our discussions. One interview was conducted in person, while the other four took place virtually via Zoom. Each session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, with the questions addressed in order and clarifying inquiries made throughout the interviews to explore details. All sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. I also took field notes during each interview to capture my insights and reflections. Follow-up communication during data analysis was conducted via email to maintain written records.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. I used interpretative phenomenological analysis to connect with the participants' personal experiences by closely listening to their voices and reviewing the transcripts (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The data was analyzed using a hybrid approach. I started with deductive coding and inducted new codes based on the prominent themes within the data: (1) the identities of the participants, (2) their lived experiences, (3) current expectations, (4) aspirations, and (5) beliefs.

Following the coding process, I engaged in a meaning-making process that allowed me to generate thematic codes: (1) teaching philosophies, (2) teaching experiences, (3) multimodal presentations, and (4) technology integration. These aspects served as thematic codes derived

from my first research question. For the second research question, I identified themes based on the analysis of their interview transcripts from each participant, particularly as it related to their pedagogical approaches that enabled their multilingual students to showcase their strength and agency through various forms of literacy. Through this iterative analytical step, I generated three themes that captured the connections across the interviews: (1) shifting power dynamics in the classroom, (2) future envisioning, and (3) educators' self-reflection.

Findings

The Identities and Experiences of Educators of Color Influence Their Dreams and Hopes

I found notable similarities in analyzing five educators' aspirations, beliefs, and expectations for their students. Their dreams and hopes were deeply rooted in their identities, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences.

Family Expectations and Values Shape Perspectives and Beliefs on Education

In discussions about the motivations driving educators in the field of education, Grace and Lupe connected their motivations to their heritage and family values.

Grace's Filipino family viewed education as a pathway to opportunity, and the values they instilled in her greatly shaped her perspective and beliefs. As Grace progressed through her educational journey, she became increasingly aware of the educational inequities tied to social class, access, and opportunity.

"I grew up with my family constantly telling me, like you need to focus on your education. Education is really important. That's how you succeed and do well for yourself and your family ... **I think education really is such a powerful opportunity to really learn and grow and advance in ways that you didn't even think was possible** ... I want other people, other young students to see that they can really do whatever they want in the world."

Grace recognized that education opens doors and broadens opportunities for individuals. This understanding shaped her purpose to become an educator, empowering students and viewing education as a transformative tool for expanding opportunities and fostering self-determination.

Lupe shared his perspective on identity terms according to audience and institutional language, emphasizing the complexity of racial, ethnic, and national labels (e.g., Mexican, Latino, Latinx). He rejected academic terms imposed on him that do not resonate personally, asserting his right to self-identification.

“For the most part, I identify as, like with my national identity, which is Mexican, Mexicano, right? And Latino is just an academic ... It’s not a term that I really feel strongly about ... I don’t identify with Latinx ... Thinking of my immigration story, and also the hopes and dreams of my mother, my own personal hopes and dreams. I think those are starting points ... [I am also] thinking of ... [creating] the world as it should be versus the world as it is.”

Lupe reflected a nuanced understanding of identity as fluid, contextual, and relational. His motivation to work in education was rooted in his immigration experience, family aspirations, and a desire to contribute to social change. His perspective aligned with culturally sustaining frameworks that emphasize both the affirmation of identity and the need for systemic transformation in education.

Educational Backgrounds and Work Experiences Influence Educators’ Motivations

Personal and professional factors motivated the educators to enter and remain in the field of education. The interviews revealed how their educational backgrounds and work experiences fueled their passion for teaching and shaped their educational goals.

Juno’s internship at a college preparatory high school sparked her interest in teaching.

“The second year of school, I actually went to a newcomer school ... I really liked it ... I went back for my third and fourth years ... **And then I decided I would teach ESL.**”

Juno discussed her experiences across multiple schools, noting vast differences in teacher involvement, school structure, and student academic performance. Concerned about students being promoted without adequate preparation, Juno emphasized supporting student growth and readiness. She aimed to incorporate student interests into her teaching.

“I try to incorporate their [students’] interests ... I’ve noticed about charter schools is that they will just continue to push kids from grade to grade. And so I just hope that they’re being prepared ... and they end up ready for ... sixth grade, seventh grade.”

On the other hand, Juno highlighted several sustainability challenges facing education in the U.S. during discussions about contemporary teaching. She pointed out the impact of political pressures, inconsistent pay, and the varying working conditions across different types of schools. Juno expressed concern about the lack of long-term support and flexibility in both charter and public schools in the U.S.

“It seems like being a teacher today is not really sustainable ... It was much more sustainable in South Korea than here in the United States ... Finding a public school that ... good for you and works for you is very hard ... And then for kind of my own charter school, we are very contracted. So it just doesn’t seem as sustainable.”

Juno was driven to support multilingual learners and cultivate meaningful educational connections. Furthermore, she was concerned about broader issues related to labor conditions and teacher retention within the American educational system. These insights underscored the ongoing tension between educational aspirations and the structural challenges Juno encountered in rigidly managed environments.

Kirito transitioned from medicine to teaching because he could directly and effectively support children’s growth. His decision was influenced by his experiences during the recovery efforts after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The community-based tutoring initiatives he participated in ignited a sense of hope and inspired collective action.

“I gravitated more towards education because I saw that in some ways I was a little bit more hopeful ... Going back to the Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans recovery angle ... They had a lot of different community groups, like do tutoring services for students. So I’ve done that ... As a public school teacher, I definitely saw a range of different [high-performing] outcomes ... So it’s like I must be doing something right.”

The discussion of community groups and tutoring emphasized the importance of accessing resources beyond the formal classroom. It highlighted how informal educational networks can support student growth, particularly in underserved settings. Additionally, Kirito shared the tangible, long-term effects he observed in his students’ growth and achievements across various areas. This experience reinforced his belief in the value of public education and strengthened his motivation to work in this field.

Leah had thirteen years of teaching experience. They found joy and meaning in working with children. They shared their motivation by saying:

“I just think working with kids involves like a lot more play ... I really like working with children. I like their, like freshness, their attitudes toward change. They carry a lot more hope than adults do. And I feel like I get to learn a lot ... It’s like I’m learning without being told to learn when I’m learning from kids.”

Leah’s perspective emphasized the importance of mutual learning, emotional connections, and relationships in education. They also pointed out that children’s perspectives can provide valuable insights, inspiring hope and purpose in educators.

Lupe reflected on his learning about culturally relevant pedagogies by Gloria Ladson-Billings from the teacher preparation program, which guided his hopes and dreams alongside his family background.

“Based on culturally relevant pedagogy, and it’s three tenets of academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. I feel like those tenets guide my hopes and dreams, but I’m also informing, or what’s also informing those tenets is my life history and lived experiences.”

Lupe was motivated by his academic goals and his personal and social contexts. He embraced critical pedagogical frameworks to align with his vision of culturally sustaining education.

Immigration Experiences and Identities Drive a Strong Passion for Educational Equity and Social Justice

In the individual interviews, four educators with immigration tales in their families demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing educational equity and social justice. They all shared their prior educational experiences related to race and socioeconomic status, connecting those experiences to their current teaching values and goals.

Grace grew up in a low- to middle-income Filipino immigrant family with no computer science education. She became an educator in informal settings and dedicated herself to providing technology education resources to underserved schools and communities. Grace observed that the lack of resources in these schools often stemmed not from indifference but from systemic limitations.

“When I was growing up, [my school] didn’t have any computer science or technology education. And so I wanted to be able to provide that to a school that was in the same position where they didn’t have anything that they could already offer.”

However, Grace was also concerned about the political restrictions affecting what can be taught, which could lead to negative experiences for students. Despite these challenges and the growing scrutiny on educators, she remained dedicated to empowering her students and shared her vision for the future of education:

“I think that having educators who can be guiding lights, and also role models, and help them [students] through some of these challenging times [is necessary] ... **I hope that I can be an educator who is, you know, empowering for them** ... I’m very committed ... **I really care about having high quality education that speaks to the lived experience of the learner.** And I, even though it’s scary. I’m committed to it.”

In reflecting on the sociopolitical climate and the complex realities of teaching in the digital age, Grace emphasized the importance of educators acting as supportive role models, guiding students to navigate these challenges with care and responsibility.

Lupe, a minority male educator of color in the public elementary school system, emphasized the importance of carving out his own space within the profession. He shared his elementary schooling experiences and highlighted the lack of diversity among his teachers, which influenced his perspective and motivation as an educator.

“I didn’t have any teachers, yeah, who reflected my background in any way, shape or form, linguistically, culturally, nationally, ethnically. So that experience put things in perspective.”

Lupe also recounted a mentor who pressured him to conform to a standard teaching model, making him feel overlooked. Nevertheless, he remained passionate about inspiring his students through his unique teaching style.

Kirito grew up in Louisiana, a place he described as both homophobic and transphobic, where scientific values often clashed with religious beliefs. In this environment, people could be judgmental about interracial relationships and perpetuate discriminatory values through cultural norms and institutional policies. While teaching honors physics classes at a high school in Louisiana, Kirito noticed a notably low enrollment of Black students, which contributed to the underrepresentation of Black students pursuing STEM pathways. Kirito explained:

“For example, in a school with 60% Black students, I’ve only had three [in my honors physics] ... It’s like the reason why Black students might not go into like engineering or pre-medicine [pathway] is because they aren’t in my physics class, which is a requirement for the top scholarship at the time ... **that’s why they’re not going into the field is because you’re not letting them into the [required honors] class.**”

Kirito believed that everyone can succeed in STEM subjects. In his environmental science class, he had students who faced various challenges, such as homelessness and teenage pregnancy, and

were often underestimated in their abilities and potential, leading to segregation at school. Aware of this issue, Kirito actively challenged these negative perceptions and made his science classes more accessible and relatable. He stated:

“There was the [deficit framing], oh, they [students] are not going to college ... they’re not doing chemistry or physics. They’re going in the easy. **But I never saw it in that way. So that’s one of the things that I would say that I’ve been fighting against or have been when I was a teacher.**”

As a committed advocate for anti-racism, Kirito believed that education has the potential to create meaningful change and opportunities. In his doctoral research, he advocated for increasing access to advanced classes, such as dual enrollment and advanced placement courses.

“I think that education needs to have a wide breadth of opportunities ... By the time that students get to 18 years old, what do you want them to have experienced? ... Should they have had key experiences or opportunities to have these key experiences? ... **Why I’m inspired or motivated to work in education is because I do think it changes.**”

Kirito emphasized a purposeful, equity-centered approach to education that prioritizes holistic development and encourages critical reflection on existing educational structures.

Leah shared their experience attending racially diverse public schools in North Carolina, highlighting the positive impact in fostering respect and inclusivity. As a mixed-race educator teaching social justice and sex education, Leah emphasized the importance of respect and equity in interactions and expressed hopes for their students’ growth at the private school.

“I want them to learn, like that everybody matters the same. Nobody matters more than anybody else. And **it’s a really important attitude to hold that like you’re really special, and you’re not more special than anybody else** ... I teach sex ed ... I have aspirations that they will approach their partners with more nonviolent communication than students that don’t have access to comprehensive sex ed.”

Leah shared personal identity experiences selectively and intentionally, using self-disclosure as a tool to foster student understanding, connection, and inclusivity.

“This year, in my fifth grade class, I have more South Asian students than I’ve ever had before. So **I’ve been sharing more about being South Asian ... Because there’s a lot**

more kids that have that same identity ... I co-lead, like an LGBTQ student affinity group. So I share a lot more about gender and sexuality in that space with those kids ... I'm willing to talk about what it's like to have different gender, different sexuality as an adult."

Leah reflected on how sharing their South Asian and queer identities, especially in spaces where others have similar backgrounds, can offer representation and validation for students. They emphasized the importance of adopting culturally responsive teaching, where identity serves as both a lens and a bridge for fostering relational trust and a sense of belonging, while also addressing marginalization in the classroom.

The findings indicated that educators of color were profoundly influenced by their identities and lived experiences in shaping their teaching goals and motivations. Their educational and professional journeys, including community-based teaching and teacher education, steered them toward culturally responsive and equity-centered practices. Moreover, their family values and immigration histories offered a personal perspective on systemic barriers, strengthening their commitment to social justice, representation, and increasing student access.

Integrating Multimodality and Technology Enhances Teaching and Learning for Multilingual Students

All five educators incorporated multimodal materials and technology into their teaching, student assignments, and assessments in diverse ways and for various purposes to enhance effective learning. The discussions also emphasized how their students showcased their independent learning skills and talents through multimodal presentations.

Lupe implemented multimodal instruction, specifically Total Physical Response (TPR), in the Spanish dual-language program. He emphasized that visual cues, physical gestures, and

context related to identity enhance comprehension and engagement. By adopting this approach, he met students where they are. Lupe explained:

“Many of my students weren’t native Spanish speakers ... If I say turn and talk, ‘girar y hablar’ [Spanish] ... not all of them might understand that, but if I use like hand signals, or thinking about identity ... added a TPR movement to it ... We’re bilingual [Lupe used hand signals as he pronounced each syllable of the word ‘bilingual.’] ... Connecting both parts of their brain and then circling it, you know, would help them connect.”

Lupe was aware of different linguistic ideologies and actively worked to cultivate a positive bilingual identity through both embodiment and metacognitive reflection.

Lupe also implemented a multimodal approach to teaching during remote learning in 2020. By utilizing digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Seesaw, Jamboard, YouTube, Next Generation Science, and Pear Deck, Lupe curated multimedia resources to give students differentiated and multimodal opportunities to engage with content and express their understanding. For example, he created assignments on Seesaw that allowed students to record their voices while reading their papers aloud. In his social studies class, he developed a digital library using slides on Seesaw, which offered students more options during their independent listening time and catered to their interests and needs. Lupe shared:

“It’s thinking of UDL [Universal Design for Learning] and differentiation ... It differentiates my instruction and, you know, still get to follow the model that I would use.”

Additionally, Lupe advocated for authentic self-expression in the classroom by incorporating culturally relevant music into his lessons to build connections with his students. He dismissed approaches that infantilize students and instead treated them as capable individuals. In his math class, Lupe created a hip-hop instrumental beat for skip counting exercises. Lupe shared:

“It was just my way of bringing myself into it. Also, like getting to see what [hip-hop music] students are listening to ... It was cool to connect with them in that way ... I don’t want to ... infantilize them ... These are real people. We don’t have to treat them like

infants or toddlers, right? These are real students ... Let's be real about what we're teaching. **Let's be real about ... who our students are and be real about myself.**"

His approach recognized students as capable, whole individuals, emphasizing that relationships, identity, and broader methods of participation are central to equitable teaching and learning.

Kirito was an early YouTuber during his high school years. He combined his interests and skills in digital media with his STEM teaching and student assignments. As a former high school teacher, Kirito used various forms of digital media such as podcasts, video clips, comic books, video games, virtual reality, and social media to engage with his students effectively.

"I definitely integrated lots of YouTube videos on things because ... **if Hank Green from Vlogbrothers says the thing or Crash Course or whatever, if he says it, then they'll listen ...** And then the Sal Khan from Khan Academy."

Kirito offered his students multimedia alternative assignment options instead of traditional essays, such as audio recordings, card game designs for environmental science, one-minute reflection videos, or solving the problem set in a short video. He noticed many students preferred the video option because it was easy to record on their phones and matched their interests in social media and mobile device usage.

"For certain projects, like, especially in physics, **it was like okay do a video of your group ... They enjoyed that because there was like a social dynamic of trying to make the video funny or like goofy or whatever or appealing.** Because they knew that we're going to watch it."

His multimedia alternative assignments facilitated flexible participation for English language learners in his classes. Kirito described the videos made by one of his Vietnamese students:

"As far as the kinds of participation ... [I've said] do this in Vietnamese, but subtitle ... you could do that if you want ... **It [her video] became one of those things ... pantomime, or like made the video in a way that didn't require any speaking, or is like a silent film.** Because it was like a physics demonstration."

Kirito's students also actively participated in their online forum by sharing links, music albums, and feedback, showcasing their tech skills and ability to personalize their work in this new

engagement environment. In multimodal projects, students utilized the Oculus Rift virtual reality developer kit to connect their experiences to their realities, presenting their self-directed learning.

“One of my students made ... the [VR] Italian coaster and the Alps ... You chose which vacation you wanted to go on, and then they modeled ... the scenery. And it’s like you could interact with stuff. And that was really cool. So like a lot of self-directed learning. That was a high point.”

In addition, Kirito found graphing particularly useful in physics and chemistry, as it enhanced understanding of topics like calorimetry and activation energy. Students also used Excel to analyze projectile motion. Moreover, technologies such as microphones and captioning, initially implemented for a hard-of-hearing student, ultimately benefited the entire class.

Kirito implemented a teaching approach that was multimodal, student-centered, and integrated technology to enhance student engagement and creativity. This approach supported multilingual expression and emphasized authentic participation through various modes of communication. Students were encouraged to use their unique ways of knowing to interpret and present ideas in the classroom. By allowing students to present in their heritage languages, Kirito affirmed that multilingualism is a valuable resource rather than a barrier. His teaching practice aligned with culturally responsive pedagogy, which values students’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and promotes accountability and self-directed learning.

Juno taught remote classes, both synchronous and asynchronous. Her students enjoyed video games, social media, and various multimedia platforms, including Roblox, Talkies, TikTok, and popular TV shows. To align with their interests, Juno used Nearpod, incorporating game-based learning and using tools such as voice messages and polls to promote interaction and self-paced learning.

“It [Nearpod] has a ton of tools, so the collaboration board is really great. It lets students all type their answer, and then it shows up on a board where you can kind of see what

other people have written. **I like that aspect, especially for remote learning, because the students get that classroom community.**”

Juno emphasized accessibility and interaction by using digital tools to promote voice, choice, and inclusion in virtual or asynchronous environments. She also integrated another digital learning tool named Kami, which provided multimodal documents, assessments, and accommodations tailored for her diverse student groups.

“If a student kind of just isn’t sure how to do something, I can record a video and then just put it in the document itself ... You can highlight things and leave either voice, video, or text comment ... **It [Kami] also has really great accessibility tools, like it will read aloud to students and stuff.**”

The digital learning tool had a dictionary feature to help students quickly look up words and find translations in Juno’s ELA classes. Moreover, the autocorrect function helped students complete their assignments efficiently. Juno elaborated:

“For my, like multilingual students, I think the tools [spell checker] help, especially during, like our live class time ... I think that helps them get their ideas out rather than getting stuck on, like, okay, how do I spell this?”

Additionally, the digital learning tool collaborated with Canva, a graphic design platform for creating posters, presentations, videos, and various types of multimedia content. One of Juno’s students used Canva to demonstrate his learning agency and creativity.

“He will do lots of projects on Canva, like making a PowerPoint slide of, you know, whatever topic we’re discussing and going through, and like creating his own advertisement for a book that we’re reading or something like that.”

Juno observed that her students enjoyed using digital tools to create multimodal presentations.

This process allowed them to connect elements related to their personal interests and backgrounds in their projects.

“I do the ‘Getting to Know You’ for all my classes on Kami ... They [students] really love adding pictures in. **They’ll look up pictures of their favorite show, pictures of their favorite foods, and add those in.** I have a lot of students who like the drawing tools ... We’ve had kind of a make your own character ... They had a lot of fun, like

putting in the different types of hair, and the different clothes that they would wear ... They would draw, like a little stick picture or something.”

In Juno’s asynchronous class for high school students, she noticed that many students were using ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence tool, to answer assignment questions instead of engaging with the materials themselves. To address this issue, Juno created instructional videos that provided strategies to help students complete the reading assignments independently.

Juno highlighted the role of digital learning tools in promoting participation, accessibility, and creativity in a diverse classroom setting. She recognized that student engagement varies depending on the task, as some students prefer visuals and technology-based interactivity over traditional writing. To enhance student motivation and learning, she strategically utilized digital platforms. Her approach reflected a commitment to inclusivity, differentiation, and multimodal engagement, particularly benefiting multilingual learners and students with various needs.

Leah’s students explored various communication formats, including debates, boycott letters, digital posters, and radio journalism. Leah believed that students could express their opinions in many ways as they learned different methods and discovered what resonated with them. For a fifth-grade unit on identity, Leah implemented a project-based approach where students created multimodal projects that incorporated drawings and crafts.

“First, I taught them about, you know, what is ethnicity? What is race? What is gender? ... Now **they’re making dioramas about their own identity** ... We did drawing and mandala making last class. And I was like, okay, so **your options for making a mandala or drawing are, you’re either representing one of your interests, or you’re representing your connection to languages in your life** ... I feel like there’s a lot of modalities.”

While working on the identity mandala project, Leah’s students reflected on how their languages and ethnicities relate to their identities. However, Leah observed that some students might find it challenging to understand their identities, as their parents may also struggle to grasp theirs. Leah

contemplated the tension between honoring students' self-exploration of identity and the discomfort of being positioned as the "arbiter" of that identity. Leah encouraged students to consult their families, as well as think critically throughout the multimodal project.

"They don't know [their identities] sometimes. And mostly, it's like the white kids that don't know. And **over the course of my time at this school, I've learned like, part of my job is to be like, I think you are white, but you can talk to your parents about it.** Because I don't want them to not know. I don't want the white kids to not know that they're white. And just for all of the non white kids to know their racial identities, because they're like the different thing. Because that feels complicated."

In Leah's sixth-grade class, students used Canva to create digital posters for Black History Month. The objective was for students to learn about a significant figure in Black history and present their findings creatively. This project allowed students to engage with academic content more freely, moving beyond rigid academic standards. Leah observed that although technical challenges could lead to frustration, the creative freedom provided students with a sense of ownership and increased their engagement.

"It's digital doesn't mean it's going to be like fast. But at the same time, **it gives them so much more choice, which they love,** you know. They get to choose colors. They're not limited to like, their own drawing skills. They love picking fonts ... I have an example of my own. So they can just copy how I did mine, but most of them don't. **Most of them have some desire to make it look a little bit different.**"

Leah noted the rapid increase in students' digital literacy since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This shift was accelerated by remote learning and cultural changes, including the rise of TikTok, which introduced students to advanced digital content creation. Reflecting on 2012, her fifth graders had no smartphones and limited access to technology. However, by the end of the pandemic, tools like Google Slides became standard expectations in the classroom.

"**Their [students'] ability to video edit goes far beyond what I can do ...** I never taught of Google Slides or anything like that when I was like before COVID ... **Now I use Google Slides for every class I teach. And the kids sort of like expect that ...** It just really changed."

Leah designed projects centered on identity, allowing students to explore race, language, and personal interests through various artistic mediums, including drawing, mandalas, dioramas, and digital posters. These projects offered structured guidance while encouraging creative freedom. Leah's approach exemplified reflective, inclusive, and culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Grace taught technology education. She thoughtfully integrated multimodal and experiential learning strategies to deepen student engagement and connection to academic content. By incorporating videos, especially culturally relevant media such as Kendrick Lamar's music video on deep fakes, she effectively linked complex technological concepts to students' everyday experiences, making learning more accessible and relevant. Grace elaborated:

“I tried to bring in multimodal materials that are connected to their daily lives, right? Like things that they see in their day to day that connected back to these, like technology innovations or features. So videos is a big thing”

Grace pointed out a common misconception that being skilled in certain STEM subjects is necessary to engage with technology. To counter this belief, she broadened her students' understanding of technology to include ideas, design processes, and problem-solving strategies. By intentionally removing digital tools from her lessons, she made the subject more accessible to students who might feel disconnected from standardized STEM practices.

“I try to take a different approach. And one of those approaches is to remove some of the digital tools from the environment so that they can see we're still talking about technology. And **we're building technology in our thoughts and the projects that we're doing but we're not actually using any tech in this process.**”

Moreover, Grace encouraged her students to take their learning beyond the classroom to foster autonomy and deepen their connections to themselves and their community.

“I tried to have them go outside a lot ... So whenever I'm asking them to like, do a reflection, either on themselves or their community, **I will ask them to go outside or go be in a space that is outside of the classroom** ... Gives them opportunity to explore.”

This approach reflected a belief in learning as dynamic and grounded in real-world contexts, rather than being limited to textbooks or classroom walls.

In Grace's workshop, her students created a variety of projects that included posters and 3D prototypes. These prototypes featured paper models of their technology ideas, as well as a paper phone displaying app icons. Grace observed that her students communicated in different ways beyond just talking, showing confidence while working independently. She was impressed by how effectively the students collaborated with one another through gestures.

“There's a couple students that almost never talk, but they're doing something the entire time ... It's like they're drawing something or they're cutting something out, but they almost never talk, which I think is really interesting. And I would say that they're still engaged ... **I was really impressed and just kind of in awe of how much communication happened without any speaking ... I see more gesturing.**”

Grace's reflections provided a powerful perspective on the intersection of technology, multimodality, and embodied learning in creative ways. Her teaching practice challenged conventional notions of what “technology” and “participation” mean in the classroom. Importantly, she acknowledged nonverbal communication and artistic expression as valid and meaningful forms of engagement, understanding that participation does not always require spoken words. Through these approaches, Grace cultivated a classroom environment that was critically conscious, culturally sustaining, and attuned to multiple literacies and identities.

The findings indicated that five educators of color placed a strong emphasis on student engagement, creativity, and agency. They utilized multimedia resources, offered choices, and integrated technology to personalize learning, making academic content more accessible and meaningful. This approach differentiated instruction to cater to students' varied attention spans, familiarity with media, interests, and language skills. The use of multimodal resources and technologies also reflected the identities and interests of educators of color, allowing them to

connect more effectively with their students. Furthermore, the findings highlighted how educators of color broadened student participation both inside and outside the classroom, moving beyond traditional writing and speaking standards. By granting students creative freedom, these educators celebrated linguistic and cultural diversity as well as everyday expression, providing flexibility in language use and communication styles.

The Power Dynamics Shifted Between Educators of Color and Multilingual Students

In analyzing observations from educators regarding their students' engagement and agency, I identified significant instances where students took ownership of their learning. As the process of teaching students can be a transformative experience (Ladson-Billings, 1992), educators also gained insights by reflecting on their students' experiences through various aspects of their teaching and reflection.

Leah recounted a key moment from their early teaching journey, during which they modeled classroom management strategies learned from their mentor teacher to address power struggles with students effectively. They elaborated:

“It’s not on me to make kids do exactly what I want them to do. It’s actually more on me to help them figure out what it is they actually want to do and help them get there.”

Leah also mentioned their eighth-grade unit on ethics, which included a Socratic seminar as one of the activities. This seminar focused on exploring open-ended questions through discussion. They were impressed by how the students took ownership of the conversation, demonstrated deep thinking, and posed insightful questions.

“That [Socratic seminar] was a place where I saw a lot of strength in their [students'] agency ... I put the question on the table, but then I'm not really participating. So it was very cool to see them try to push each other to thinking more deeply about the nature of an ethical question ... **I think if they understand the structure, they're pretty good at taking it on without me needing to really be a part of it.**”

Leah reflected on a shift in their role that prioritized student agency. They created student-centered learning environments where students led discussions and engaged critically with complex ideas. These experiences highlighted Leah's evolving teaching philosophy, focusing on fostering independent thinking instead of controlling their students.

Grace viewed herself as a community resource who provided students with information. She also discussed how her previous relationships with her teachers shaped her approach.

“Some of the best educators I’ve ever had, I felt like they saw me as a person first and a student second. And so I try to do that with my students ... I try not to call them students just because I’m not really your teacher. I’m just here to like give you some information and I’m a resource. And so I think that my relationship with my students is really something that I have tried to embody from the educators that really made an impact on me.”

This mindset embodied a humanizing pedagogy that prioritizes students' identities, emotions, and humanity over content or performance. Grace moved away from a transactional education model that emphasized grading and assessing skills. Instead, she focused on building trust and strong relationships with her students, illustrating her asset-based and community-centered learning approach.

Grace believed that when students were given autonomy and trust to make their own decisions, they could demonstrate strong collaboration and problem-solving skills. In contrast, rigid instruction could lead to dependency, diminishing students' ability to act independently.

Grace advocated for a more open and student-centered teaching practice. She elaborated:

“When I’ve worked in learning environments where that independence is not given to them or where they’re not empowered to make those decisions for themselves, it can be really hard to exert independence ... I think that **in every opportunity or every time that I have given them the opportunity to be independent, they will take it, and they will do a really good job.”**

Moreover, Grace transformed the classroom by removing the desks and devices and sitting in a circle with her students. This new arrangement allowed the students to take the lead in presenting

their ideas. Grace interviewed her students to gather feedback on her teaching approach. By actively listening to their thoughts, she engaged in self-reflection, which helped her learn and grow as an educator.

“They [students] talked about like, how they had fun coming up with their idea and getting to speak ... I realized like, oh, they just want to be engaged, and they don’t want to be talked at. And **learning is so much more powerful if you feel like you’re in control of what you get to do.** And I just, that was really meaningful for me because I feel like **I learned a lot from how they responded differently. And I think that I learned and grew as an educator in those experiences.**”

Grace noticed that her bilingual and multilingual students were often quieter and more reserved during group activities. She recognized that fostering personal connections and using culturally responsive practices could enhance student confidence and engagement. For instance, her quiet student became more vocal and empowered when given the opportunity to share about her Samoan heritage. This experience demonstrated how trust and meaningful inclusion could help students find their voices.

“When we went to Microsoft, the students got the chance to see a tool that would translate languages in front of you ... She [Samoan girl] raised her hand and ... [said] ‘Samoan’. And then the language wasn’t on the list of options ... And what was nice though, was that the team that works on that tool was there. And they were like, we will get that feedback that the Samoan language is not on there, and it should be ... And she was so happy. And I was a little bit nervous because ... she doesn’t always speak out. And she spoke out about something that’s related to like her language ... and they didn’t have it. And so I was worried that she was going to be upset or ... feel like she wasn’t included. But when I got to talk to her afterward, she was like, oh no, that was my favorite part. Like **she got to provide feedback on something related to her language** ... Even in that situation, like she spoke in front of Microsoft people, and she was still confident ... **I feel like engagement can be a little bit challenging in the group, but I can see that change as we develop more connection one-on-one.**”

This moment showed that educational inclusion is not about forcing participation; it is about creating culturally responsive spaces where students feel seen, heard, and valued. It also illustrated how student voices can contribute to systems change when educators advocate for students to speak from their identities.

Lupe held high expectations for his kindergarten and lower elementary students, treating them with respect rather than infantilizing them. He shared his reflection on one student who aspired to be a Microsoft engineer and was creating videos on social media.

“There was a student, Sazadin ... I really enjoyed working with him. And it was because of how curious he was ... He just had a glow, when it came to just asking questions, or just who he was, his way of being, I don't know. It just some things resonated a lot about that with me. Perhaps **I saw parts of myself in him, but also learned something else to that, you know, wasn't part of me.**”

Lupe's humble, curious, and conscious mindset allowed him to recognize and learn from his students' strengths.

Educators of color shared how meaningful interactions with students enhanced their understanding of student voice, agency, and lived experiences. These moments transformed teachers from authority figures into responsive guides, underscoring the importance of relational trust, empathy, and cultural connection. Through self-reflection, educators began to reimagine their classrooms as spaces for mutual learning and to humanize teaching practices. The reciprocal relationship with students contributed to the development of educators' hybrid identities and evolving teaching philosophies.

Discussion

In this study, I gathered the perspectives of five K-12 educators of color regarding their teaching and learning experiences in various school settings with diverse student groups. By examining each educator's past, present, and future, I highlighted how their family backgrounds, cultural identities, and lived experiences significantly impact their sense of purpose, teaching values, interactions with students, and future aspirations. The discussions also revealed that educators of color can effectively engage with students who share similar cultural backgrounds,

identities, and interests. Their intersecting identities allowed them to connect with their students in meaningful ways, fostering a more inclusive and understanding classroom environment (Brown, 2022; Burkhard et al., 2022; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Haddix, 2010; Hsieh, 2015, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Through the narratives, I further elaborated on how the intersecting identities of critical educators of color deepen their awareness of systemic inequalities, reflecting on their own positionality as well as their relationships with students and the broader teaching community. This awareness and reflection inspired them to confront systemic biases related to race, gender, and class while also embracing culturally responsive and justice-oriented teaching practices and mindsets.

Given that recent critical scholars emphasize the need to broaden traditional literacy education and recognize that technology and multimedia are integral to students' daily lives, both inside and outside of school (Afolalu, 2024b; Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; Gee & Hayes, 2011; Jewitt, 2008; Karkar Esperat, 2024a; Karkar Esperat & Stickley, 2024; Nash & Skerrett, 2025; Skerrett, 2011), I illustrated how critical educators of color integrate these resources into their classrooms to connect learning with real-world contexts and incorporate students' perspectives. My examination of how five educators utilized visual presentations, body language, interactive platforms, and digital resources highlighted their strategies for establishing dynamic learning spaces that engaged students on multiple levels. For instance, multimedia presentations helped clarify complex concepts and made learning more accessible. Even if educators do not speak their students' home languages or if students are learning new languages, effective communication can still occur through various means, such as body language, facial expressions, and multimodal communication. The findings suggested that a technology-enhanced multiliterate curriculum and instruction extend beyond traditional texts and languages, broadening the

definition of literacy to showcase students' learning in various ways and dismantle language hierarchies. However, it is equally important to emphasize that integrating digital technology in educational settings should prioritize facilitating students' learning. The findings indicated that educators should use technology in ways that do not create distractions, complicate the learning process, or lead to excessive dependence on digital tools. Therefore, educators must carefully and critically focus on enhancing student engagement and comprehension when incorporating digital tools to enrich the educational experience.

In discussing student participation, I highlighted how a technology-enhanced multiliterate approach actively engaged students in the classroom. For instance, multimodal materials effectively bridged the gap between academic terminology and the knowledge that students already possess, especially in STEM subjects. Digital technology allowed students to create and interact with multimodal texts, including images, audio, video, code, and interactive components. This practice facilitated personalized learning experiences that accommodate various styles and preferences, thereby enhancing the efficacy of student learning and cultivating a dynamic classroom environment. When creating multimodal presentations, students were encouraged to draw on their funds of knowledge to express their understanding. As they acquired new knowledge and used digital multimodal presentations to showcase their understanding, they reorganized and redesigned that knowledge. This process empowered them to take an active role in their learning, transforming them from passive recipients of information into active creators who define the knowledge they present (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kosnik & Menna, 2013; Lim et al., 2022; Skerrett, 2011; van Haren, 2015). By examining how meanings are constructed across different modes, students can better understand the representation of power, ideologies, and perspectives while strengthening their critical thinking skills. This approach encouraged

critical engagement with their education and transformed classrooms into vibrant spaces that support holistic learning experiences and cultivate a sense of community (Afolalu, 2024a; Campano et al., 2020; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Jewitt, 2008; Karkar Esperat & Stickley, 2024; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011; Skerrett, 2011; The New London Group, 1996).

This study uniquely focused on how multiliteracies and digital technologies can empower students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, particularly at the intersection of the identities of educators of color. I highlighted that multiliterate pedagogies inherently acknowledge and celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity. This was demonstrated by showcasing multimodal presentations created by students that incorporated cultural elements, multiple languages, and personal interests, all of which reflected and respected their identities within the learning environment. This culturally sustaining approach preserved students' multilingualism and encouraged them to bring their everyday languages and social practices into the classroom (Afolalu, 2024a; Campano et al., 2020; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Flores, 2020; González, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 2006; Moll et al., 1992; Paris & Alim, 2017; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011). Furthermore, I elaborated on the insights of individual educators of color and illustrated how their students form connections by expressing their true selves. The findings underscored that this technology-enhanced multiliterate practice emphasized authenticity, enabling students to showcase who they are instead of conforming to traditional methods or external standards that attempt to define their abilities and identities. It also suggested that this approach can help build students' confidence and resilience, positively impacting their overall well-being.

In exploring the process of building reciprocal relationships in teaching and learning, particularly as a “transformative experience” for educators of color (Ladson-Billings, 1992;

Villegas & Irvine, 2010), I focused on how these educators maintained high expectations for their students while nurturing a sense of agency. They achieved this by centering student voices, offering choices, and affirming cultural identities. As a result, students took ownership of their learning and engaged critically with their surroundings. This sense of student agency restructured the power dynamics between teachers and students. Educators transitioned from being the sole authorities in the learning process to becoming facilitators who guide, listen to, and respond to students' needs and interests. This redistribution of power encouraged mutual respect and collaborative decision-making. Furthermore, through critical self-reflection and openness, these educators of color gained insights that transformed their perspectives and teaching approaches, ultimately paving the way for personal growth and empowerment.

Implications

The findings of this study emphasize the urgent need for teacher diversity in the multilingual and multicultural contexts of the United States and highlight the essential perspectives that educators of color bring inside and outside the schools. While recruiting more educators of color to increase representation in schools is necessary, it is equally important to focus on retention to achieve lasting changes in workforce diversity. Understanding the factors influencing educators of color in their career decisions and aspirations can provide valuable insights into efforts aimed at further diversifying the teaching workforce.

This study demonstrates that enacting technology-enhanced multiliteracies approaches intertwines the knowledge, interests, and strengths of both educators and students. This method nurtures students' identities and encourages collaboration and dialogue among peers from different linguistic and cultural contexts. Additionally, it encourages educators to remain humble

and understand how students embody their ways of knowing. This insight could profoundly influence the future of language and literacy education by broadening the traditional academic standards to value learning both inside and outside the classroom.

New technologies and the Internet facilitate globalization and promote the exchange and emergence of different cultures and societies. Contemporary communication moves beyond traditional methods such as writing, drawing, and speaking. The ways in which we create meaning and interpret information are continually evolving, reflecting the dynamic nature of our interconnected world. For instance, social media platforms, digital storytelling, and multimedia projects have transformed how people express themselves and share knowledge.

As educators, we need to consider how we can prepare students for the rapidly changing, diverse world that encompasses various cultures and languages. This preparation involves not only teaching literacy skills but also fostering critical thinking and adaptability to navigate and analyze different forms of information while understanding the cultural context behind them. Technology-enhanced multiliterate curriculum and instruction have the potential to transform educational practices. As we move forward, it is critical to continually reflect on our teaching methods to align with the evolving landscape of teaching and learning in the 21st century.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is the small sample size, as I interviewed only five participants currently residing in the greater Seattle area. I specifically invited these individuals to participate because of their diverse cultural backgrounds, each bringing unique teaching experiences from different contexts across the United States. Because of this limited number of narratives, the findings may not fully represent the larger community of educators of color.

However, the relational nature and intimacy of the study allowed me to gather rich, detailed information, leading to a deeper understanding of human experiences and relationships.

Future research should aim to gather larger and more diverse datasets that consider demographic factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, and geographic location. Additionally, employing a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data can yield a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of educators from varied backgrounds. Since the interview questions centered on personal backgrounds and experiences, engaging a broader spectrum of voices will help capture the nuanced experiences within the educator community, thereby identifying trends, commonalities, and distinct experiences that shape the educational landscape for educators of color.

Conclusion

Perspectives from educators of color offer a critical lens to illuminate the strengths and nuanced experiences of students, particularly those from marginalized communities, including students of color and multilingual learners. This study illustrates how technology-enhanced multiliterate curriculum and instruction can create reciprocal learning spaces for both multilingual students and educators of color. In this approach, students bring their identities to the class and establish social norms together, with teachers not positioned as the only knowledgeable and authoritative figures. The role of a teacher shifts from being above students to collaborating with them. The student-teacher relationship becomes reciprocal, allowing students to gain empowerment and ownership while teachers enhance their cultural awareness by learning from their students. This dynamic interaction dismantles language hierarchies and

enables teachers to offer ongoing personalized guidance and support. As a result, students feel valued in the class.

A technology-enhanced multiliteracies approach allows teachers and peers to see the world through each other's eyes and voices. Moments of sharing their work can cultivate unity and understanding among students, garner emotional support, and build a stronger, more inclusive learning community. Moreover, it encourages students to bring their own questions into the learning space, nurturing curiosity about the world they inhabit. Ultimately, this holistic approach aims to achieve inclusive and equitable education for minoritized students.

Educators play an essential and foundational role in creating an environment that serves as a healing space, ensuring it is safe and open for all students. By implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies, educators can contribute to the movement for racial and decolonial justice (Paris, 2021). A truly healing classroom requires active student participation; thus, engaging students in the learning space is the pivotal first step. Through this engagement, teaching and learning can sustain and honor the diverse communities, languages, practices, and ways of knowing of the younger generation within the school and beyond as they navigate our rapidly evolving social landscape.

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Appendix A

Final Individual Semi-structured In-depth Interview Protocol

The interview has 10 questions to gather your perspectives on your students and to reflect on your identities, backgrounds, and aspirations.

1. What is your identity and background?
 - What is your ethnicity?
 - How many languages do you speak?
2. What inspires or motivates you to work in education?
 - How many years have you been teaching?
3. What main subjects or topics are you currently teaching? Have you taught any other subjects or topics?
 - In what school settings have you taught? Formal schools, after-school activities, or summer camps?
4. Can you share some key moments in your teaching journey?
5. Who are your students? How would you describe the students you teach, including their identities, backgrounds, strengths, and interests?
 - What grades of students have you taught?
6. What expectations or hopes do you hold for your students' growth and learning?
7. How do you integrate digital tools and multimodal materials into your teaching?
8. How would you describe your students' engagement in your classroom?
9. What observations have you made about your students' independence in learning?
10. How do you feel about being an educator in today's educational climate?