



# **The CCTE Fall 2024 Research Monograph**

Published by  
the California Council on Teacher Education

Containing 18 Research Articles  
Based on Presentations  
at the CCTE Fall 2024 Conference



# **CCTE Fall 2024 Research Monograph**

**Published by the California Council on Teacher Education**

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## **Preface**

### ***Message from the CCTE President***

**By Karen Escalante**

Our California Council on Teacher Education Fall 2024 Conference around the theme “Feedback for All: Preparing for Deeper Learning for Equity and Excellence in the California Classroom” was a huge success thanks in large part to the contributions of our CCTE Research Committee Co-Chairs Marni E. Fisher and Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi as well as the incredible research presentations selected by their Committee for the Conference program.

The Conference included a variety of ways to engage with and present scholarly work, including concurrent research presentations, panel discussions, workshops, roundtables, and the poster session. Many of those presentations are reflected in the articles which appear in this monograph.

CCTE continues to follow our charge “to work toward improving education at every level through fostering teacher development and growth opportunities” by offering multiple ways for our community to share, distribute, engage with, disseminate, and talk through our lines of inquiry. I encourage all of our CCTE delegates and members to enjoy this *CCTE Fall 2024 Research Monograph*. I am grateful to all of the contributors.

In Community,  
**Karen Escalante**  
CCTE President

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## **Introduction**

### ***Feedback that Calls for Educational Change***

**By Marni E. Fisher & Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi**

Following the 2024 Fall CCTE Conference, themed “Feedback for All,” *The 2024 Fall CCTE Monograph* offers a rich call for systemic change that loosely aligns with Linton’s (2011) suggestion that creating systemic equity requires personal commitment, institutional change, and daily practices. As such, this *Monograph* offers themes of change: systemic, in teacher education, through classroom practice, whole-school, and in higher education.

Starting at the institutional and political levels, the articles included here involve changing both the current systems and recognizing the effectiveness of political activism. Looking at system changes, John Pascarella identifies the need to address: “the impact of anti-DEI measures on teachers, students, and families, as well as: interrogated long standing inequities in educator preparation and K-12 schooling, evaluated race-evasive policies and curriculum decisions, and reflected on current efforts to address racially biased teaching practices” (p. 10). Following this, Brenda S. Burgo pinpoints the need to shift from the deficit model generated by “achievement gap” language while recognizing the strengths inherent to Black Genius. In a similar multicultural focus, Jordi Solsona-Puig, Minhye Son, and Ferran/Fernando Rodriguez-Valls advocate “for a formative and holistic assessment

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## *Introduction*

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approach to be the guiding framework for bilingual teacher preparation programs” (p. 31). Then, Jill Kerper Mora, Edgar Lampkin, Barbara Flores, and Anita Flemington explicate: (1) steps taken recognizing the political pushes for The Science of Reading that were connected “to a conservative, monolingual agenda,” (2) how they clarified “the ideological underpinnings of current literacy policies,” and (3) the need for “broader and more inclusive approaches to literacy instruction” (p. 38).

Articles encouraging changes to teacher education programs advocate transformation in recruiting, practices, and coaching. Mayeen Quader starts by identifying how “majority white teachers deculturalize BIPOC students through a Euro-centric, race-evasive curriculum validating white norms and values, reinforcing the powerful invisibility of whiteness” (p. 59). Furthermore, these gatekeeping elements within recruiting fail to diversify, instead supporting white-norms. Alternately, Shana Matamala examines supervising, suggesting that building a formative feedback loop supports ongoing growth, improving teacher prep practices. Lisa Sullivan and Andrew Hood stress the importance of supporting “candidates with culturally responsive teaching, addressing social justice issues in TK-12 schools, and navigating diverse classroom environments” (p. 77) while still underscoring concerns about supporting multilingual students, the “lack of diversity among candidates” (p. 77), and generational differences between supervisors and candidates. Also looking at supervision, Isabel Orejel and Shana Matamala encourage supervisors to develop reflective practices while also creating a “structured, equity-focused approach to coaching” (p. 83). Libbi R. Miller and Heather Ballinger suggest a more critical cornerstone, which includes “equipping [teacher candidates] with critical historical content knowledge and strategies for civil discourse and civic engagement” in order to “increase teachers’ critical historical content knowledge from an equity-oriented perspective” (p. 88), applying instructional practices that make civics relevant, meaningful, and action-oriented, and increasing equitable access.

Implementing changes to daily K-12 classroom practices covers professional development, steps for teacher self-care, restorative trauma-informed practices for managing behavior, and teaching that is concept oriented. Furwa T. Rizvi proposes the need for leadership targeted PD, since “TK will need to embrace DAPs [Developmentally Appropriate Practices/Play-Based Learning], SEL [social-emotional learning], dual language support, and early intervention” (p. 94). TK/K teachers are typically knowledgeable, but the leaders are not as familiar with developmentally appropriate teaching. Shifting directions toward teacher self-care, Joanne M. Van Boxtel and Rebecca Spady discuss how teachers increase resilience and guard against burnout through addressing social-emotional and physical needs. Moving on to the needs of the child, Carrie R. Giboney Wall highlights how two-thirds of students experience trauma by age 16, and this trauma impacts school performance. Rather than taking a punitive approach, these behaviors should be addressed through social-emotional learning, growth mindset, shared control, proactive and prompt responses, and building strong relationships. Examining teaching practices, Shan-



na Del Rosario and Marni E. Fisher advocate a transformation from scores-only feedback, looking at written feedback, promoting student agency, teaching parents/guardians to understand feedback, integrating concept-based instruction, and developing the generalization/transfer of information process.

Articles on changing whole school practices center around school-wide systems and leadership development. Ingrid Beaty, Danelle Teikel, Jeremy F. Cavallaro, Kelsey Wan, Robin Cerato, and Marni E. Fisher share how their school utilizes four elements to support systems growth and inclusive learning: adaptive leadership, project-based learning, professional learning communities (PLCs), and restorative practices that specifically heal damaged PLCs. Similarly, Marni Fisher, Mina Chun, Meredith A. Dorner, Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi, Joe A. Perry, Kelsey Wan, Allison Petersen, Ingrid Beaty, Jeremy F. Cavallaro, Jasmine Ramirez, Gayle Bentley, Shanna Del Rosario, and Paul McDonald clarify how different educators perceive the implementation of PLCs. Moses Ochanji, Roxanne Greitz Miller, Benjamin E. Seipel, Erika Daniels, and Rong-Ji Chen further delineate the needs of middle school or middle level education, suggesting professional development to support administrators, and improvements that include student choice and community interaction as well as a general need for improvements.

Finally, looking at not only the field of education but also at practices that can be used throughout higher education, involves constructivism and multimodal feedback. Meredith A. Dorner, Marni E. Fisher, Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi, and Jeremy F. Cavallaro emphasize how “metacognitive reflection, real-world problem-solving, and collaborative feedback... enhance student engagement, skill development, and learning outcomes” (p. 152). Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi and Marni Fisher then consider how multimodal feedback within higher education supports both the Universal Design for Learning and differentiation to support “a more holistic, student-centered approach that aligns with modern educational goals of developing well-rounded, engaged learners” (p. 162).

Overall, this body of work represents a profound blueprint for reimagining feedback and assessment in education. Offering insights from a variety of voices, the *Monograph* underscores the urgency of embracing equitable and inclusive practices while examining systemic inequities. It calls upon educators, institutions, and policy-makers to cultivate an environment where every student’s strengths are recognized, every educator’s growth is supported, and every school’s culture is rooted in equity and empathy. This vision for educational transformation invites each of us to take action, reinforcing that true progress is achieved through collaboration, resilience, and an unwavering dedication to equity in all dimensions of education.

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# **Bias Implied, Learning Denied**

## **Unlocking the Potential of Race-Conscious Culturally Responsive Teacher Education in Perilous Times**

**John Pascarella**

### **Abstract**

This workshop explored the political backlash against race-conscious teacher education, contemporary cases of culturally responsive teaching, and practical strategies to disrupt educators' racial biases.

*Keywords:* Racial equity, political backlash, culturally responsive pedagogy, and teacher preparation

### **Workshop Session Overview**

During a period of widespread political backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion in PreK-12 education and educator preparation programs, this workshop examined a contemporary case study of racial bias in a public school classroom, concrete examples of racial literacy-in-action, and practical strategies that teacher educators could immediately use with pre-service teachers, colleagues, and school partners. Credible and current research informed this engagement, which introduced content and strategies that offered participants varied opportunities to learn

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### ***Bias Implied, Learning Denied***

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and practice building racial literacy knowledge and skills as teacher educators. Participants interrogated evidence-based sources of racial socialization, evaluated a classroom scenario of culturally relevant curriculum “gone wrong,” and applied research-informed frameworks to disrupt our/educators’ racial biases. Participants engaged in independent and small group reflections on practice. The problem-based case scenario was provided, along with research produced by nationally recognized racial equity scholars, including Aronson and Laughter (2016), Barajas-Lopez (2016), Bryan-Gooden (2019), Emdin (2016), Gay (2016), Kohli et al. (2022), Ladson-Billings (2021), Michael (2015), Milner (2020), and Paris and Alim (2014), as well as research reports, practice briefs, and frameworks produced by USC Race and Equity Center, NYU Steinhardt Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity, and Pew Research Center.

#### ***Part 1: Framing the Context***

During the first segment, participants examined recent reports based on national studies of educators, parents, and students’ views on race, gender, and sexuality being addressed in K-12 schools and university contexts. Participants discussed the implications for race-conscious teacher education, and what teacher educators can do to pushback against overreach and the spread of misinformation about what happens in K-12 classrooms. This segment addressed the impact of anti-DEI measures on teachers, students, and families, as well as: interrogated longstanding inequities in educator preparation and K-12 schooling, evaluated race-evasive policies and curriculum decisions, and reflected on current efforts to address racially biased teaching practices. Participants learned practical strategies to address these longstanding inequities in the face of increased public scrutiny of equity and inclusion efforts in public institutions.

#### ***Part 2: Promoting Race-Conscious Culturally Responsive Teacher Education***

During this second segment, participants examined current educator preparation practices to address race, racism, homophobia, and transphobia. Participants reviewed a contemporary case scenario to analyze the sources of racial socialization and unproductive conversations about racism in educator preparation programs and K-12 schools. They then evaluated research-informed practices for addressing avoidance tactics in dialogue about race and racism in program planning meetings, curriculum decisions, instructional interactions, and mentorship experiences to meet and/or exceed the session objectives listed below.

#### **Purpose/Objectives**

By the end of this workshop session, teacher educators should have been better equipped to: (1) Identify practices, cultural norms, and policies that actualize and

undermine racial equity; (2) Recognize how implicit biases and deficit mindsets about students of color, their families, and their communities contribute to racial inequities in academic achievement and students' experiences; (3) Develop curricula that include students' racial realities, histories, identities, and cultural interests; (4) Teach in inclusive, culturally responsive, and culturally respectful ways; (5) Discuss race and racism with higher levels of comfort, confidence, and racial literacy; and (6) Meaningfully anticipate and prepare teachers to address complex racial problems in classrooms and larger school environments.

### **Problem of Practice**

Since January 2021, 44 states have advanced legislation, executive orders, and board resolutions to constrain, ban, or criminalize discussions of race, racism, gender diversity, and sexuality (Bella, 2021; Blow, 2023; Friedman, 2022; Friedman and Farid Johnson, 2022; Green, 2021; Pendharkar, 2022; Schwartz, 2023). To prevent local censorship measures in California, Governor Gavin Newsom signed AB 1078 into law in 2023. AB 1078 prohibits schools from banning books on the basis of race, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, social economic status, or political affiliation of a book's subject, author, or intended audience. Newsom also signed AB 1955 into law in 2024, which prohibits schools from requiring faculty and staff to share information about a student's gender identity or sexual orientation to parents and caregivers without the child's permission. Local school board members in Chino Hills, Temecula, and other regions have faced increased accountability by the state for policy actions that run contrary to these laws. In 2023, Temecula Valley Unified School Board reversed its decision to reject a social studies textbook that included the history of Gay Rights activist and former San Francisco mayor Harvey Milk, after Governor Newsom ordered a \$1.5 million fine that would have been imposed had the Board decision been carried out. In 2024, a San Bernardino County Superior Court ruled Chino Valley Unified School District could not enforce its policy to disclose students' gender identities to parents without the child's consent. After four years of advancing anti-CRT policies, elected officials and conservative activist groups like Moms for Liberty and Parents Defending Education have referenced the 2023 Supreme Court decision to end affirmative action in college admissions as cause for eliminating all race-conscious and LGBTQ+ inclusive initiatives and policies that aim to counteract long-standing inequities in public institutions, including university-based educator preparation programs.

As educators continue to reflect on the implications of the 2024 election, educator preparation programs leading any form of identity-conscious learning experiences for new teachers and aspiring school leaders must fortify themselves against political forces that: censor free and civic discourse, ban books that feature BIPOC and LGBTQ+ authors and characters, and/or criminalize the actions and decisions of teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators who advance antiracist,

### ***Bias Implied, Learning Denied***

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culturally sustaining, and Queer-inclusive teaching practices (Pascarella, 2024). In this workshop session, we will examine the current political efforts attacking race-conscious education, the research demonstrating teachers, parents, and care-givers' actual views of book bans, critical race theory, and teachers' autonomy, as well as explore practical pathways to continue advancing equity-driven teacher preparation during these politically turbulent times.

### **Practices that Address the Issue**

Given the current sociopolitical climate, teacher educators must work together in our/their programs and across institutions to: (1) Develop strong race-conscious identities and discourse practices as teacher educators preparing K-12 teachers; (2) Critique our own roles in reproducing race-evasive and cis-heteronormative instructional practices and program decisions; (3) Continuously increase our understanding of racial dynamics among students by building stronger rapport with students and using varied inquiry practices that increase knowledge of their racialized experiences; (4) Personalize and publicly engage in discussions of intersectionality in our educator preparation programs; (5) Collaborate with more experienced race-conscious teacher educators; (6) Make our programs more inclusive beyond including BIPOC and LGBTQ+ scholarship into just one or two courses; and (7) Meaningfully include BIPOC, Queer, and Genderqueer students and faculty in cogenerated program decisions and policies that ensure race-conscious and culturally responsive work is supported and deeply entrenched race-evasive and cis-heteronormative conditioning and biases are disrupted. To achieve these objectives, this session offered practical recommendations for: (1) collecting data on teacher candidates' experiences; (2) preparing teacher candidates to evaluate curriculum, books, and resources in their K-12 clinical classrooms; (3) identifying racial biases and increasing assets-based views of students and families; and (4) practicing three critical lenses to increase race-conscious culturally responsive teaching practices and decisions.

### **Aligning with CCTE Priorities**

As teacher educators continue to reimagine educator preparation programs that prepare educators to disrupt educational inequities in K-12 schools, we have only made limited progress enacting intersectional frameworks that purposefully consider interdependent systems of power and oppression based on race, class, nationality, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Carter Andrews et al., 2019, 2021; Hill Collins et al., 2021; Kohli et al., 2022; Shah & Coles, 2020). Given the current sociopolitical climate in which BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students, families, and educators continue to be threatened, teacher educators must work together in their programs and across institutions to: critique our own roles in reproducing race-evasive and cis-heteronormative programs;

personalize and publicly engage in discussions of intersectionality in our educator preparation programs; make our programs more inclusive beyond including BIPOC and LGBTQ+ scholarship into just one or two courses; and meaningfully include BIPOC, Queer, and Genderqueer students and faculty in co-generating program decisions that would otherwise continue to reflect deeply entrenched race-evasive and cis-heteronormative conditioning and biases. This workshop session prioritized diversity, equity, and inclusion in educator preparation programs by addressing the potential fallout from teacher educators' efforts to prepare pre-service teachers and support in-service teachers who advance race-conscious culturally responsive practices in their K-12 classrooms.

The focus of this session was to meaningfully engage educator preparation leaders and practitioners committed to advancing racial equity and inclusion. Participants in this session: (1) Analyzed race-conscious practices in educator preparation programs and cogenerate practical strategies to address racism, homophobia, and transphobia while facing increased scrutiny; (2) Analyzed sources of racial socialization and characteristics of unproductive conversations about racism, homophobia, and transphobia in order to cogenerate actionable dialogue strategies and decisions that continue advancing equity and inclusion; and (3) Examined feedback practices that explicitly name racial biases and engage in reflective practices that disrupt those biases in future instructional experiences. To address the political overreach to eradicate all race-conscious initiatives in public institutions, including the preparation or in-service education of teachers and school leaders, this workshop session examined strategies implemented by teacher educators to diversify coursework in this current context, evaluated mistakes made by well-intentioned teachers making culturally responsive teaching decisions, and expanded professional learning opportunities for teacher educators to have productive dialogues with colleagues and students about racism, as aligned with their greater efforts to deliver on their programs' commitments to continue advancing equity and inclusion in the face of state and local measures banning books and censoring discussions of race, racism, gender, and sexual diversity.

### **Connection to the Theme**

Despite extensive literature documenting educators' implicit racial bias, most teacher educators have had limited exposure in their own preparation to learning experiences that increased their own cultural competency and racial literacy, even after attending graduate programs and certificates with coursework on culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy. In alignment with the CCTE 2024 fall conference's theme of "Feedback for All: Preparing for Deeper Learning for Equity and Excellence in the California Classroom," this session explored practical strategies for advancing feedback that explicitly addresses racial biases by leveraging the expertise and resources generated by the facilitator's experience



leading numerous racial equity academies for teacher educators, school leaders, and teachers at the USC Race and Equity Center.

### **Inquiry Questions Explored During this Workshop**

Reflecting on our role as teacher educators, we must consider: Is the point of learning about racism to take action to abolish it? If so, then how do we prepare teachers to unearth the ways racism is learned and internalized, how those ideas inform their everyday interactions, and how to take meaningful actions that result in disrupting racism, if we, as teacher educators, have not been adequately and continuously prepared to do so ourselves? What did we learn about race and racism in our own educator preparation programs? Given the heightened scrutiny of diversity, equity, and inclusion education nationwide, what are teachers' views of the current debates about what schools should be teaching? What questions do these findings raise about how we prepare teachers to address race and racism in K-12 schools? Have you developed a robust racial identity as a teacher educator? If not, how do you expect your teacher candidates to do so? What are your experiences building stronger rapport across racial and ethnic groups of students? Colleagues? To what extent and with what approaches have you learned about the racialized experiences of the teachers you supervise/mentor? Of the K-12 students they serve? As teacher educators, are we cultivating joyful, identity conscious, and critical learning experiences that are practical and transferrable to K-12 classrooms?

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# **Black Genius, An Achievement Distortion**

## **A Critique on State Standardized Testing and Deficit Framing**

**Brenda S. Burgo**

### **Abstract**

Is the achievement gap real? Using a mixed-methods approach, this study reframed state standardized testing through a Quantitative and Black Critical lens. It interrogated the deficit framing of Black student achievement by asking: (1) To what extent do the aggregated state standardized test scores for Black students correlate with other measures of achievement? (2) What beliefs do Black educators have regarding the standardized test scores of Black students? and (3) How do Black educators define Black Genius? From the findings, the study proffers terminology to frame the issue more accurately: Black Genius, Achievement Distortion, and Connection Gap.

*Keywords:* State Standardized Testing, Achievement Distortion, Black Genius, QuantCrit

### **Introduction**

In K-12 education, standardized testing is a bedrock practice even amidst numerous critiques (Hutt & Schneider, 2018). It has been tied to educational funding

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since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and sanctioning with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002. Under our current legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states are still required to test annually for federal funding. The results are used to make key decisions including student placement, resource allocation, curricular materials, programs, and school ratings (Davis, 2014). Most importantly, an educational term known as the *achievement gap*, later reframed as an opportunity gap, has emerged to frame the disparity seen between the standardized test scores of White and/or Asian students and other students of color (Carter & Welner, 2013; Flores, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Reframing the achievement gap as opportunity gap highlights how we have disproportionately failed to invest in high-quality, culturally relevant, and asset-based education for all students. However, it does not address the fact that Black students do “achieve” when viewed through a non-deficit, multi-measurement lens. Nor does it interrogate the socially constructed markers of achievement (Safir & Dugan, 2021; Toldson, 2019). For students who have traditionally “underperformed” on state tests, the consequences can result in a range of harmful practices, from remediation to a loss of rigorous classes and programs which support acceleration (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Davis, 2014). The purpose of this study was to interrogate the deficit framing of Black students’ academic achievement, as measured by the California state standardized test and perceived by Black educators.

My research questions are:

RQ1: To what extent do the aggregated standardized test scores for Black students in California (SBAC) correlate with other measures of achievement, specifically their college and career indicator (CCI) and graduation rate?

RQ2: What beliefs do Black educators have regarding the standardized test scores of Black students?

RQ3: How do Black educators define Black Genius?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical underpinning was guided primarily by Quantitative Critical Studies, (QuantCrit). This framework asserts:

(1) The centrality of racism, (2) numbers are not neutral, (3) categories are neither ‘natural’ nor given, (4) voice and insight are critical because data cannot ‘speak for itself,’ and (5) we can use numbers for social justice. (Gillborn et al., 2018, p. 169)

In addition, Black Critical Studies (BlackCrit), and the concept of ground truthing (Perez Huber, et al., 2018) supported my methodological choice to focus solely on Black student data and Black educators. BlackCrit, theorized by Dumas and Ross (2016), asserts that anti-Blackness is endemic. Using a BlackCrit lens illuminates how the depiction of Black students as “underperforming,” and other deficit terminology, is legitimized through standardized testing data. Lastly, Pérez Huber et

al. (2018) expounded on the phrase “ground truthing” (Vélez & Solórzano, 2017) which asserts that community expertise is vital to validate the accuracy of data, especially when matters of race are involved.

### **Methodology**

This was an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To determine the participants for the quantitative data, I used Proportional Stratified Random Selection to ensure that certain groups are included in the sample in the same proportion that they exist in the population (Mertler, 2019). According to the U.S. Census Bureau for 2022, in the state of California, the Black/African American population made up approximately 5.6% of the population. As a result, all California counties and school districts that met the specified threshold of having at least a 5.6% Black/African American demographic were included, resulting in 56 California school districts.

My data came from three sources: (1) Standardized ELA and Math test scores on the SBAC, graduation rates, and the college and career indicator (CCI). (2) The CCI web documents which detail the criteria for demonstrating college readiness. (3) Responses from a digital questionnaire.

1. I compared 4 measurements of achievement for the Black student group within 56 school districts across two cohort years using a Spearman Rho Rank Order Correlation Analysis. These measurements of achievement were (a) the SBAC English Language Arts (b) SBAC Math test scores (standardized measurements) (c) graduation rates (based on coursework completion) and (d) their CCI (a combination of standardized measurements and coursework completion).

2. To analyze California’s College and Career Indicator (CCI), I conducted two document analyses on (1) the previous CCI criteria in 2019 (2) the more recently revised CCI criteria in 2021. Since this study interrogated standardized testing, it was important to unpack the percentage of standardized testing within the CCI.

3. I sent a digital questionnaire to all Human Resource Superintendents within the 56 school districts requesting input from Black Educators. I received 23 responses from Black educators. These data were coded to determine key themes.

### **Findings**

*RQ1: To what extent do the aggregated standardized test scores for Black students in California (SBAC) correlate with other measures of achievement, specifically their college and career indicator (CCI) and graduation rate?*

There was no strong correlation between Black students’ aggregated SBAC scores to their graduation rate or CCI. Also, Black students performed better on their graduation rates and CCI. This is an important finding, given that the document analysis revealed that 42% of the current CCI indicators include SBAC scores and 58% include course work completion only. Therefore, since graduation rates rely

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100% on course work completion and CCI relies 58% upon course work completion, it was shown that Black students are achieving better in the areas where course work completion is involved.

*RQ2: What beliefs do Black educators have regarding the standardized test scores of Black students?*

Black educators felt that the SBAC test scores for Black students are not a sufficient measurement of achievement and paints an inaccurate picture of their progress. They also shared several nuances of Black students' performance on standardized testing, including a lack of student connection to the test; and a lack of communication and understanding between the school, home, students, and the test. Black educators also offered alternative measurement formats that they felt were more meaningful for Black students, specifically projects, portfolios, and presentations.

In terms of valid indicators for Black student achievement, graduation and college acceptance rates were seen as more authentic and valid than SBAC test scores. The quantitative results of this study supported this, as these two measurements (graduation rates and CCI) were consistently higher than the SBAC scores for Black students.

*RQ3: How do Black educators define Black Genius?*

The term *Black Genius* is not new, and previous scholars have noted the ways in which we can build on the genius of Black students (Brawley, 1966; Wilson, 1992; Sullivan, 2016; McGee, 2018; Muhammed, 2020; Moore & Neal, 2023; Nance, 2023). However, this study conceptualized the term Black Genius differently in that it derived a definition using the ground truthed data from Black educators in this study. They frequently noted the ways in which they themselves and their Black students have had to navigate an unfriendly educational environment, while retaining their own sense of pride and self efficacy. From the coding analysis, a definition emerged that reflects a composite of their opinions (see definition below). It recognizes that anti-Blackness, as manifested in school policies and procedures, has negatively shaped the way Black student achievement is framed. Therefore, Black Genius is a reframing and reclaiming of the ways that Black students have achieved.

### **Towards a More Critical Educational Lexicon**

I proffer three terms to the educational lexicon to illuminate the problems uncovered within this study.

(1) Achievement Distortion: *the phenomenon that occurs when viewing the achievement data for racialized groups using singular and/or standardized*

*measurements without including insider voice to provide insight. This leads to unverified assumptions and deficit framing of student achievement.*

This terminology builds on the phenomenon known as the *achievement gap* and interrogates this deficit conceptualization as a socially and racially constructed gap (Gutierrez, 2008; Safir & Dugan, 2021; Toldson, 2019). It offers a more nuanced understanding of how achievement can be misconstrued when community and insider voice is not centered to validate the accuracy of the data, as argued by Pérez Huber et al. (2018). It also highlights the ways that quantitative data as a stand-alone measurement can reproduce harm for communities of color. Using the term *achievement distortion* acknowledges that achievement is a social construct (Toldson, 2019) and other data can also be used to interrogate the legitimacy of quantitative claims based on standardized test scores.

(2) Black Genius: *Although genius is universal to all of humanity, Black Genius acknowledges a verve that Black people possess which exists outside of the traditional, status quo conceptualization of intelligence. This verve is rooted in Black community, consciousness, and collectivism, propelling Black people to achieve, persist, and make progress in the face of persistent anti-Blackness.*

(3) Connection Gap: *the disconnect between what is taught (curriculum); how it is taught (pedagogical approach); what is tested; and what is relevant to students, their families, and their communities.*

The disconnect was a major theme from the coded data. Educators felt that it negatively impacts Black student achievement because they and their families often do not feel connected to the learning or assessment. Black educators explained that the curriculum is often disconnected from the daily lives and culture of Black students. Teachers often teach and test in ways that do not best support their Black and other diverse students. Most importantly, there is an unclear connection between performing well on the standardized state test to any positive future life outcomes for the students. Therefore, there is a disconnect.

### **Implications**

*Teacher Education:* This study provided a framework for the way educators must view achievement data for marginalized student groups. Understanding that numbers have been used to reproduce and legitimize deficit views of communities of color (Priddie & Renbarger, 2023), first, we must interrogate standardized test data in comparison to other measures of achievement. Second, any quantitative measure of achievement must be ground truthed (Pérez Huber et al., 2018) using insider/community voice as the experts and data verifiers to determine the validity and authenticity of the data. Third, educators must highlight the ways in which students are achieving and harness this data to guide key decisions.

### *Black Genius, An Achievement Distortion*

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*Policy:* Policymakers can expand the requirements for federal funding. California schools have the Local Control Funding Formula which includes a number of measures that schools are required to address. However, the state test is still required for federal funding. Allowing multiple measures to satisfy the federal funding requirement could allow LEAs the flexibility to be creative and use more authentic and culturally responsive measurements to demonstrate student progress and achievement.

*The Testing Industry:* If the federal funding requirement remains and states are required to test their students annually, another option is for the testing industry to adapt its tests. The call for more socially responsive tests has already been articulated (Bennett, 2023). The testing industry has psychometricians who can design differentiated tests. Test formats may be differentiated to allow uploading projects, oral presentations, and/or a portfolio of collected work to allow students to demonstrate proficiency.

### **Conclusion**

This study interrogated the term *achievement gap* in relation to Black students. Based on the data, the term achievement gap was reframed as an *achievement distortion*. As I, and other scholars have pointed out, Black students can and do achieve. Structural racism, anti-Black institutional practices, biased and one-dimensional standardized tests, and deficit-based framing of Black students' progress have distorted our ability to see it.

It is imperative to state that students belonging to other communities also have assets not recognized by the limited framing of standardized testing. Community Cultural Wealth is a well researched and brilliantly articulated concept that is widely acknowledged in education (Yosso, 2005). Students of color have many assets and deep community and cultural connections which allow them to learn, persist, and make progress, despite opposition and oppression. The key difference between these framings and the term Black Genius is the legacy of anti-Blackness that plagues Black students today. Anti-Blackness is not just racism towards Black people. Dumas and ross (2016) explained it as “a broader antagonistic relationship between blackness and (the possibility of) humanity” (p. 429). Black people exist in the shadow of anti-Blackness today.

Anti-Blackness has manifested historically in chattel slavery, Black codes, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and the fight for Civil Rights. Scholar Fania Davis (2019) noted that this legacy of anti-Black racism has created considerable harm—harm that was historically legalized and is still evident today in structural, institutional, and individual practices. Currently, anti-Blackness can be seen in policies, social inequalities, and measured outcomes which reveal Black students and Black people as the lowest-performing or lowest-achieving racial group across myriad social measures. In the vein of Black Critical studies, Black Genius acknowledges that



anti-Blackness is insidious, and Black students operate in the wake of its social and political ramifications. Therefore, Black Genius exists within the tensions of neoliberal framings of multiculturalism and diversity because it recognizes the specificity of the Black experience (Coles, 2023; Dumas & ross, 2016). This specificity is not meant to emphasize separatism, but rather uniqueness.

Thus, Black Genius is an affirmation of Black achievement in the face of anti-Blackness. It recognizes that anti-Blackness, as manifested in school policies and procedures, has distorted the way Black student achievement is framed. Standardized testing is its chief distortion tool. Due to this distortion, reframing and interrogating the data on Black students is essential (Toldson, 2019). Standardized testing can be misrepresentative of actual student achievement (Hutt & Schneider, 2018). Therefore, Black Genius is a reframing and reclaiming of the ways that Black students have achieved. For this study, it was shown that Black students in the specified school districts within California are doing better on two other measurements, their graduation rate and CCI. Black educators confirmed that these other measurements focusing on graduation and college are more significant and authentic for measuring Black student progress.

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## **Assessment of Bilingual Teachers in California**

### **Exploring the Complexities of a Changing Policy Landscape**

**Jordi Solsona-Puig, Minhye Son,  
& Ferran/Fernando Rodriguez-Valls**

#### **Abstract**

California faces a critical need for effective bilingual education to support its diverse student population. This article examines the assessment of bilingual teacher preparation programs within the California State University (CSU) system, focusing on policy standards like Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) and Bilingual Teacher Performance Expectations (BTPEs). Faculty members and co-chairs of the Council on Plurilingual Educators Preparation (CPEP) provide a unique perspective on these assessments, including clinical practice and coursework and the opportunities and challenges of policy alignment. Successful program models and innovative practices within the CSU system will be showcased to foster dialogue on enhancing bilingual teacher preparation.

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## *Assessment of Bilingual Teachers in California*

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**Keywords:** Bilingual Teacher Education, Teacher Preparation, Teacher Candidates Assessment, Bilingual Teacher Performance Expectations (BTPEs), Bilingual Authorization, California State University (CSU), CPEP (CSU Council of Plurilingual Educators Preparation)

### **Positionality Statement**

As bilingual coordinators, faculty and scholars embedded within the broader CSU university system, we recognize that our perspectives on bilingual teacher preparation programs are shaped by our roles and experiences within this institution, but we cannot represent its wide diversity nor speak on behalf of the institution as a whole. Our examination of these programs stems from a shared belief that we often prioritize sheer numbers and data-driven outcomes, with limited attention to the complexities of program realities and the diverse needs of bilingual educators in a changing policy landscape. While we acknowledge the importance of data, we believe that bilingual teacher preparation should extend beyond metrics to holistically address the human elements of teaching, especially in assessment, in preparing educators for the multilingual and multicultural challenges they will face in the field.

### **Introduction:**

#### **The Need for Effective Bilingual Education in California**

Arguably, California is the most diverse state, linguistically and culturally, in the United States (USCB, 2024). It hosts the largest number of K-12 students reporting other languages than English at home—more than 2 million students, close to 35% of Ever English Learners households -Ever-ELs: who were previously identified as ELs but have transitioned out from that classification (CDE, 2024). Due to its size, importance and repercussions, it is effectively the biggest bilingual program laboratory in the nation—by sheer number of emergent bilinguals or programs diversity—and maybe in the world (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018; Solsona-Puig et al., 2021). Hence, it has become imperative to address the educational needs of its students and families with the training of bilingual teachers, which we deem better prepared to attend to their needs. In addition, California is not only home to the largest population of English Learners (ELs) in the U.S. (CDE, 2024), but also it offers a great variety of bilingual programs.

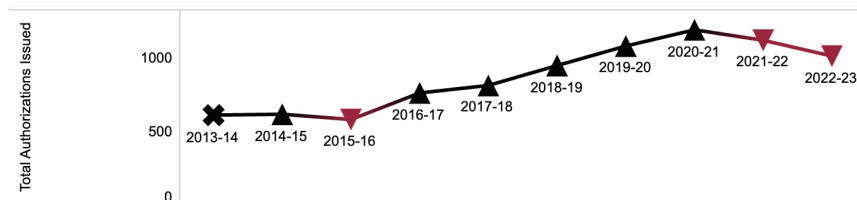
Bilingual education has had a controversial history of acceptance and rejection in California (Garcia & Lin, 2017; Solsona-Puig, 2019). Just in the last two decades, Proposition 227 (1997) banned almost all bilingual education in the state, while Proposition 58 (2016) reinstated them back after two decades. Depending on the source used (see below), bilingual programs differ substantially in their goals and format. Baker (2011) states that there are *strong* and *weak* bilingual programs, depending on their goals and student population. In a similar way, Potowski establishes that some bilingual programs in name are not in nature (Potowski, 2009). Gándara and Escamilla, (2017) differentiated between *Transitional Bilingual pro-*

grams -based on subtractive bilingualism- and *Dual Language Education*, based on additive bilingualism and with three distinctive formats to develop fully bilingual and biliterate students: “(1) Developmental or maintenance dual language, (2) Two-way immersion programs, and (3) Immersion programs in languages other than English” (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017, p.7). In California, enrollment in bilingual students such as bilingual programs such as Dual Language Immersion is on the rise (Stavely & Marquez Rosales, 2021). These quality programs provide instruction in both a partner language and English, a model known to foster better academic outcomes and higher rates of bilingualism and biliteracy (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Collier & Thomas, 2017; Gándara & Escamilla, 2017; Genesee, & Lindholm-Leary, 2021; Steele et al., 2017). However, the demand for bilingual teachers in California continues to outpace supply (Sutcher et al., 2019), creating continued concerns about the quality and effectiveness of bilingual education in the state.

Somehow, the passage of Proposition 58 in 2016 restored the ability of school districts to establish or expand bilingual programs without requiring parental waivers. Since then, the number of students enrolled in dual language immersion and bilingual programs has steadily increased, yet the pipeline for bilingual teachers has not kept pace, and the Global California Report 2030 pointed to that need (CTC, 2024a). A key area of focus is the way CSU assesses their bilingual teacher candidates, which is intrinsically connected with issuance of bilingual credentials by the CTC. Over the past five years, despite initial increments, there has been a decline in the number of bilingual credentials issued in the past two years, despite the rising demand for bilingual educators. According to the CTC’s most recent data, the number of bilingual authorizations has remained relatively stagnant, raising questions about the recruitment and retention of bilingual teacher candidates (CTC, 2024b). Figure 1 provides an overview of the number of bilingual credentials issued in California over the last 10 years.

The bilingual teacher preparation pipeline seems to be sputtering, a fact that, if not addressed, could limit the efficacy of these programs. Effective bilingual education requires well-prepared teachers who possess both linguistic proficiency in the target languages and pedagogical and cultural skills tailored to bilingual instruction. This study seeks to present the distinctive strength of the bilingual teacher preparation programs within the California State University (CSU) system, which

**Figure 1**  
**Trend of Bilingual Authorizations issued in California (CTC, 2024d)**



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is responsible for preparing close to 50% of the total state’s bilingual educators yearly, as shown in Table 1.

Specifically, this research article will analyze the assessment methods, its connection with the curriculum and policies, as well as outcomes of CSU’s bilingual credential programs to determine their effectiveness in meeting the needs of California’s diverse student population. Given the critical role of the CSU system in producing teachers for the state and the nation—out of the 23 CSU campuses offering educators preparation, 20 CSU campuses accredited to offer bilingual programs produce single handedly more bilingual teachers than any other institution (CTC, 2024b). Having said that, it is essential to assess whether these programs are thoroughly preparing candidates for the unique demands of bilingual instruction.

**Table 1**

**California Teacher Candidates Overview:**

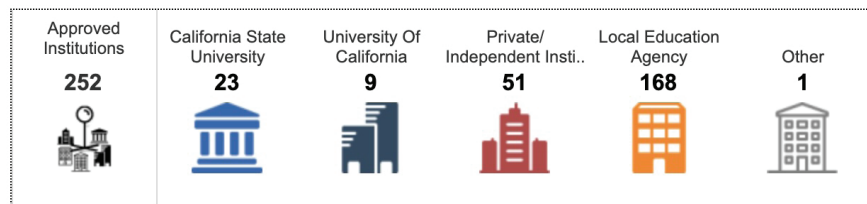
**Total Credentials vs Bilingual Authorization (CTC, 2024f)**

Academic Year	Total Teacher Candidates Enrolled	Total Teacher Credentials Issued*	Bilingual Teacher Credentials Issued*	CSU Enrolled Candidates and Program Completers	CSU Credentials Issued %	CSU Bilingual Credentials**
2017-18	24,954	16,515	812	13,245	5,940 (48.8%)	398
2018-19	23,091	17,019	947	13,496	5,966 (46.8%)	445
2019-20	23,755	18,126	1,079	14,120	6,340 (44.9%)	486
2020-21	26,179	19,184	1,189	15,475	7,482 (46.8%)	559
2021- 22	23,043	16,491	1,118	14,331	5,728 (47.4%)	537
2022- 23	19,844	14,636	1,011	13,323	5,211 (48.9%)	495

\* Excluding interns, waivers and permits. \*\* Estimated based on CSU credentials issued.

**Figure 2**

**Commission-approved institutions offering educator preparation (CTC, 2024b)**



Despite these numbers, the demand for bilingual educators in California far exceeds the supply (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). The urgency to address this gap is further highlighted by the fact that many school districts are increasingly turning to emergency permits and credential waivers to fill bilingual teaching positions (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). With this reflection, we aim to add more data to the ongoing research. The findings will contribute to the broader conversation on how to effectively serve California's diverse student population while addressing the bilingual teacher shortage (Sutcher et al., 2019).

### **The Role of Policy in Bilingual Teacher Preparation Programs and Policies: TPEs and BTPEs**

In the last thirty years, the gap between policy (e.g., Propositions 227 and 58) and the praxis that was constructed and examined in Bilingual Teacher Preparation Programs and the implementation of this praxis in compulsory education settings has defined the strength and the impact, effectiveness and durability of Bilingual Education. For almost two decades, from 1998 to 2016, Proposition 227 dismantled both TK-12 bilingual programs as well as the need for Bilingual Teacher Preparation Programs. The monolingual and monoglossic endorsement for English-Only education created a twofold damage: deny the right of bilingual education to emergent plurilingual students as well as creating shame and linguistic insecurity in thousands of prospective bilingual teacher educators (Revilla & Asato, 2002; Matas & Rodríguez, 2014; Quezada, 2015). In 2016, Proposition 58 counteracted these devastating effects by reclaiming the need for bilingual education as a tool to ensure just, equitable and inclusive education for all the linguistic marginalized families and communities.

A quinquennial after the historical support to Proposition 58, in 2021, the CTC considered pertinent to review the 2009 Bilingual Teacher Preparation Standards to have an alignment with current research as well as to better support Dual Language Instruction Programs. Back in 2009 and prior to that, the goal of bilingual education was to use the language skills and literacy emergent plurilingual students already possess in their linguistic repertoires as a springboard to obtain language competency in the dominant language: English. Nowadays, bilingual education has (or should have) the goal to graduate high school students with linguistic repertoires that include an array of plurilingual tools students can use depending on the audience, purpose and goal (García et al., 2018; Sánchez et al., 2018; Dörnyei & Cervantes-Soon, 2020). These linguistic repertoires draw from the named languages, registers and varieties students learn in different spaces as well as the languaging for specific purposes (i.e., write a thesis, critique a piece of art, explain your thinking process) students along side with their teachers collectively construct in linguistically and culturally inclusive classrooms.



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The 2021 reviewed and adopted Bilingual Authorization Preparation Standards (BTPS, CTC, 2024e) constituted a framework to design, implement, and evaluate the teacher competencies needed to create spaces in the aforementioned linguistically inclusive classrooms. Adjacent to these standards and for the first time in history, the CTC created the Bilingual Teacher Performance Expectations (BTPEs) to guide in a more praxial way how Bilingual Teacher Preparation Programs should develop syllabi that recognizes the linguistic richness, knowledge and skills bilingual candidates bring to the programs as the foundation to co-construct the pedagogical language knowledge (PLK) and languaging for specific purposes (LSP) candidates need to dispel the doubt that always flutters around bilingual candidates (Aquino-Sterling, 2016; Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016; Zúñiga, 2021).

There is an existent antagonism between the languaging candidates develop in their communities and homes and the “academic” language candidates have to acquire in order to be “qualified and competent” educators. Zúñiga (2019) illustrate this reality asking the following question:

... if bilingual teachers cannot meet the language and academic demands of the classroom associated with ways of using language for academic and professional purposes, how does that impact their ability to offer rigorous Spanish/English instruction that supports bilingual/biliterate development to communities who have long been denied such opportunities? (p. 83)

We agree that bilingual teachers should and can reach competencies associated with pedagogical language knowledge. As Zúñiga (2019) points out, healing is the first step before competencies and skills are collectively further developed by faculty and candidates in Bilingual Teacher Preparation Programs. Our stance in this developmental process is that any competency must be: (a) built through a series of assignments strategically and intentionally designed to honor, embrace and include the linguistic repertoires candidates bring to the programs, (b) evaluated formatively through the aforementioned assignments rather than summative and standardized assessments, and (c) situated and draw from the space and communities where the candidates come from and they are going to teach.

### **Assessment Frameworks and Practices Within the CSU System**

In higher education, we come across the concepts of assessment and evaluation, combined with the multiple practices accompanying them. Using the concept approach from Kislick (2012), assessment in learning is the process of collecting information through various methods to monitor progress and inform decisions, while evaluation uses that information to determine if a subject meets specific criteria or qualifications. California State University (CSU) bilingual teacher preparation programs use comprehensive assessment tools and methods to evaluate bilingual teacher candidates’ competencies in bilingual pedagogy, language



proficiency, and multicultural competence. These assessment practices occur across bilingual coursework, clinical practice, and during formal evaluations, aligning with both California's Bilingual Teaching Performance Expectations (BTPEs) and the California Teacher Preparation Expectations (TPE) standards. CSU programs must navigate diverse language needs and policies, particularly around language requirements assessment, as they aspire to thoroughly prepare bilingual teachers equipped to serve California's multilingual student populations (Zuñiga, 2019). Bilingual teacher candidates are subject to internal and external assessments: internal demands from the specific Bilingual Teacher Preparation Programs (BTPPs) and external evaluations conducted such as CalTPA, RICA or CSET exams proctored by third party institutions. As depicted in Table 2, bilingual teacher candidates are exposed to extra layers of assessments (linguistic requirements in two languages, bilingual coursework and bilingual clinical practice in bilingual settings).

In this article, we advocate for a formative and holistic assessment approach to be the guiding framework for bilingual teacher preparation programs. Formative assessment is central in bilingual programs, providing iterative feedback to candidates during coursework and clinical practice. These assessments foster self-reflection and allow candidates to modify instructional strategies, furthering their language and pedagogical development (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019). For instance, formative assessments include classroom visits conducted by clinical coaches, peer observations, reflective journals, and feedback from mentor teachers. These practices provide insights from multiple perspectives, crucial for preparing candidates to meet the BTPEs' requirements in creating an inclusive classroom

**Table 2**  
**Assessment of Bilingual Teacher Candidates in California**

<i>Teacher Candidates</i>		<i>Internal</i>					<i>External</i>		
	TPP Pre- requis- ites	Lingu- istic Require- ment*	TPP Course- work	BTPP Course- work (6-9 units)	Clini- cal Prac- tice (600 hours)	Bilin- gual Clini- cal Prac- tice (20 hours)	Cal TPA Ed TPA **	RICA ***	CSET Subject Matter
Non- Bilingual	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bilingual	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

\* CTC requires all Bilingual Candidates to comply with the Linguistic requirements, each program's design lays out the way to achieve them.

\*\* Bilingual CalTPA or EdTPA candidates have the option to deliver Cycle 1 or Cycle 2 in the target language, which add another layer of complexity in the candidate's assessment.

\*\*\* RICA exam to be replaced by in 2025 with a Literacy Performance Assessment.

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culture, instructional design, and cross-linguistic teaching. Holistic assessments are used during summative evaluations, often in the form of performance-based assessments such as the California Teacher Performance Assessment (CalTPA) and clinical teaching evaluations conducted by experienced bilingual coaches. The BTPEs emphasize the need for candidates to demonstrate proficiency across multiple domains, including bilingual instructional strategies, language transfer techniques, and cultural responsiveness (CTC, 2024c). Employing comprehensive assessments at the end of coursework and clinical practice to ensure bilingual teacher candidates meet these holistic competencies, aligning with state standards in bilingual education.

When analyzing the CSU bilingual programs, we acknowledge a vibrant offer that, combined, not only is the biggest in the state and the nation, but probably one of the most thorough and qualitative. However, it also displays a variability across campuses and program-specific approaches, that enrich the field but make it challenging to speak as in unison. CSU campuses vary in their approaches to assessing bilingual teacher preparation. Language requirements and Language proficiency is one area where this diversity is evident, due to the existence of multiple target languages and the fact that all programs operate separately and are independently evaluated by CTC. The variety of experiences that bilingual teacher candidates bring to the profession are mediated by their experiences with the educational institutions, the context in their area of influence that shape their linguistic ideologies and repertoires (Collins et al, 2019). While some CSU campuses require candidates to pass the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) World Languages (formerly Languages other than English-LOTE), others view these tests as outdated—not aligned with the revised BTPS nor with the BTPEs—and favor alternative language assessments that more formatively and continuously measure candidates' language skills for academic settings. Campuses may employ in-house assessments developed independently or collaboratively with local educational agencies or external agencies, ensuring that candidates are well-prepared to serve the specific linguistic demographics of the regions where they teach (Capdevila-Gutiérrez et al., 2020).

Language proficiency is viewed both by state and local educational agencies as a key element to measure the level of readiness of bilingual teachers. School districts and county offices carefully examine constructs such as appropriateness, correctness and academic language to define if a bilingual teacher is prepared to effectively deliver instruction in a language other than English. We as teacher educators agree that a bilingual teacher must have control of what Aquino-Sterling and Rodriguez-Valls (2016) define as Pedagogical Language Knowledge (PLK) and Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). The point of contention is how we measure these two elements.

Historically, language proficiency, at the state level, has been evaluated through standardized testing (e.g., California Subject Examinations for Teachers—CSET). It can be argued that content proficiency such as mathematics and history is accu-

rately quantified through standardized tests. We claim that language proficiency could be better and more precisely measured through formative assessments where faculty gathers information and provides meaningful feedback and thoughtful support. Avoiding the use of quantitative evaluations prevents judging a candidate's preparedness from a "white gaze and white listener" stance (Rosa & Flores, 2023). PLK is suited to be assessed through course assignments, reflections of fieldwork observations and teaching lessons. The enactment of languaging requires real time settings where the candidate shows how she/he/they use LSP on the spot making adjustments and creating a linguistically inclusive classroom where all the students use their linguistic repertoires fully.

In this sense, the BTPEs allow for program flexibility in assessing language skills incorporating all linguistic repertoires of teacher candidates, enhancing program accountability (Muñoz-Muñoz et al., 2024), a critical provision given the variation in languages offered across CSU programs. For example, while Spanish remains the primary target language, other programs focus on languages like Mandarin, Korean, Tagalog and Vietnamese, each necessitating unique pedagogical and assessment frameworks to become "linguistically qualified" (Zúñiga et al., 2019). In the process of language proficiency assessment should measure candidates' fluency in both oral and written language skills of the target language, as well the cultural implications that are embedded in the language at hand. Bilingual candidates should first assert the language proficiency or qualifications to then be trained in the pedagogical aspects. This stage evaluates candidates' capacity to integrate bilingual methodologies and cultural practices effectively in the classroom, preparing them to support students' content learning in both languages of instruction. External performance assessments, such as the CalTPA, many times are not fully aligned to bilingual settings in order to capture candidates' bilingual teaching competencies accurately.

In the next section, we will delve into innovative models and best practices in Bilingual Teacher preparation programs.

### **Innovative Models and Best Practices in CSU Bilingual Teacher Preparation**

The CSU system has long been a leader in preparing bilingual teachers, driven by California's diverse linguistic landscape and the increasing need for culturally and linguistically responsive educators. As demand for culturally and linguistically responsive educators continues to grow, the CSU system has become a hub for innovation in bilingual teacher preparation. Across California, CSU campuses are implementing pioneering models and teaching practices that address the unique needs of bilingual teacher candidates, equipping them to support diverse student populations effectively. This section highlights different program models, initiatives that exemplify best practices within the CSU system and explore how these examples contribute to enhanced teacher performance and student outcomes.

**(1) Teaching as a Community: Collaborative Consortium Models**

An essential aspect of CSU's bilingual teacher preparation is the formation of consortia, which unite campuses with a shared commitment to promote social justice and linguistic equity across California. One example is the work around CSU Council on Plurilingual Educators Preparation (CPEP). Supported by the CSU Chancellor's Office, the consortium collaborates to enhance multilingual education and plurilingual teacher education, envisioning a transformative and equitable approach. Given that, the group has created a shared vision and mission for our work:

Grounded in a decolonial framework and a commitment to the linguistic rights of children and their families, our vision is to foster a critical lens, social justice, and equity-centered practices in teacher educators' roles and responsibilities. In our teaching and working with communities, we strive to disrupt systems of oppression, counter hegemonic narratives, and decenter whiteness. As a collective, our community-centered languaging approach values people's multiple identities, affirms linguistic identities, and recognizes the cultural funds of knowledge. (see Appendix 1 for full statement).

In developing our mission and vision statement, we began by brainstorming core ideas individually and collectively, then identified key words that captured these concepts. Using Padlet, a virtual bulletin board, we gathered everyone's input, which the CPEP Leadership team then synthesized into a cohesive statement reflecting our shared vision. This collaborative process models our commitment to collective, democratic decision-making, creating a foundation of mutual respect and shared ownership that reinforces our dedication to equity and transparency in all aspects of our work.

Each CSU campus within the Council contributes its unique strengths to create a comprehensive and inclusive program, collaborating in ideas and actions (see Appendix 2). For instance, in 2021, when the transition plan with new BTPEs (Bilingual Teacher Preparation Expectations) came out, CPEP invited a representative from CTC to provide an overview of the major updates and changes to the standards. We reviewed these updates, planned actions aligned with the transition timeline, and outlined steps needed to meet the expectations for transition plan approval. To facilitate this work, we held both online and in-person meetings, where we collaborated in large and small groups to develop the transition plan together. Through this process, we exchanged innovative ideas for program design, BTPE mastery, field experience, progress monitoring, and assessment, all tailored to California's unique context. This approach exemplifies how we work as a supportive community, addressing shared challenges and collaboratively seeking solutions.

Another example is the Asian Language Bilingual Teacher Education Program (BTPE) Consortium, which pools resources, expertise, and curriculum across participating campuses to support teacher candidates specializing in Asian languages,

including Cantonese, Hmong, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Vietnamese (See Appendix 2). This Consortium model was made possible by a \$5 million allocation from the state of California, proposed by Senators Dr. Richard Pan and Tom Umberg with the support of an activism organization Asian Americans Advancing Justice and CSU Faculty (KVCR, 2022). The funds support the CSU Asian BTEP consortium's goal of building a sustainable pipeline of bilingual teachers in high-demand Asian languages, where accreditation rates are critically low. This investment promotes educational equity and cultural competence, ensuring students have access to linguistically and culturally responsive educators.

This model promotes culturally sustaining pedagogy through shared curriculum development and professional learning communities (PLCs) that empower faculty to exchange best practices. One of the Asian BTEP consortium's most effective strategies has been to offer joint courses that span multiple campuses, allowing students from any CSU campus to enroll in specialized courses related to bilingual education in Asian languages. For example, when CSU Los Angeles offers a Mandarin bilingual authorization course, students from all other CSU campuses can enroll. This approach is particularly valuable because it allows us to sustain and maintain these Asian language classes without duplicating resources or creating competition among campuses, even with limited student enrollment. This collaborative framework not only enhances program quality but also makes training in Asian languages more accessible, allowing for increased enrollment and a more diverse cohort of future bilingual educators.

## **(2) Teaching for the Community: Multiple Learning Pathways**

Across the CSU system, there are multiple pathways to earning a teaching credential and bilingual authorization, including integrated programs, residencies, internships, and concurrent and post-credential options. Whether the bilingual program can offer pre credentials (integrated), internships and residencies are many times based on the resources available and the specific agreements between the LEA and the IHE. Nine of the 23 CSU campuses, for example, offer a Teacher Residency program, a co-teaching model that blends classroom mentorship with academic coursework to provide real-world teaching experience in bilingual settings (CTC, 2024g). At CSU Bakersfield, for instance, teacher residents are placed in bilingual classrooms within partner districts to work alongside experienced bilingual educators. This immersive experience enables candidates to build their teaching skills within an authentic context, receiving hands-on guidance that encourages reflection, adaptation, and a dynamic learning cycle to strengthen teaching efficacy.

In addition to regular bilingual teacher education pathways, numerous professional opportunities—often offered at no cost—are available for teacher candidates. For example, CSU Dominguez Hills regularly hosts events and initiatives dedicated to bilingual teacher education, such as conferences and workshops for educators

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engaged in dual language and multilingual programs (See Appendix 3). This year's Bilingual Teacher Conference, themed "Reframing Multilingual Learners as Everyday *Folcloristas*" and centered around the concept of *compañerismo*, drew over 200 Spanish-speaking participants, including both pre-service and in-service teachers from across Southern California. Designed to support educators in developing culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies, the conference also promoted pathways to Bilingual Authorization, particularly for K-12 educators in dual language settings. Conducted primarily in Spanish, with bilingual support, the conference encouraged active translanguaging as a normative practice, illustrating how professional development can effectively take place in languages moving away from English-only policies (Son & Kim, 2024).

Also, there are events hosted by cross-campus collaborative events too. For instance, Dr. Suzanne García (CSU Monterey Bay) and Dr. Fernando Rodriguez-Valls (CSU Fullerton) hosted a webinar to promote linguistically inclusive higher education institutions (See Appendix 3). This event offered valuable insights for CSU students and educators, promoting critical reflection on challenging English hegemony, monolingualism, and linguistic purism in higher education. This collaboration exemplifies how CSU leverages "in-house" experts and initiatives to foster a community committed to expansive and inclusive language practices.

#### **(3) Teaching from the Community: Situating Our Learning within the Community**

Lastly, many CSU teacher educators are creating community-based assignments to help teacher candidates engage with the communities they will serve. One such assignment is the "Translanguaging Podcast" at CSUDH, where students produce a 5-minute podcast episode reflecting on their language experiences and the influence of their linguistic community. At the end, they include a statement about the type of teacher they aspire to be regarding language in the classroom. This multimedia assignment allows candidates to connect theories studied in class—such as translanguaging and critical language awareness—to their personal experiences, analyzing how home, school, and society shape their linguistic repertoire. Students are encouraged to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire without strict adherence to traditional language boundaries and to reflect on guiding questions like, "What significant moments have shaped your language experiences?" This assignment highlights the dynamic nature of language learning and explores how bilingual candidates' personal experiences inform their identity as future educators.

Another example is the Asian BTEP Consortium's professional development series. In one assignment, Asian bilingual authorization seekers reflected on the strengths and challenges of local Asian American language communities, exploring how language serves as a tool for communication and social cohesion while fostering or inhibiting inclusivity. They examined the intersections of language, belonging, and identity, including age, race, and socio-economic status, while

identifying the role of language teachers in meeting community needs. Students also brainstormed strategies for integrating community resources into language instruction and developed lesson plans to enhance language learning.

In an additional Consortium assignment on Asset-based instruction, students are required to identify resources that support instructional practices by utilizing personal narratives and digital storytelling. This involves reflecting on their own experiences and cultural backgrounds to uncover valuable assets within their communities. Additionally, they created a community funds of knowledge map, capturing the linguistic and cultural capital in their school neighborhoods.

Overall, these assignments prepare teacher candidates to be culturally responsive educators who meet the needs of diverse learners. By emphasizing community engagement, situating learning within community contexts, and promoting cultural understanding and reflective practice, this approach strengthens the connection between schools and communities, fostering an environment where all students can thrive.

### **Opportunities and Challenges of Policy Alignment in Bilingual Teacher Preparation**

This section will examine the implications of aligning bilingual teacher preparation programs with current policies, highlighting opportunities and challenges while proposing strategies for enhancing future policy alignment.

#### **Opportunities**

##### ***Collaboration and Collective Efforts in Promoting Bilingual Education***

The CSU Bilingual Teacher Education Programs can leverage collaborative initiatives like the California Bilingual Education Partnership (CPEP) to enhance advocacy and resource sharing among educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders. This collaboration fosters a unified approach to promoting bilingual education, which can lead to improved program visibility and support.

##### ***Increased External Funding and National Attention***

The recent success of three CSUs in securing the US Department of Education Hawkins Grant highlights a growing recognition of bilingual education programs at the national level. With three CSU campuses each participating, this funding provides essential resources for program development, research initiatives, and the expansion of bilingual education offerings, enabling programs to enhance their capacity and impact.

##### ***Quality Bilingual Teacher Educators and Professional Development***

The focus on developing high-quality bilingual teacher educators through ongoing professional development opportunities and webinars positions CSU programs as leaders in the field. By investing in the training and support of educators, these



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programs can ensure that teachers are well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively teach in bilingual and multilingual classrooms, ultimately improving educational outcomes for students.

### **Challenges**

#### ***Varied Support Across Campuses***

Support for bilingual education programs varies across campuses, influenced by campus priorities, available resources, and differing levels of understanding regarding the importance of bilingual education. This variability can impact program development and stability, as well as the overall commitment to fostering bilingual initiatives within each institution.

#### ***Perception of Bilingual Education as Supplementary***

Bilingual education is still often viewed as supplementary or non-mainstream, which limits the resources, attention, and priority allocated to these programs even in contexts where institutions are designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) or Asian American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AAPISIs). This perception undermines their recognition as essential to the education system and restricts their curriculum integration, negatively impacting students' academic and linguistic development.

#### ***Challenges in Securing Consistent Bilingual Student Enrollment***

Sustaining enrollment in bilingual education programs is a significant challenge, as fluctuations in student numbers can affect program viability, funding, and the quality of educational experiences. Recruitment is affected by the extra layers of assessment. This inconsistency undermines the long-term goals and effectiveness of bilingual initiatives. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding of Asian bilingual teachers compared to broader bilingual education.

### **Conclusion**

As California continues to diversify, the role of the California State University (CSU) system as a powerhouse in preparing future bilingual teachers is clearly delineated by the facts stated in this article. Fostering effective bilingual education becomes increasingly vital at all levels, as quality bilingual education increasingly demands more qualified bilingual educators. By cultivating future teachers who are well-prepared to serve our diverse communities, CSU demonstrates its commitment to equity and inclusion in education through multiculturalism and multilingualism in a diverse society. The training and assessment of these future educators will define the field in the coming years. It is essential to not only assess and align bilingual teacher preparation programs with current policy standards but also to reimagine the future of bilingual education in a way that embraces innovation and responsiveness to community needs with a holistic approach. Through collaborative efforts, shared



best practices, and a dedication to continuous improvement, bilingual programs and faculty at CSU are leading the way in preparing educators who will positively impact the lives of students and their families across the state and beyond.

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## **Appendix I**

### **CPEP Vision and Mission**

#### **Vision Statement:**

Guided by principles of linguistic equity, justice, and diversity, the CSU Council on Plurilingual Educators Preparation envisions a transformative and equitable bilingual and multilingual education. Grounded in a decolonial framework and a commitment to the linguistic rights of children and their families, our vision is to foster a critical lens, social justice, and equity-centered practices in teacher educators' roles and responsibilities. In our teaching and working with communities, we strive to disrupt systems of oppression, counter hegemonic narratives, and decenter whiteness. As a collective, our community-centered languaging approach values people's multiple identities, affirms linguistic identities, and recognizes the cultural funds of knowledge.

### *Assessment of Bilingual Teachers in California*

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#### **Mission Statement:**

Through a pedagogical approach that is inclusive and student-centered, the CSU Council on Plurilingual Educators Preparation is on a mission to prepare educators who promote plurilingualism and challenge and resist English supremacy and hegemonic policies. We advocate for linguistic and social justice, supporting the dismantling of oppressive systems while valuing all languages and ways of languaging. Our mission encompasses:

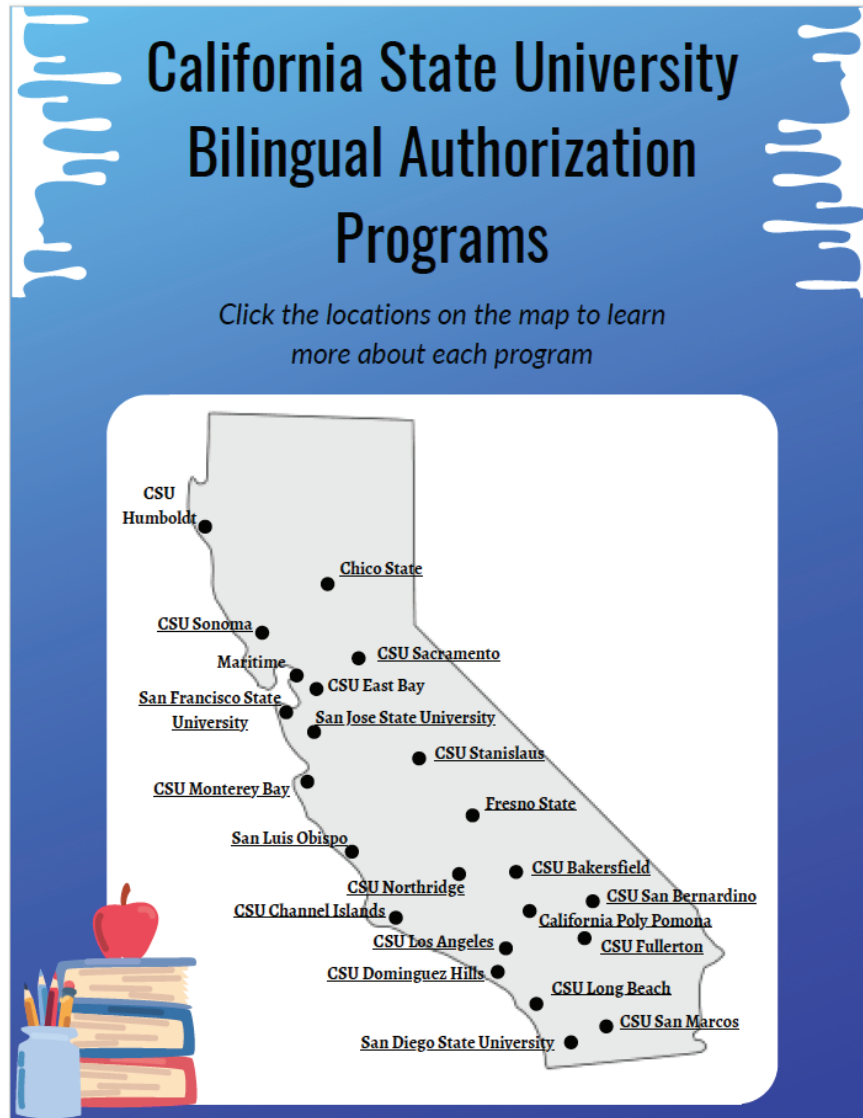
*Advocacy & Collaboration:* Taking action for linguistic equity and justice, we actively work towards dismantling oppressive structures and policies. Through collaboration, we promote shared ways of learning language, culture, and community, fostering an inclusive and transformative environment.

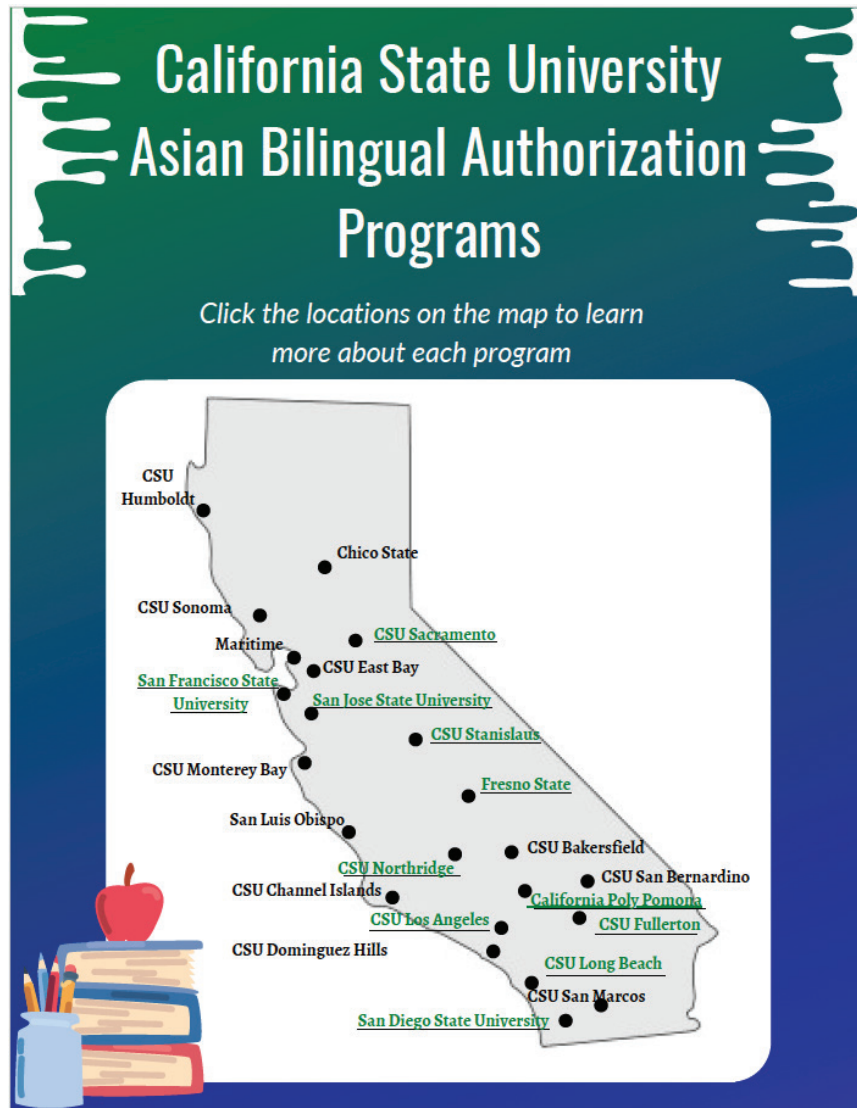
*Preparation:* Centering on language, affirming students identities and interactions, we prepare educators to engage in inclusive, innovative, and student-centered teaching practices.

*Transformative Pedagogies:* Embracing critical pedagogies in linguistic and social justice, we challenge English supremacy and foster linguistic diversity. We utilize translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy, valuing all languages and recognizing the richness that linguistic diversity brings to education.

Appendix 2

CSU CPEP and Asian Bilingual Authorization Program Map







Appendix 3  
Professional Development Opportunities



**SEPTEMBER 21ST 2024**  
**9AM - 3 PM**

**2024 BILINGUAL  
TEACHER CONFERENCE**

**REFRAMING MULTILINGUAL  
LEARNERS AS EVERYDAY  
FOLCLORISTAS**

*Keynote with Dra. Cati de los Ríos*

*Workshops for PK - 12  
Bilingual Educators*



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***Friday, Feb. 16, 2024***

from 9:30 – 11:15 am (PST)

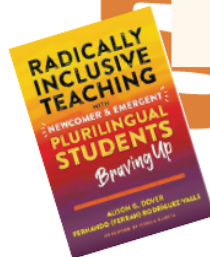
Deconstructing the Ethos of  
Linguistically Inclusive Higher  
Education Institutions

**Keynote:** Christian Zúñiga, Ph.D.,  
University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley

In dialogue with, Minhye Son, Ph.D., CSU-  
Dominguez Hills and and Isaura M. Escamilla, Ph.D.,  
San Francisco State University

FREE Zoom registration. Click [here](#).

**Book Raffle!**



Funded by the METAS grant #ED-Grants-122710-001 & CSUF College of Education





## **Pushing Back Against Science of Reading Mandates The California Story**

**Jill Kerper Mora, Edgar Lampkin,  
Barbara Flores, & Anita Flemington**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of our California Council on Teacher Education Fall 2024 Conference panel presentation was to tell the story of how a coalition of policy advocates responded to the introduction of Science of Reading legislation in California. The leaders of opposition to the proposed legislation explain how organizations representing teachers and teacher educators successfully argued against AB 2222 (Rubio) Science of Reading (SoR) in the California Legislature in April 2024. The proposed legislation followed a national trend of legislation mandating reading instruction reforms in 38 states and the District of Columbia (Aydarova, 2024; Neumann, et al., 2023). The California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) was the first out of the gate in opposition to the proposed legislation. This

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### *Pushing Back Against Science of Reading Mandates*

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advocacy focuses on unifying multilingual advocates to recognize connections to a conservative, monolingual agenda and to clarify the ideological underpinnings of current literacy policies and to frame the need for broader, more inclusive approaches to literacy instruction.

A coalition of organizations utilized political networking and legislative advocacy to formulate talking points and create dialogue with constituent groups. Advocacy organizations articulated their rationale against a proposed law mandating school districts and university teacher education to align with a singular research paradigm for teacher credentialing and professional development through official opposition letters addressed to the California Assembly Education Committee. These opposition letters mirror the concerns for multilingual learners' language and literacy education and teachers' professional preparation and development articulated in the research literature (Aydarova, et al., 2022; Flores, et al. 2023; Mora, 2024).

Opponents of the legislation refuted claims that AB 2222 addressed California's multilingual learners' access to equitable and effective literacy instruction against SoR's legislative overreach. In fact, the most frequently cited research base for state Science of Reading legislation is the National Reading Panel Report (2000), which highlighted five "pillars" of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The California AB 2222 legislation did not acknowledge the *National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth* that provided a meta-analysis of 293 studies from between 1980-2002 that focused on factors that influence language minority students' second-language literacy development and achievement (August & Shanahan, 2006). These factors included individual differences in second-language oral proficiency, first-language and bilingual oral proficiency and literacy, some sociocultural variables, and classroom and school factors. The National Literacy Panel asserted that language-minority students are subject to an additional set of intervening influences related to their language proficiency and literacy in their first language and their socio-cultural context for literacy learning that were not addressed in the National Reading Panel Report (2000).

### **The California Context**

According to Californians Together, during the 2022-23 school year, 1.1 million students were classified as English learners (EL), making up 19% of the public-school population, while 40% of students were reported as coming from homes where a language other than English is spoken (Buenrostro, 2024). Spanish is spoken in the home by 82% of English learners. These demographic statistics explain why public discourse about the research base for language and literacy instruction has examined and reaffirmed the multilingual learner education knowledge base for language and literacy. The intent of the advocacy coalition was to address problematic aspects of the SoR legislation by identifying flaws in the legislation itself and emphasizing the insufficiency of Science of Reading research alone to inform

teachers' professional decision making. This is because of the legislation's narrowing of the pedagogical knowledge base for addressing the language and literacy learning needs and its disregard for the context factors that impact the literacy achievement of California's linguistically and culturally diverse student population.

During the decade of the 2010s, California developed a compendium of curriculum policy documents to address the linguistic diversity of its student population. These included the California English Language Development (ELD) standards (2012) based on an eclectic research base to guide implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies, learning activities and task to address the Common Core State Standards for English language arts. The California English Language Development Standards (2014) provide a well-researched, evidence-based curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. The ELA/ELD Framework provides grade-by-grade guidance for teachers to implement these two sets of standards through an interdisciplinary and integrated approach to asset-based instruction (Slowik & Brynson, 2015). However, various organizations expressed concern that the ELA/ELD Framework was not being fully implemented through comprehensive designated and integrated ELD instruction. These concerns were reflected in the English Learner Road Map (Hakuta, 2018). The document clearly stated that compliance with its recommendations were not binding on local educational agencies.

The AB 2222 Science of Reading bill came under consideration by the California Assembly Education Committee in 2024 in a climate of contentious debate over policies regarding reading instruction, largely fueled by public media that blamed schools and colleges of education for not utilizing science-based approaches to teaching reading (Aydarova, 2024; Hanford, 2022; McPhee et al., 2021; Yaden, 2021). Multilingual and bilingual educators expressed concern that controversies surrounding the legitimacy of theories and approaches to literacy instruction, most particularly reading instruction, have resulted in misguided policies and bans on instructional practices that undermine the educational equity and access for vulnerable student populations (Cummins, 2021; Robinson-Cimpian, et al., 2016; Téllez & Mosqueda, 2015). Controversies surrounding teacher preparation for reading instruction included criticisms from private foundations such as the National Council on Teacher Quality (Ellis, et al., 2023).

However, the critiques of teacher education programs have generated more heat than light. There is no scientific research presented to support their criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of teacher preparation for reading instruction. In fact, their model for teacher education: courses, syllabus design, lectures, tests, textbooks, etc. is antiquated. In addition, the NCTQ offers no scientific research evidence of a causal or even a correlational relationship between an (alleged) lack of preservice teachers' knowledge of SoR and lower student test scores in reading achievement. In fact, they overlook the obvious explanation: A large proportion of students who are classified as English language learners in the state reading achieve-

### *Pushing Back Against Science of Reading Mandates*

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ment test population (Sireci & Fualkner-Bond, 2015; Téllez & Mosqueda, 2015). In addition, the NCTQ purports to have identified a number of literacy instruction methods, approaches and strategies that are “contrary to research-based practices.” The claims of the NCTQ were reflected in the language of AB 2222 legislation.

Despite the lack of validity to the NCTQ’s criticisms of teacher education, a coalition of parent organizations in California based a complaint with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the Commission on Accreditation against a newly accredited teacher credential program of Mills College at Northeastern University. The complaint quoted language from the California Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) Literacy Domain 7 (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016) to argue that certain reading instruction practices are “not supported by research and are aligned to a disproven theory of how reading acquisition develops...” The complainants cited the NCTQ with these statements: The instructional recommendations provided in this text are concerning given their misalignment to current research on effective instruction. Because the science of reading does not match with the philosophy of Fountas and Pinnell (2006), this text is not recommended for preservice teachers or reading professionals. CAFE submitted a letter of support for the decision of the Commission on Accreditation to deny the actions against Mills College requested by the coalition of organizations with this statement: “We would add that the “Science of Reading” (SoR) used to discredit our California programs has, we believe, negative ramifications for multilingual students.

### **Teacher Education as Contested Terrain**

The research literature on the utilization of education research in policymaking identify legitimate and productive contributions of research to policy formulation for designing “good legislation” and stopping “bad legislation” from being enacted (Bogensneider, et al., 2019). One policy issue consideration is the examination of how a problem is defined and how legislative action is justified. This consideration is particularly visible in regard to the rationale as to how the specific actions proposed in a bill provide a remedy for the problem. When the AB 2222 Science of Reading bill was first introduced, CAFE recognized the problematic nature of the “literacy crisis” argument in the sponsors’ rationale for the AB 2222 legislation. The use of this argument harkened back to the notion of a “manufactured crisis” in America’s public education, where standardized achievement test scores were used as evidence of massive failure and underperformance schools and teachers (Aydarova, 2023; Aydarova & Berliner, 2018; Berliner & Biddle, 1995).

The history of the Science of Reading movement through legislation confirmed that efforts were needed to counteract false narratives of teacher education failure in California that were being promulgated to increase control over teacher credentialing programs and courses in the name of accountability and “science.” Multilingual educators were alarmed that a singular corpus of research was being

proposed as a basis for a regulatory schema for university teacher education and credentialing programs, teacher professional development and classroom practices. There was a consensus among teacher educators that it is reasonable to demand teachers' alignment with and adherence to curriculum standards that articulate the behaviors of students that provide evidence of learning. However, it is not reasonable to demand that teachers are aligned with or adhere to a specific corpus of research. Every research study must be interpreted. Teacher educators are members of an interpretive community who negotiate the validity and utility of research findings (Anwaruddin, 2015; Shulman, 1986).

### **Legislative Language**

One of CAFE's advocacy objectives was to communicate the concerns about the proposed AB 2222 all of the constituencies who are accountable for educating multilingual learners. This effort began with a critical analysis of the language of the bill itself and to identify "talking points" about the specifics of the legislation that were relevant to each constituency (Aydarova, et al., 2022). A major talking point across constituencies was the definition of the Science of Reading and the subsections with statements about SoR research that were clearly intended to enact bans against teachers' use of certain instructional approaches and strategies. These bans were framed as approaches that the Science of Reading does not rely on and therefore, allegedly are not based on research evidence: *Section 10 60011(5) "Does not rely on any model for teaching word reading based on meaning, structure and syntax, and visual cues, including a three-cueing approach..."* These banned approaches were congruent with the NCTQ's "contrary to research-based practices" (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2023). Tierney and Pearson (2024) provided a comprehensive analysis of the claims of the Science of Reading movement about literacy research and concluded that there is no research evidence to support such bans on instructional approaches and strategies. The bans against approaches and strategies that are derived from linguistic and psycholinguistic research are associated with metalinguistic awareness as a compendium of knowledge and skills that must be mastered for language and literacy learning (Apel, 2022; Bloom, 2001; Gombert, 1992; Ke et al., 2023; Verhoeven, et al., 2019). This corpus of research makes bans on instructional practices especially problematic for multilingual educators and teacher educators who prepare teachers for linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Briceño & Klein, 2019; Kabuto, 2016; Mora, 2023).

### **AB 2222 Opposition: An Organizational Dialogue**

CAFE's policy advocacy efforts on behalf of bilingual and multilingual educators resulted in a coalition of organizations with dialogue and exchanges that articulated concerns and identified points of agreement and disagreement among the constituencies that these organizations represent. Several organizations that

### *Pushing Back Against Science of Reading Mandates*

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sponsored or supported AB 2222 responded directly to CAFE’s talking points with rebuttals and objections. For example, CAFE’s advocacy team provided organizations with an analysis of claims and points to fully comprehend the nature of concerns about the legislation’s rationale and purpose, as well as its potential negative impact on the equity of access to effective language and literacy education for California’s linguistically and culturally diverse student population. Many of these talking points were addressed and amplified through letters of opposition to AB 2222. We present a review of several of the main themes and concerns with verbatim quotations from organizations’ opposition statements.

#### **Misuse of Reading Achievement Test Scores**

Concerns over the misuse of standardized achievement test data to support the AB 222 legislation’s mandates was articulated in the CAFE talking points and dialogue with organizations that supported the legislation. These points of opposition to the AB 2222 language are supported by research on testing and assessment of the overall student population (Thomas, 2022). Specifically, testing procedures and data interpretation for accountability purposes for educating language-minority students (Bailey & Carroll, 2015; De Avila, 1997; Ortiz, et al., 2018). CAFE wrote the following in an opposition letter of March 11<sup>th</sup> 2024 entitled CAFE Opposition Letter to Assembly Education Committee Chair Al Muratsuchi:

CAFE believes AB 2222 (Rubio) is based on a misreading of reading achievement test scores and does not specify how the SOR-aligned instruction and materials would remedy the causes of low achievement in reading. In fact, standardized test scores cannot be used for that purpose. They cannot identify causes of score variability among student subgroups, particularly EL students.

The description of students who are not reading on grade level by third grade identifies lower achievement based on students’ demographic characteristics. AB 2222 (Rubio) states that “[T]he vast majority of children falling behind are economically disadvantaged low-income families, children who are Black and Latino, and English Learners.”

From an empirical research vantage point, these statistics do not indicate that poor literacy instruction is a causal factor in these students’ reading achievement. Therefore, these data do not support an argument that instruction aligned with the Science of Reading is a remedy to low levels of reading achievement.

In particular, ELs are not expected to be reading on grade level by third grade because of the predictable rates of acquiring English language proficiency.

On-grade-level reading achievement is dependent on a student having attained a near-native level of English proficiency. AB 2222 (Rubio) does not consider factors that are unique to California’s English learners.

### **Disrespect For Teacher Agency: A One Size Fits All Approach**

Several organizations identified a disrespect for teacher agency as a problematic feature of AB 2222 because of its mandate for adherence to and alignment with a singular corpus of research, the Science of Reading. The CAFE advocacy team argued that approaches to instruction are an amalgamation of theoretical models and perspectives on how learners learn. There is no research methodology that can generate empirical data to verify the “effectiveness” of an approach to instruction. This is because “effectiveness” of instruction is specific to an educational context with a specific demographic of students, depending on a complex array of implementation and teacher effectiveness variables. Consequently, claims of “ineffective” approaches or more effective approaches from the advocates of the Science of Reading lack credibility among academic researchers and literacy scholars (Noquerón-Liu, 2020). The California Teachers Association (CTA) made this point in their opposition letter of March 18, 2024 to the Assembly Education Committee:

Educators should have the flexibility to adapt their teaching strategies based on their students’ needs, interests, and content being taught. Allowing for a range of instructional approaches fosters creativity and encourages teachers to experiment with new methods to enhance learning.

Teachers should have the autonomy to select instructional methods that best support the attainment of learning goals while considering the needs and preferences of their students.

As trusted professionals, educators are best equipped to make school and classroom decisions to ensure student success. Limiting instructional approaches undermines teachers’ professional autonomy and may impede their effectiveness in the classroom. The limiting nature of the ‘one-size-fits-all’ language of the bill will not allow educators to differentiate, support special education students, and meet the diverse needs of California’s English Learners.

Similar sentiments regarding teacher agency were expressed by a coalition of organizations in an letter of concern to the Assembly Education Committee on March 24, 2025. The coalition included the California Teachers Association, California School Boards Association, Association of California School Administrators, Californians Together, California Association for Bilingual Education, California Association of Suburban School Districts, California School Library Association, Sobrato Early Academic Language, and Catalyst California:

A one-size-fits-all does not work. AB 2222 is flawed because it assumes all students learn the same way. Defining what ‘science of reading’ is not while requiring adherence to what is proposed limits the flexibility for teachers to meet the individual and diverse needs of students and is not based on research. Limiting flexibility will create problems for before and after school programs in spaces where there may or may not be credentialed teachers. We want all kids to succeed—we need more tools not fewer.



### ***Pushing Back Against Science of Reading Mandates***

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Teacher educators found their voice in opposition to AB 2222 and defended their own agency as generators of knowledge through research and teachers of teachers with expertise in their academic disciplines (Anwaruddin, 2015; Aydarova & Berliner, 2018). An opposition letter from the Loyola Marymount University Center for Equity for English Learners to the Assembly Members of the Education Committee specifically identified the potential for the AB 2222 to negatively impact teacher education program's effectiveness in preparing teachers for educating California's students:

Narrow Educator Preparation and Program Accreditation in California: AB 2222 would mandate that the Science of Reading (only) is taught in all university teacher preparation and credentialing programs and in all educator professional development programs, and poses unnecessary additional monitoring and oversight requirements for the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The opposition response to AB 2222 validated the perspectives of bilingual teacher educators about the nature of their work in preparing teachers with the technical skills and pedagogical knowledge to implement programs to enable effective bilingual, multilingual, and multicultural instruction for California's students (Alfaro, 2018; Freire & Valdez, 2017). The California Association for Bilingual Teacher Preparation (CABTE) expressed parallel concerns the AB 2222 mandates:

If passed, AB 2222 would: (1) mandate that only Science of Reading (SoR) be taught in all university teacher preparation and credentialing programs across the state, this will limit the development of a comprehensive foundation for literacy/biliteracy/ multiliteracy; (2) ignore the needs of bilingual teacher candidates who use their primary languages (i.e., Arabic, Armenian, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese) for literacy instruction and development of bilingualism and biliteracy; (3) obligate that all IHEs conduct extensive training for faculty for the implementation of Science of Reading, which undermines academic freedom; and (4) undermine and question teacher expertise and knowledge base on multi-literacy and biliteracy development.

### **Undermining California State Board of Education ELA/ELD Framework Policy**

The statements of opposition to AB 2222 also reflected an affirmation of the ELA/ELD Framework policy and the level of articulation of effective curriculum and instructional guidance for literacy education of all California's students in the compendium of state-approved standards documents. Organizations expressed confidence in the work of the panels of researchers, experts and specialists who had designed and created the education policy documents, carefully and thoroughly identifying a multidisciplinary research base for instruction and assessment (Flores, et al., 2023.) The underlying argument was that AB 2222 added nothing more to the research base for effective language and literacy instruction and contrarily,



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only served to distract from the implementation of these policies already in place in California’s teacher education programs and in schools and classrooms. A coalition of organizations (as identified above) wrote this in their Letter of Concerns of March 25, 2024:

The CA ELA/ELD framework should continue to serve as our guide for literacy. Requiring stakeholders to change direction would further impact their ability to implement the CA ELA/ELD Framework and would waste valuable time and resources already dedicated to improving literacy for students. AB 2222 would undermine these efforts and divert attention from recently adopted programs that have not been funded or implemented as intended, like Proposition 58 (2016) and the English Learner Roadmap (2017). Teacher Performance Expectations were recently rewritten to include ‘science of reading,’ so it is unnecessary to require teacher candidates and teacher credential holders to do duplicative work before entering a credential program or before entering the teaching profession.

The California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE) White Paper (Wahleithner, 2024) is the product of the CCTE Working Group on Literacy that met five times to undertake various tasks to address current literacy education legislation. The White Paper draws the following conclusions:

In conclusion, we believe that reading instruction and the preparation of teachers to teach reading must be open and inclusive. The Science of Reading are not settled and will continue to evolve. As such, there is no one right way to teach every child to read. Instead, teachers must be prepared with a full repertoire of strategies so they may respond to the individualized needs of the full classroom of learners before them. To best serve our students, we must commit to reviewing and conducting research faithfully and without bias. Second, we must commit to using valid and research-based instructional strategies. Third, we must resist any action or policy that would make reading instruction more restrictive than what is recommended by the full body of research (Tierney & Pearson, 2024). Using multiple evidence-based approaches is the only way to serve the needs of every learner.

### **Conclusion: The Power of Collective Advocacy**

The CCTE conference panel “Pushing Back Against Science of Reading Mandates: The California Story” was an account of the collective efforts of many advocacy organizations in response to legislation that threatened to negatively impact language and literacy education for California’s multilingual learners. This landmark advocacy effort gave a voice to families, teachers, administrators, teacher educators and school boards to shape education policy on behalf of our state’s 6.1 million children. We are proud to have offered our expertise and experience and strongly believe that our legislators and education leaders need to honor and respect our expertise and collective voice.

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**"We just need teachers of color ...  
I don't care if they're blue"**  
**Racialization in Teacher Education  
Recruitment and Admission**

**Mayeen Quader**

**Abstract**

America's teachers are whiter than the communities they serve. This qualitative multiple case study explored how racialization shapes BIPOC teacher education program (TEP) recruitment and admission. I reviewed TEP policies, observed recruitment sessions, interviewed TEP personnel, and conducted a critical race framework-based Critical Discourse Analysis. Findings suggest TEPs operate as racialized organizations, gatekeeping, or whitekeep teaching via racialized discourses about teacher quality and strict compliance with standards that undermine diversity initiatives. TEPs that prioritize racial justice, interrogate racialized policies and practices, and engage K-12 and post-secondary stakeholders might show promise in improving BIPOC representation in teaching.

**The Teacher Preparation Diversity Gap**

Most, 54%, of K-12 students are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), however most teachers are white (79%) (Ingersoll et al., 2019; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021). This teacher diversity gap is critical as majority white teachers deculturalize BIPOC students through a Euro-centric,

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race-evasive curriculum validating white norms and values, reinforcing the “powerful invisibility” of whiteness (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Garza, 2018; Jupp et al., 2019; Omi & Winant, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Research suggests students with BIPOC teachers perform better academically (Dee, 2004; 2005; Gershenson, et al., 2016; 2018), face less exclusionary discipline (Shirrell et al., 2021; Wright, 2015), and graduate and attend college at higher rates (Gershenson, et al., 2016; 2018). MSIs working alongside Grow Your Own (GYO) programs (Bianco & Goings, 2022; Garcia et al., 2022; Gist & Bristol, 2022) show promise in diversifying teaching, however BIPOC teachers remain the minority.

University-based TEPs traditionally admit white, female, preservice teachers (PST) (Fraser, 2006; Ingersoll, 2017; Labaree, 2008; Kohli & Pizarro, 2022). As of 2020, less than 33% of TEP enrollees are BIPOC (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2020). This teacher prep diversity gap (The New Teacher Project, 2020) persists even within MSIs due to limited targeted recruitment, overwhelmingly white faculty, and complex and costly requirements (Carter Andrews et al., 2021; Van Overschelde & López, 2018; Epstein, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Redding & Baker, 2019; Sleeter, 2016). How BIPOC are recruited and admitted to TEPs warrants critical examination (Carter Andrews et al., 2021; Kohli, 2021; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Matias, 2016; Sleeter, 2016).

This qualitative multiple case study explored racialization in BIPOC TEP recruitment and admission in three California-based TEPS within MSIs.

### **The white World of Teacher Education**

Majority white TEPs historically shape narratives about teacher quality. Neoliberal market-oriented reforms in the 1980s, introduced rigorous licensure exams, rerouting thousands of aspiring BIPOC teachers from classrooms (Brown, 2014; Cochran-Smith, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2020; Lambert, 2019; Petchauer, 2016; Sleeter, 2016).

TEP admission often requires reading, writing, and mathematics competency, a minimum 3.0 Grade Point Average (GPA), letters of recommendation (LOR), personal statements of experience (PSE), and interviews (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2015; Michel et al., 2019; Posselt, 2016). Such a race-evasive contest mobility approach prioritizes test scores and disproportionately excludes BIPOC from admission (Guinier, 2003; Van Overschelde & López, 2018). Local GYO programs collaborating with MSIs show promise in recruiting and retaining BIPOC, however the teacher prep diversity gap remains (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Petchauer & Mawhinney, 2017; Redding & Baker, 2019; Sleeter, 2016).

To critically explore the BIPOC TEP recruitment and admission, this study necessitated critical race frameworks.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The study drew from Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS),

and the Theory of Racialized Organizations (TRO) to employ an innovative interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework, and conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on racialized discourses embedded within TEP recruitment and admissions.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

In CDA, discourse is seen as a form of social practice sustaining and reproducing the social status quo (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2004). CDA calls for the explicit evaluation of how “social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). The use of critical race frameworks is in alignment with CDA.

### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT challenges white supremacy, by recognizing that institutions are not objective, merit based, race-evasive environments offering equal opportunity for BIPOC. According to CRT, systems and structures of discrimination serving as barriers to BIPOC achievement demand inspection (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Milner et al., 2013; Solórzano, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Bonilla-Silva’s (2018) color-blind, or race-evasive (Jupp et al., 2019) logic frames, or discourses, 1) Abstract Liberalism, 2) Naturalization, 3) Cultural Racism, and 4) Minimization of Racism, guided CDA. To examine the racialization and the contours of whiteness (Feagin, 2020), tenets of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), were also integrated for this study.

### **Critical Whiteness Studies**

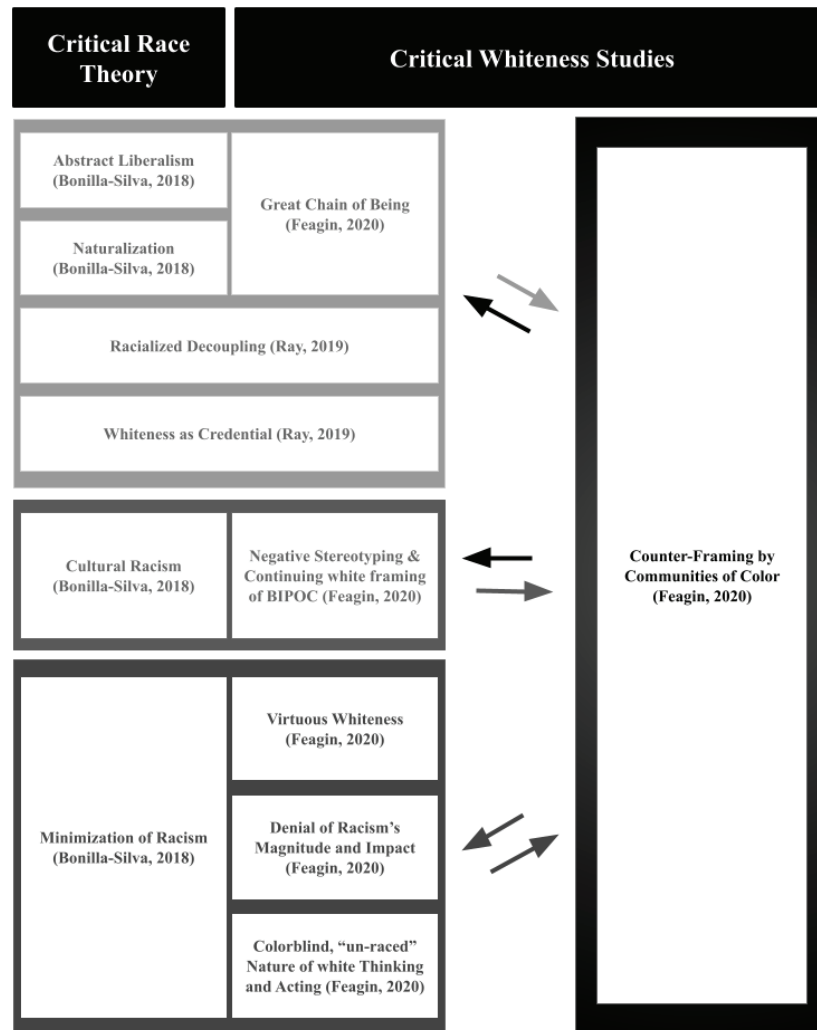
According to CWS, whiteness is a form of property (Harris, 1993) and racism is understood as systemic, and maintained via a white racial frame, or, a set of organized racialized ideas which elevate, valorize, normalize, and hegemonize whites and stigmatize, demonize, marginalize, and devalue BIPOC (Feagin, 2020). The white racial frame as an interpretative tool for racial oppression was applied to this study in addition to the Theory of Racialized Organizations.

### **Theory of Racialized Organizations**

According to critical race sociologist Victor Ray (2019), organizations are not race-neutral, but enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups, legitimate the unequal distribution of resources, and maintain whiteness as a credential. Within these organizations, the decoupling of formal rules from organizational practice is racialized (p. 26), benefiting the majority.

To explore racialization within BIPOC TEP recruitment and admission these frameworks were integrated into a Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies Logic Framework used in alignment with CDA. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies Logic Framework**



### Methodology

To capture the complexity of BIPOC TEP recruitment and admission I employed a multiple case study design (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2017) in three California-based MSIs, Melon, Nectarine, and Apple. Site selection was based on each TEP's teacher prep



diversity gap (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2023). Research questions included (1) What are the racialized discourses in the TEP recruitment and admissions processes in three California-based MSIs? (2) What are the racialized factors that shape recruitment and admissions in TEPs of BIPOC? (2a) What are the policies and practices that support the recruitment and admission of BIPOC teachers or are specifically aimed at recruiting BIPOC teachers? and (2b) What are the barriers or perceived barriers for the recruitment and admission of BIPOC teachers?

Data was drawn from TEP websites, TEP virtual recruitment sessions, and semi-structured interviews with TEP personnel across three sites. As I navigated TEP websites I recorded myself “thinking aloud” (Jørgensen, 1989). Data was triangulated with transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Interview participants were purposively sampled, including staff, faculty, and administrators who actively served in TEP recruitment and admissions within the past 5 years. In each virtual, 90 minute, in-depth interview, participants shared perspectives on an ideal PST, disparities in teaching, race and TEP recruitment and admission, and teacher diversity initiatives. Data were de-identified, imported, and managed in NVivo 20 for coding and analysis.

The Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies Logic Framework informed the CDA of transcripts, generating over 2,000 codes (Wodak, 2004). Special attention was paid to participants’ use of micro-level strategies to reproduce, consolidate, and artificially recreate existing power structures, and frame institutional hierarchy, equality and merit in race-evasive ways. Special attention was paid to how university-based teacher education policy discourse shapes TEP recruitment and admissions beliefs and culture (Gee, 1996).

## **Findings**

Findings suggest that TEPs within MSIs operate as racialized organizations (Ray, 2019). Racialized discourses of teacher quality emphasize equal opportunity (Bonilla-Silva, 2018) and deflate diversity initiatives via strict compliance with state mandates. White normed dispositions reveal the complex, invisible, cultural privilege of white teachers (Feagin, 2020) whose admission is largely ignored by TEPs that effectively gatekeep, or what I term, whitekeep teaching.

Racialized factors shape BIPOC TEP recruitment and admission. Contradictory understandings of roles and duties, miscommunication regarding complex requirements, lack of time or collective effort for targeted BIPOC recruitment, and white normed, exclusionary admissions policies, race-targeted burdens (Ray, 2019) and structures present challenges for BIPOC.

Melon is a case of homophily as majority white personnel choose admits similar to themselves. Personnel at Melon presume the U.S. to be post-racial, and admit those who, like them, adhere to racially coded white norms such as “politeness,”

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“professionalism,” and native English language proficiency. The majority white applicant pool is examined only when local districts need BIPOC teachers. One faculty member summarizes the program philosophy well, stating, “we just need teachers of color...I don’t care if they’re blue, I don’t care what color they are!” Humans are not blue. Such a discursive move minimizes the harsh realities of racism and those racialized, reducing it to a joke.

Melon applicants are screened via licensure exams, GPA minimums, and an admissions interview employed as a method to deny entry. Personnel shared a sense of duty to protect students from applicants with “red flags,” admitting those deemed “appropriate,” but “not necessarily diverse.” Two participants shared counter narratives emphasizing that faculty whiteness, and preoccupation with politeness and white norms and dispositions continue to deter applicants of Color.

Nectarine is a case of stasis as TEP personnel maintain the status quo, white-keeping admission via strict adherence to state mandates and a shared belief in equal opportunity due to a “level[ed] playing field.” Despite emphasizing justice, diversity, equity and inclusion, policies and practices center whiteness. Reflecting neoliberal market-based discourse, administrators frame Nectarine as “prestigious” with applicants treated as customers, expressing frustration with admission flexibilities offered during the pandemic. When asked about teacher diversity, interview participants frequently redirected the conversation to the teacher shortage. Ironically, one administrator shared, “the biggest challenge now is...there’s no one to recruit, not even a white teacher.”

One Nectarine recruiter simplified credentialing and minimized complex jargon, sharing that flexibilities such as AB 130 attracted BIPOC applicants who often need personalized support. Another acknowledged barriers such as program tuition for BIPOC, especially those who might also be low-income. Unlike Nectarine and Melon, Apple acknowledges barriers facing BIPOC.

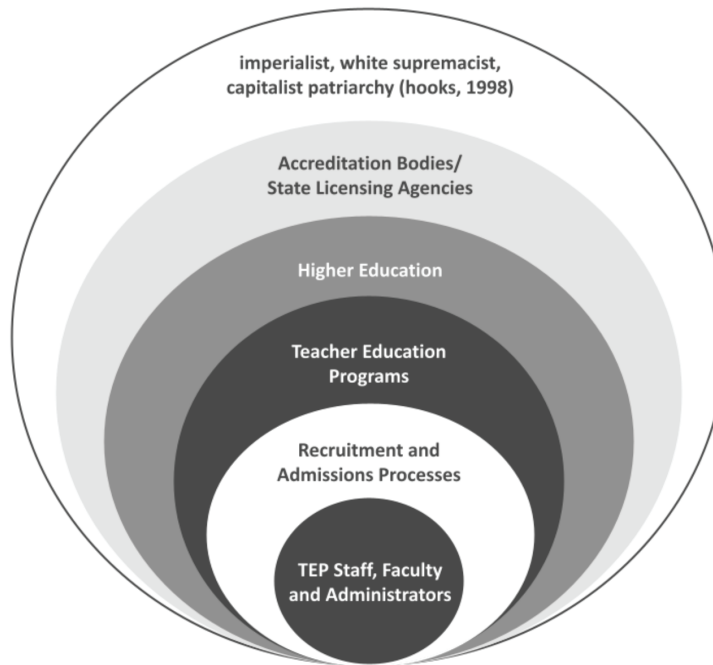
Apple’s TEP is a case of symbiosis as administrators establish partnerships and a colorful pipeline of teachers. In challenging whiteness and prioritizing community and racial equity, Apple works to circumnavigate mandates intentionally recruiting and admitting PSTs from local communities of Color, who graduate, teach, then return for higher learning.

Apple’s support for BIPOC teachers is extensive, personalized, and inclusive. One staff summarizes the program well, sharing,, “Our biggest goal is to prepare students that want to help communities.”

Overall, findings reveal that racialized discourses and factors in TEPs are anchored in dimensions of imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchal systems (hooks, 1994) seen in Figure 2, that emphasize neoliberal market-based discourses in accreditation. This is reified through broader educational community discourse in higher education of what it means to be a teacher.

Racialized discourses are reinforced by micro-level interactions among those in positions to whitekeep teaching. Despite constraints, California TEPs can exercise

**Figure 2**  
**Dimensions of Racialized Discourses in TEPs**



flexibility in BIPOC recruitment and admission. Interrogating racialized policies and practices and involving stakeholders across K-12 and post-secondary contexts is vital for diversifying teaching.

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# **Developing Key Assessments Based on the CalTPA**

## **Enhancing Teacher Candidate Feedback**

**Shana Matamala**

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the redesign of key assessments in a teacher preparation program to align with the California Teacher Performance Assessment (CalTPA), aiming to enhance feedback mechanisms and support teacher candidates in their professional development. Recognizing the challenges posed by the CalTPA, we implemented a systematic approach to integrate assessments aligned with state standards across all program semesters. This involved aligning assessments with CalTPA rubrics, conducting faculty calibration sessions to ensure consistent feedback, and providing ongoing formative assessments to facilitate reflective practice among candidates. This process led to improved CalTPA scores and fostered ongoing efforts for program effectiveness.

### **Introduction**

Teacher preparation programs are tasked with equipping future educators with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in today's diverse and complex classrooms. One of the primary challenges in teacher education is providing candidates with continuous, meaningful feedback that helps them grow professionally

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while aligning with state and national standards. In California, teacher preparation programs rely on the California Teacher Performance Assessment (CalTPA) to evaluate candidates' readiness for the teaching profession. A performance assessment is defined as "a test in which the test taker actually demonstrates the skills the test is intended to measure by doing real-world tasks that require those skills, rather than by answering questions asking how to do them" (Educational Testing Service, 2020). The CalTPA is designed to measure teacher candidates' competencies based on the state's Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs), which include effective instructional planning, assessment, classroom management, and the ability to adapt instruction to meet student needs. Instead of focusing on standardized testing, the CalTPA aims to focus "on the process of teaching, and equity in opportunity to perform is based on a standardized collection of planning documents, observational records of teaching, and samples of P-12 student work, with related analytic commentaries" (Peck et.al., 202, p. 4).

The CalTPA, while a powerful tool, is also a source of stress for many candidates as they work to meet this requirement at the end of their teacher preparation program. In analyzing our CalTPA scores, we noticed patterns of where our candidates were consistently struggling. With the aim to better prepare our candidates and reduce their anxiety, we decided to redesign our program key assignments to align with the CalTPA. We integrated key assessments across all semesters, using CalTPA-aligned rubrics to guide and monitor candidates' progress. These assessments serve multiple purposes: they gauge the mastery of TPEs, provide formative feedback, and help candidates prepare for the CalTPA's final assessment. According to Ervin-Kassab et al. (2021), integrating data from the TPEs and TPAs is essential for the ongoing review and improvement of teacher education programs. This approach is designed not only to help candidates succeed in their final TPA but also to foster their growth as reflective practitioners who continuously improve their teaching practices.

This article focuses on the implementation process of these key assessments, discusses lessons learned from their application, and provides best practices for other teacher education programs aiming to adopt similar strategies.

### **Implementation Process**

The process of integrating key assessments aligned with the CalTPA into our teacher preparation program involved several phases, including planning, faculty training, continuous calibration to ensure consistency in feedback, and program improvement.

#### ***Phase I: Planning and Alignment with CalTPA Rubrics***

The first step was to align each semester's key assessments with the CalTPA rubrics and TPEs. We saw the importance of both the candidates and the program faculty gaining an early and in-depth understanding of the rubrics. A thorough



understanding of the TPA rubrics is essential for effective implementation, as it allows teacher educators to accurately evaluate candidate performance and provide meaningful feedback. Opportunities to build a shared understanding of the rubrics, required artifacts, and scoring procedures among faculty are critical to ensure consistency and fairness in evaluations. This shared comprehension not only improves the reliability of scoring but also enables programs to use TPA data more effectively for continuous program improvement (Sloan, 2013; Whittaker & Nelson, 2013).

This alignment to the CalTPA rubrics ensured that candidates received feedback specifically targeted toward areas they would be assessed on in their final TPA. By embedding these assessments throughout the program, candidates had the opportunity to receive formative feedback at critical stages of their development, which supported their growth and preparation for the final assessment. As Goldhaber (2019) noted, improving teacher preparation hinges on the ability of programs to enhance teacher candidates' instructional capacities. By integrating CalTPA-aligned assessments early and often, we aimed to continuously develop these capacities.

### ***Phase 2: Faculty Calibration and Training***

A crucial element of the implementation process was the calibration of faculty members who were responsible for scoring the key assessments. Inconsistency in feedback quality can significantly affect candidates' development, as noted by Greenblatt (2018), who highlighted the challenges of variability in teacher preparation programs. To address this issue, we conducted regular calibration sessions where faculty reviewed sample assessments together, discussed their interpretations of the rubrics, and reached a consensus on scoring. This practice ensured that all candidates received consistent, high-quality feedback that accurately reflected their performance against the TPEs.

Calibration also allowed faculty to refine their own understanding of the CalTPA rubrics, ensuring that they could provide more targeted guidance to candidates. A common language of practice develops as faculty collaborate to establish a shared understanding of the terminology used to assess the practical aspects of teaching. This shared language is crucial for ensuring consistency in scoring teaching performance assessments, as it enables evaluators to align their interpretations of key teaching practices (Sloan, 2013; Whittaker & Nelson, 2013). Through this process, faculty create a more cohesive and standardized approach to evaluating teacher candidates' performance, which is essential for fair and reliable assessments across the program. As a result, the feedback became more consistent and actionable, giving candidates clear directions for improvement.

### ***Phase 3: Ongoing Formative Feedback***

Throughout the program, candidates received structured, formative feedback on their performance in key assessments. Feedback is widely recognized as a vi-

### *Developing Key Assessments Based on the CalTPA*

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tal component of formative assessment, playing a key role in improving student learning outcomes (Bennett, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 1998). Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasize that effective feedback provides clear guidance on how to improve, helping learners understand the gap between their current performance and the desired outcome. Our key assessment feedback was designed not only to identify areas where they needed improvement but also to highlight their strengths, encouraging them to build on what they were doing well. Our program addressed this challenge by formalizing the feedback process, ensuring that candidates knew exactly where they stood in relation to the TPEs.

Additionally, the formative feedback helped candidates to engage in reflective practice, a key element of effective teaching. Reflective practice serves as a meaningful process that fosters teacher growth by allowing educators to analyze their experiences and derive valuable insights from their teaching (Rodgers, 2002). By continuously receiving and acting on feedback, candidates were better prepared to approach their final CalTPA assessment with confidence.

#### **Phase 4: Program Improvement**

Performance Assessments can offer concrete insights into which aspects of coursework and fieldwork teacher candidates are fully integrating and where they may be struggling. These assessments help identify specific areas of success and growth, allowing faculty to tailor their feedback and support to the individual needs of candidates. This ensures a more targeted development of teaching competencies and aligns candidates' learning experiences with performance expectations (Peck et.al., 2021).

In our program, we initiated an analysis of key assessment results, along with CalTPA data to inform necessary adjustments in our courses. Early in this process, several key concepts emerged as areas needing additional focus. These included the effective use of asset language, a deeper understanding of funds of knowledge, the implementation of self-assessments, and the application of English Language Development (ELD) goals. We met as a faculty team to determine how to better embed these concepts into specific courses. This has led to candidates scoring higher in these areas on the CalTPA.

### **Conclusion**

The integration of key assessments aligned with the CalTPA into our teacher preparation program has been a critical factor in improving the feedback loop between faculty and candidates. By focusing on calibrated scoring and formative feedback, we have provided candidates with the support they need to meet the TPEs and succeed in their final CalTPA assessment. This approach has also allowed our program to make data-informed decisions about curriculum adjustments and professional development for faculty, ensuring continuous improvement in our teacher preparation practices.

The lessons learned from this implementation process highlight the importance of consistency in feedback, the value of faculty calibration, and the need for ongoing formative assessments to support candidate growth. Our experience offers a roadmap for other teacher preparation programs seeking to improve their assessment processes and better prepare candidates for the complexities of the classroom.

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# **Equity Focused Supervision for Credential Candidates**

## **Feedback from Field Supervisors Identifying Their Needs and Concerns**

**Lisa Sulliuvan & Andrew Hood**

### **Abstract**

Survey data gathered from three years (2022, N=68; 2023, N=41; 2024, N=56) of professional learning gatherings for teacher educators, suggests that there are ongoing needs related to addressing issues of equity in both TK-12 contexts and in teacher education programs. The survey data highlight some of the concerns clinical supervisors have about the important work they do to bridge university and TK-12 contexts. Both open ended and Likert scale items were included in the survey, however the open-ended responses will be highlighted here as they revealed common areas of concern and needs related to supporting novice teachers. Some of these concerns include hesitancy to discuss issues of race, a recognition of generational differences between candidates and supervisors, and a need for additional resources and professional development on how to teach and supervise with an equity and social justice focus. Implications and potential next steps for teacher education programs are discussed. A primary question that arose from the survey responses was how might teacher education programs prioritize the work of clinical field supervisors by providing the resources and professional learning opportunities required to do the critically important and complex work of mentoring and guiding novice teachers in our TK-12 schools?

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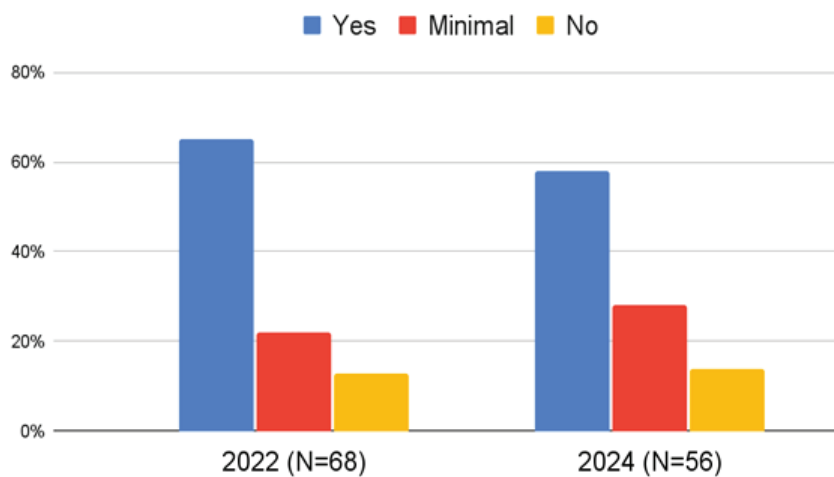
## Introduction

Fieldwork supervisors in teacher education programs play an important role in preparing future teachers (Steadman & Brown, 2011). One challenge that has been highlighted in prior research on teacher education is uneven or ill-defined mentoring and the under-resourcing of clinical experiences (Zeichner & Bier, 2015). For example, many supervisors describe having limited opportunities for professional development focused on important topics such as how to attend to equity and social justice issues in classrooms (Sullivan & Mastrup, 2020).

The Supervisors of Teacher Education Network Team (STENT) has hosted five virtual professional state-wide learning conferences focused on how to center equity and social justice in supervision practice. The annual conferences are designed to address a need for collaborative professional learning opportunities that was expressed by supervisors during focus groups conducted across University of California teacher education programs in 2019. The conferences are also in response to a need identified in prior research for more professional development opportunities for supervisors (Griffin et al., 2016; Hood, 2024). The annual summer conferences bring supervisors together to learn from one another and discuss common challenges and concerns they encounter in their work.

In order to understand these needs and design resources, prior to each conference, attendees are asked to complete a survey. One of the questions asked supervisors whether or not their program had provided them with professional

Figure 1. Has your program provided you with professional learning opportunities related to your work as a supervisor/teacher educator?



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learning opportunities. These responses were summarized across two time periods from 2022 and 2024 (See Figure 1). Although many supervisors responded yes to this question, an additional 35% (2022) and 42% (2024) responded that they had minimal or no opportunities for professional learning in their role as a supervisor. In addition, the survey asked supervisors to identify their confidence levels with certain practices, as well as their concerns and needs related to their work in teacher education (See Figure 2 and Figure 3). Survey data from 2022, 2023, and 2024 were reviewed and common concerns and areas of need were identified from open ended responses. Survey data from 2021 was excluded because many of the concerns raised were specifically related to the pandemic and the switch to remote teaching and learning.

When asked to describe specific concerns they had about their work in the coming year, responses across the three years fell into several major categories related to equity and social justice. The primary themes were related to concerns and challenges regarding equity and social justice practices; providing support for credential candidates, including discussing and raising issues of race and highlighting inequities; and a desire for ongoing professional development and personal growth. Each of these themes is described in more detail below and specific examples are provided.

Figure 2: Supervisors' Confidence Providing Different Types of Support (2022, N = 69)

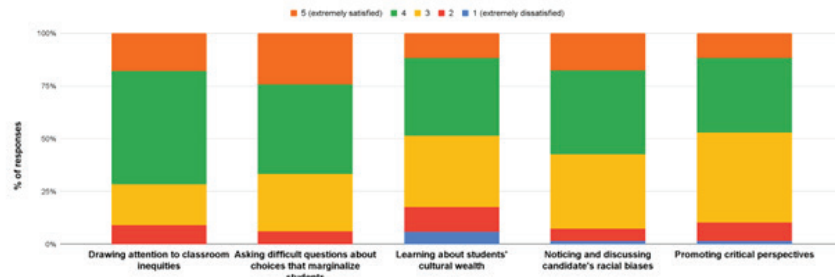
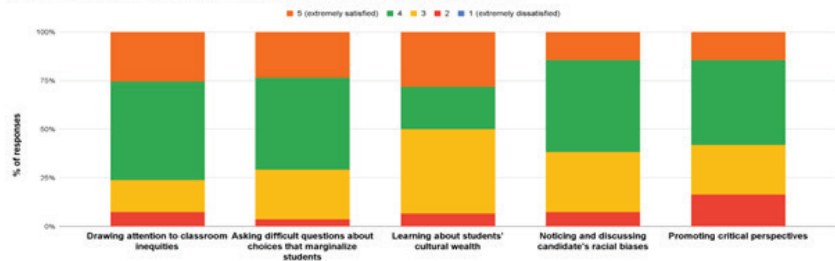


Figure 3: Supervisors' Confidence Providing Different Types of Support (2024, N = 56)



### **Focusing on Equity and Social Justice**

There was significant concern expressed by supervisors about how best to integrate equity and social justice practices into their work. This includes questions about how to support candidates with culturally responsive teaching, addressing social justice issues in TK-12 schools, and navigating diverse classroom environments. When asked to identify their primary concerns for the coming year, teacher shortages and lack of diversity among candidates were prominent responses. Supervisors also described concerns about how to help their candidates effectively support English Learners. Many supervisors also shared questions about how to manage policies and practices that communicate opposition to DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) in school and classroom settings. When asked to share their biggest concern, examples related to this theme include:

*Supporting teachers in their anti-racist work and culturally responsive teaching.*

*How social justice now fits into our clinical observations and my lack of experience in this area.*

*PSTs wanting to focus on teaching content and thinking that equity & social justice issues are not necessarily needed/warranted.*

*Addressing social justice and equity as well as cultural pedagogy as an additional supervisor task is a challenge due to the limited amount of time with pre-service teachers. Especially given the other needs and challenges that pre-service teachers need and want addressed, ie, classroom management and student discipline...*

In the 2023 survey, supervisors highlighted equity and social justice as key priorities. They expressed a commitment to supporting diverse learners and integrating social justice into their supervision practices. This includes fostering self-awareness among candidates and mentors, building equitable communities, and valuing student cultures. Their responses also showed a focus on addressing and incorporating social justice from various perspectives. Examples of supervisor responses that illustrate their priorities in this area include:

*Developing self-awareness of candidate and mentor to build how their identities impact planning, lesson execution, classroom culture etc.*

*Building a community among all subject area supervisors in the site MAT and Cal Teach programs with the goal of more equitable and sustainable support for pre-service teachers.*

*Supporting DEI efforts without jeopardizing a new teacher's job.*

### **Providing Support to Credential Candidates**

Supervisors described being focused on supporting student teachers through various challenges, including managing classroom environments, providing effective

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tive feedback, and handling emotional and mental health issues. Supervisors noted and acknowledged generational gaps that often exist between supervisors, program directors, and teaching candidates, affecting communication and perceptions. There was a desire expressed to understand how these generational differences impact the work supervisors are doing in order to improve communication and collaboration. In terms of specific anti-racist and social justice oriented practices, supervisors described some specific challenges that are highlighted below.

#### **Conversations on Race and Racism**

Survey responses illustrate the fact that there is some hesitancy and discomfort in discussing race and racism, with some supervisors feeling unsure about how to address these topics effectively. More specifically, supervisors reported significant challenges in discussing race and social justice. They mentioned difficulties with finding the right words, navigating sensitive topics, and dealing with resistance or lack of support from mentors and colleagues. Some expressed discomfort or hesitation due to their own backgrounds or fears of political backlash. These challenges are compounded by a lack of consistent support and guidance in addressing these issues during supervision. Examples of supervisor responses that illustrate this include:

*The topic is sensitive and I want to do a perfect job, which gets in the way of speaking freely.*

*I am a white 65-year old woman with very little experience with social justice.*

*Although I am able to bring up these issues during lecture classes, there is not always an equivalent opportunity during supervision of teacher candidates.*

*I am comfortable with bringing up these issues with my teacher candidates, but I often do not see them getting support from their Mentor Teachers. Perhaps the Mentors don't know what to do and how to model those challenges.*

*As an African American female supervisor, I have personally experienced issues with student bias and they were removed from my supervision without a discussion to support me as the supervisor or the student getting a pass to be removed from my supervision.*

*As a person of color, I will address concerns but in some districts, I have found that the issues target me so I have that to deal with.*

#### **Concerns About Placements and School Contexts**

In the 2023 survey responses, a third of the supervisors identified concerns related to placements in schools:

*Some districts and school sites set policies that may conflict with personal or cultural values held by the student teacher and/or supervisor as well as the mentor teacher.*



*The school district to which I am currently assigned has a school board which has openly rejected support for parents who don't speak English or students whose gender identity doesn't conform with the boards' wishes. Teachers are wonderfully sensitive, but it's a struggle for them.*

*My concern is that in today's environment, with parents demanding "rights" and screaming against "CRT," a teacher candidate is extremely vulnerable. It takes only one parent or student to rail against a teacher candidate, or a new teacher without permanent status, to destroy confidence or even a career.*

### **Professional Development and Personal Growth**

Supervisor responses to the survey suggest that there are ongoing concerns about their own professional growth and effectiveness. This includes continuing their development as supervisors, understanding new requirements or tools, improving their interaction and support strategies, and balancing personal and professional responsibilities. Supervisors are also interested in bettering their practices and staying informed about current educational trends and expectations.

*To continue my growth as a supervisor.*

*I am still trying to find my way as a supervisor. I worry that my best is not good enough...*

*Learning more about social justice from a white lens and Practices that place value on student culture.*

Overall, survey responses suggest that supervisors want to focus on enhancing their practice, and addressing diversity, equity and inclusion in both teacher education programs and TK-12 schools. When asked to identify current needs and some specific resources that would be helpful to address their concerns or challenges, supervisors highlighted the following primary resources:

**Training and Professional Development:** Supervisors identify the need for more professional development opportunities, including webinars, podcasts, and refresher courses on current teaching practices, equity, anti-racist and culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy. Specific training on new educational standards, such as EdTPA requirements, and effective coaching techniques was also requested.

**Guidance and Protocols:** Supervisors seek clearer guidelines and detailed information on observation protocols, lesson expectations, and managing the responsibilities of supervising candidates, especially in relation to EdTPA and working with candidates with disabilities. Useful resources mentioned across all three years of responses include updated observation forms, textbooks for understanding recent educational strategies, and practical ideas for promoting student autonomy and higher-order thinking.

**Collaboration and Communication:** Supervisors would like more opportunities to collaborate with peers and experienced supervisors through organized forums

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or meetings. Increased in-person interactions and discussions about common practices and challenges were mentioned.

**Support for Emotional and Mental Well-being:** Resources to help candidates manage emotional and financial stress, and support for their mental health and well-being were mentioned as being crucial. Understanding and addressing the socio-emotional impacts of teaching in the current political and social climate were identified as needs.

### **Implications**

In summary, the survey responses from the past three years reveal a nuanced picture of the challenges and aspirations of supervisors as they approach their work. Supervisors are grappling with integrating equity and social justice into their practice, supporting student teachers through complex issues, and navigating evolving educational contexts. They express a strong commitment to enhancing their professional skills and addressing systemic inequities, despite facing obstacles such as discomfort in discussing race, conflicting school policies, and generational gaps. The desire for robust professional development, clearer guidelines, increased collaboration, and resources to support mental health underscores their commitment to improving both their own practice and the educational experiences of their candidates. As supervisors continue to navigate these challenges, the insights from the survey data help identify potential next steps to help teacher education programs foster deeper learning for equity and excellence in our TK-12 classrooms.

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## **Coaching for Equity**

### **The Role of University Supervisor and Cooperating Teacher Feedback**

**Isabel Orejel & Shana Matamala**

#### **Abstract**

This article explores the importance of coaching for equity in teacher preparation programs, focusing on the critical roles of university supervisors (US) and cooperating teachers (CT) in providing reflective feedback to teacher candidates. Based on a 2022 initiative at a small, private university, we trained USs and CTs in the coaching for equity model, incorporating theory, video practice, and mixed reality simulations. The training aimed to create a consistent framework for delivering feedback through an equity lens. This article outlines the process, significance, and impact of this initiative on teacher education.

#### **Introduction**

In teacher preparation, the role of feedback provided by university supervisors (US) and cooperating teachers (CT) is vital to the success of teacher candidates. Although many factors influence a candidate's successful journey into teaching, perhaps none is more critical than the role of USs and CTs and the relationship they establish with the teacher candidate (TC), whom they are committed to sup-

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### *Coaching for Equity*

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porting (Richmond et al., 2019). The changing nature of the teaching field, coupled with diverse student needs, necessitates feedback that is not only constructive but equitable. Equity-based coaching recognizes that while all candidates work toward a common goal, the support they require can vary significantly. To address the need for effective and reflective feedback, we initiated a training program in 2022 designed to equip USs and CTs with the skills to provide equity-centered feedback. This initiative builds on the understanding that tailored coaching and feedback can significantly enhance teacher candidates' development. Our process incorporates theoretical frameworks, practical applications, and innovative tools such as mixed-reality simulations to prepare supervisors for providing reflective, equitable feedback to teacher candidates.

### **Process**

The training initiative began in 2022 by focusing on the theory of coaching for equity. Coaching for equity involves recognizing and addressing the unique needs of individuals to ensure everyone can reach shared objectives. This approach aligns with the framework presented by Kraft and Blazar (2018), which emphasizes personalized coaching to enhance outcomes for all candidates. In our initial session, we provided USs and CTs with resources and practical tools to implement three coaching styles: instructive, collaborative, and facilitative. Each style addresses different candidate needs, with the instructive style being more directive, the collaborative centering on co-constructing knowledge, and the facilitative style encouraging deeper reflection (Torsh, 2022). To model these approaches, we used video lessons and facilitated discussions where participants practiced offering different types of feedback in small groups. Some of the discussion questions included the following: *How can you determine which coaching style (instructive, collaborative, or facilitative) is most appropriate for a candidate in each situation? What strategies can you use to ensure that coaching for equity addresses the unique needs of each individual while still guiding them toward shared objectives? When using the collaborative coaching style, how do you balance co-constructing knowledge with maintaining clear goals for the candidate? What types of feedback have you found to be the most effective in promoting deeper reflection among candidates?*

Following the first training, participants were asked to implement these coaching styles during their field supervision and provide reflective feedback based on our equity-centered framework. Our second phase expanded on this foundation by incorporating mixed-reality simulations. These simulations allowed USs and CTs to engage with online avatars acting as teacher candidates, practicing their feedback techniques in a controlled, realistic environment. The simulations offered varying levels of candidate readiness for feedback, from those eager to improve to those resistant to criticism, providing participants with opportunities to adjust their coaching styles accordingly. Research suggests that mixed-reality simulations are

highly effective in offering realistic practice without the high stakes of real-world scenarios (Budin, 2024; Larson et al., 2020). This training provided supervisors a chance to develop their skills further and refine their understanding of equitable feedback practices.

During debrief sessions, we facilitated discussions focused on the challenges and successes that supervisors experienced while implementing these strategies in the field. We discussed how effective coaching exists at the intersection of strong teaching practices and educational therapy. When executed properly, coaching helps educators unpack their pedagogical challenges, refine or develop new skills, and ultimately discover their most effective teaching approach (Safir, 2008). We centered our discussion on how critical reflection is a developmental process. Student teachers progress through various stages of reflective thinking at different paces and require individualized coaching to help extend their understanding of the knowledge base to the next level of development (Stein, 2000). These debriefs were crucial for fostering reflective practice among supervisors, allowing them to critique their approaches and share insights on how to better support teacher candidates. The feedback loop created by these reflections informed our subsequent training sessions, ensuring that our process remained dynamic and responsive to participants' needs.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of clear, structured feedback in teacher preparation cannot be overstated. However, as noted by Vertemara and Flushman (2017), the roles of USs and CTs are often ambiguous, which can lead to inconsistencies in the feedback provided to teacher candidates. Through our training initiative, we aimed to remove this ambiguity by offering a structured, equity-focused approach to coaching. By continuously refining our training sessions and incorporating innovative tools like mixed-reality simulations, we have seen improvements in both the quality of feedback provided by supervisors and the teacher candidates' ability to apply this feedback in their practice.

Our efforts to incorporate equity into the feedback process have highlighted the importance of personalized coaching. Supervisors have reported greater confidence in their ability to differentiate feedback based on individual candidate needs, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. As we continue to gather data and refine our approach, coaching for equity will remain a central focus of our training program, ensuring that teacher candidates receive the guidance necessary to succeed in an increasingly diverse educational landscape.

### **Significance to the Field of Education**

The coaching for equity model offers a significant contribution to the field of teacher education, particularly in addressing some of the persistent challenges in

teacher preparation programs. Teacher candidates frequently face gaps between theoretical knowledge and practical application during their clinical fieldwork. Post-COVID, the new generation of teachers need to explore new fieldwork experiences to address the theory-practice gap (Resch et al., 2024). The feedback they receive from their CTs, and USs is crucial in helping them bridge this gap. The Coaching for Equity approach provides US and CTs with tools to model and support equity-based practices in teacher preparation. This initiative aims to address the gap in feedback quality and content by embedding equity and justice practices into the professional development of US and CTs. Establishing internal feedback loops within teacher preparation programs helps identify areas for growth and ensure continuous improvement of field-based experiences. These efforts aim to create a stronger alignment between theory and practice, leading to better outcomes for teacher candidates. Mentor feedback and coaching are central to facilitating productive practicum experiences, thus connecting to the theme of how feedback and mentorship shape teacher preparation and candidate development.

Professional experience is a pivotal component of any teacher credential program (Allen et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher preparation plays a role in teacher turnover as those with less preparation, such as preservice time in the classroom, are 2 to 3 times more likely to leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher candidates report the experience gained in their clinical fieldwork was the most valuable component of the program. This experience allows them to practice teaching methods and classroom management with their CT and US support to build mastery and preparation. High-quality mentoring gives teacher candidates the tools to focus on high-leverage activities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Feedback quality and quantity from cooperating teachers (CTs) are crucial to teacher candidates' perceptions of their clinical teaching placements (Olmstead et al., 2020). Effective feedback and coaching directly impact candidates' success in developing their teaching practice. Teacher candidates often expect constructive, growth-oriented feedback but are met with unmet expectations, highlighting the need for programs to ensure clear communication and guidance from mentors. Unfortunately, as Goldhaber (2019) notes, teacher preparation programs often lack robust feedback mechanisms that connect coursework to classroom practice. Candidates benefit more from growth-focused conversations than from formal evaluations alone (Fisher et al., 2016).

Our training program directly addresses this issue by equipping USs and CTs with the tools to provide equitable, asset-based feedback. With an asset-based pedagogy, CTs and USs are tasked with abandoning the focus on the perceived limitations and weaknesses of teacher candidates and expanding their understanding of the strengths, assets, and funds of knowledge that they possess (Arias, 2018). This approach moves beyond traditional evaluation methods, which often emphasize deficits, to one that recognizes the strengths and funds of knowledge that teacher candidates bring to their practice. By fostering a more reflective, in-

quiry-based feedback culture, we help teacher candidates develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of equitable teaching practices. Over the last 30 years, pedagogical theorists and researchers (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2014; Ladson Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2006; Paris and Alim, 2017) have examined alternative perspectives on theories and practices for historically marginalized groups. Asset-based pedagogies are student-centered and focus on the strengths in response to the deficit-based education models.

Coaching for equity is a commitment to equity for all teacher candidates by using the lens of equity through culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining approaches that address the needs of our teacher candidates. Moreover, integrating mixed-reality simulations into our training program provides a novel approach to supervisor development. The goal is to create and establish a shared understanding of a feedback protocol aligned with an asset-based framework. As Budin (2024) and Larson et al. (2020) demonstrate, these simulations offer a safe, low-stakes environment for practicing essential skills. This innovation has the potential to revolutionize professional development in teacher preparation programs, allowing for more frequent and effective practice of equity-centered feedback strategies.

In the broader context of teacher education, our focus on coaching for equity aligns with the growing recognition that teacher preparation programs must evolve to meet the diverse needs of today's classrooms. As Richmond et al. (2020) highlight, the success of teacher preparation depends on the ability of programs to produce educators who are not only content experts but also skilled in fostering inclusive, equitable learning environments. By addressing the often-overlooked role of feedback in this process, our initiative contributes to the ongoing improvement of teacher education programs, ensuring that future educators are prepared to meet the challenges of a diverse, complex educational landscape.

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## **Empowering Mentors and Teacher Candidates**

### **Advancing Civics and History Education Through K-12 Professional Development**

**Libbi R. Miller & Heather Ballinger**

#### **Abstract**

Our team focused on preparing teacher candidates, their mentors teachers, alongside other regional teachers to engage students in critical topics related to history, civics education and civil discourse in the classroom. In the first year of this three-year project, the project supported 51 educators, including mentor teachers, teacher candidates and other practicing educators through collaborative professional development. The professional development program, held on Saturdays during the academic year and concluding with a three-day summer institute, aimed to prepare teachers to engage students in critical history topics and civics education activities with an overarching goal of increasing equitable access to education for students in their classrooms.

#### **Introduction**

Our team of teacher educators focused on preparing teacher candidates alongside their mentors teachers and other regional teachers to actively engage students

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in critical topics related to history and civics education. We aimed to support a group of educators, which included teachers in secondary education, elementary education, educational specialist, ethnic studies, Indigenous education, and alternative education, by equipping them with critical historical content knowledge and strategies for civil discourse and civic engagement.

In the first year of this three-year project, we prepared 51 teachers, including 8 mentors and 8 teacher candidates, through a professional development program conducted on Saturdays during the academic year and concluded with a three-day summer institute. The project aimed to provide 60–70 hours of professional development. Mentor teacher and teacher candidate participation is a key component, as mentor teachers play a critical role in teacher preparation and have been called the “most significant source of support for beginning teachers” (Odell, 1990, p. 20). However, in our context, structural limitations result in mentor teachers receiving a small, non-financial gift and limited mentor preparation. While mentor teachers and teacher candidates regularly collaborate at school sites and in classrooms, they are not typically provided opportunities to learn together outside of the structured educator preparation programs. By investing in teachers at various stages of their careers and offering structured opportunities for collaboration and learning, we aim to develop ongoing collaborative and mentoring relationships that will inspire and sustain their teaching careers.

This project has three overarching goals: first, to increase teachers’ critical historical content knowledge from an equity-oriented perspective; second, to prepare teachers to engage students in innovative civics education activities that make civics relevant and meaningful, encouraging students to become informed, active participants in their communities and society; and finally, to increase equitable access to education for all students. We focus on providing current and future teachers with tools and strategies to address diverse learning needs and create inclusive classrooms where every student has the opportunity to engage in equitable learning.

### **Literature Review**

Mentor teacher and teacher candidate collaboration is a vital component of teacher education, with literature emphasizing the benefits of mentor teachers and teacher candidates learning together in reciprocal, co-constructive relationships. Early frameworks positioned mentor teachers primarily as experienced guides providing unidirectional support to novice teachers, yet recent studies have shifted to more collaborative models where both parties benefit from shared learning (Achinstein & Davis, 2014; Zeichner, 2010). Ongoing professional development and structured mentor preparation increased Mentor teacher satisfaction and confidence (Zaffini, 2015). Traditional mentoring often operates in hierarchical ways, with universities on the top tier, dictating the roles and responsibilities of both the mentor and teacher candidate, with the purpose of combining university-based theoretical studies with

practical experiences in the classroom (Zeichner, 2010). Conceptualizing university and K-12 campus connections that are more egalitarian and democratic in practice may help alleviate some of the role confusion and tensions that teacher-education programs currently experience (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Zeichner, 2010).

Collaborative learning allows mentor teachers to reflect critically on their teaching practices alongside their mentees. Clarke et al. (2014) found that mentors engaged in collaborative partnerships often revisit foundational teaching principles, enabling professional growth that may be limited in traditional supervisory roles. This reciprocal exchange fosters teacher reflection and an experimental stance toward pedagogy for both mentor teachers and teacher candidates, who bring new ideas from teacher education programs (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Research also suggests that shared learning cultivates mutual understanding of educational challenges and the development of innovative instructional strategies. Mentor teachers can help teacher candidates bridge theoretical knowledge with classroom application, while teacher candidates contribute new insights on inclusive practices and technology integration, enhancing the mentor's pedagogical repertoire (Hudson, 2013). Consequently, both mentor teachers and teacher candidates report improved self-efficacy and adaptability to evolving educational demands (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

The effectiveness of this collaborative relationship depends on institutional support and clear expectations around mentorship roles. Research indicates that, without structured training and defined frameworks for mentor teacher and teacher candidate collaboration, mentor teachers may default to supervisory rather than collaborative roles, limiting the depth of mutual learning (Hobson et al., 2009).

### **Key Elements of Practice**

The project includes several key elements of practice: Recruitment and Professional Development, Critical Content Knowledge in History, Monthly Professional Development, and a Summer Institute focused on Civic Engagement.

#### ***Recruitment and Professional Development***

We recruited mentor teachers and teacher candidate pairs, as well as other practicing teachers, to participate in a structured, supportive professional development program. Mentor teachers serve as teacher leaders, guiding small-group discussions and activities during monthly Saturday sessions. This approach reinforces session content while building mentors' leadership capacities.

#### ***Critical Content Knowledge in History***

Presenters with expertise in history and civics provided content-rich presentations, viewing history and civics education from an equity-oriented perspective.

### **Monthly Professional Development**

The project provided ongoing monthly professional development opportunities. Sessions include presentations from historians and experts, offering teachers content knowledge and specific expertise. Topics covered in the first year included race, class, and gender in historical documents, challenges to assumptions, Indigenous history, and movements toward sovereignty during the Civil War era.

### **Summer Institute**

The academic year concluded with a three-day summer institute dedicated to civic engagement and collaboration. This intensive program allowed for in-depth curriculum development and the sharing of best practices. Learning activities included the Third Way Civics Protocol, the Native American Blanket Exercise, and Restorative Circles. Teacher candidates preparing for their classrooms worked alongside mentor teachers and other educators.

All participants, including mentor teachers, teacher candidates, and other educators, received stipends, continuing education units, books, and classroom resources. Mentor teachers received an additional stipend for hosting a teacher candidate.

### **Preliminary Findings**

While early in this three-year project, preliminary data indicate the potential for significant impact on history and civics instruction quality through targeted professional development, leadership cultivation, and a collaborative teaching community. Mentor teachers report improved relationships with their candidates, as they focus on mutual content understanding rather than the day-to-day challenges of classroom management. The collaborative professional development has contributed to a more balanced dynamic between mentors and candidates.

Evaluation data show consistent increases in critical historical content knowledge among participants based on their participation in the professional development series. Participants also report consistent and increased implementation of community engagement activities in their classrooms that are designed to provide students an opportunity to engage in civil discourse related to content area standards. Data also points to sustained engagement from participants, as thirty-one participants from Year 1 are continuing into Year 2, including seven of the eight mentor teachers. Of the eight teacher candidates who completed their credential during Year 1 of the professional development program, three requested to continue into Year 2. As part of our Year 2 recruitment efforts, we actively encouraged all single-subject History candidates, as well as multiple-subject candidates teaching grade levels that emphasize American history and civics standards. These efforts led to a combined total of eight teacher candidates in Year 2.

Teacher candidates involvement in the program has been particularly significant. It provides them with early exposure to high-quality professional development and mentorship, setting a strong foundation for their future careers. The pairing with experienced mentor teachers allows for personalized guidance and support, facilitating a smoother transition into the teaching profession. Many teacher candidates enter teacher credentialing with current historical perspectives that benefit mentors and the students they teach. Despite this updated expertise from their recent undergraduate education, teacher candidates often lack the confidence to share this knowledge with their mentors due to the power dynamics that exist within traditional K-12 classroom settings. Having the opportunity to share space as learners during professional development, they experience increased opportunities to connect and form trusted relationships that lead towards more equitable sharing of knowledge.

### **Conclusions**

By investing in teacher professional development at various stages of their careers including during the educator preparation program, the project contributes to the broader goal of improving educational outcomes and fostering civic engagement among students. The partnership of mentors and teacher candidates engaging in professional development together, has shown positive results. In what often feels like a year-long job interview, teacher candidates value additional opportunities to engage with their mentors and other experienced educators. These interactions allow them to deepen their knowledge of historical content and explore student-centered teaching practices that will support their success during student teaching and throughout their careers.

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# **Enhancing California's Public School Transitional Kindergarten Programs Through Comprehensive Teacher and Administrator Training**

**Furwa T. Rizvi**

## **Abstract**

California's public-school system has added Transitional Kindergarten (TK) to provide universal early education for 4-year-olds. To support this, teachers and administrators must be adept in Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Social and Emotional Learning, Dual Language Learning, and Early Intervention. An online survey of teachers and administrators revealed that TK and Kindergarten teachers are generally knowledgeable and confident in these principles, while administrators show mixed appreciation, particularly for Developmentally Appropriate Practice and Play-Based Instruction. The variation in administrators' perspectives may be linked to their educational backgrounds and experience, suggesting a need for targeted professional development.

*Keywords:* Transitional Kindergarten, Professional Development, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Dual Language Learning, Social Emotional Learning, Early Intervention

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**Purpose/Objectives**

This research will identify the traps and gaps in the proposed Transitional Kindergarten (TK) model as a solution for Universal Prekindergarten in the state of California, to anticipate and address teacher and administrator needs to develop appropriate educational pathways for pre-service teachers, curriculum, and practice. This line of inquiry will culminate in the creation of a research-informed series of PD workshops that can be facilitated by the existing workforce consisting of teachers and administrators. Through this process, we will be able to establish TK as a strong foundation for K-8 education in the public school system. This strong model of high-quality ECE with prepared educators can lead to Universal Preschool in California.

The development of the Pre-K through 3rd grade specialist education credential within teacher preparation programs in higher education brings in the collaboration and communication of experienced teachers in the field to inform coursework. Furthermore, it will be meeting the standards set by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). These ensure continuous professional development for educators using the action research process to collect feedback and inform high-quality training for educators. This credential program allows for specifically trained teachers in early childhood education for children to have equitable access for high-quality early learning for all four-year-olds.

When using the cyclical action research process, the statewide expansion of TK, proposed problems identified by teachers and admin. This study generated and analyzed data to seek input on their knowledge, confidence, and relevance of four identified core principles, Developmentally Appropriate Practices/Play-Based Learning (DAP), Social/Emotional Learning (SEL), Dual Language Learners (DLL), and Early Intervention (EI) to ensure student needs are met within the classroom. Based on the responses, the next step in the process is to plan an intervention tailored to the needs of teachers and admin that address the specific needs of incoming young students. This PD will also ensure clear expectations of admin and teachers of high-quality curriculum and learning that is developmentally appropriate for this grade level. The action research process is ongoing; after teachers and administrators use these resources in the classroom, they will have opportunities to provide feedback. This input will guide revisions and reviews, helping to identify and address any new issues that arise.

This study focuses on four core principles aimed at meeting the needs of 4- and 5-year-olds. Student-centered learning is crucial for Transitional Kindergarten, as two elementary teachers identified learning gaps in this age group before the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010. TK's origins in California are rooted in feedback from students and teachers. By maintaining this model of educational reform, we can improve TK programs by leveraging the experience and insights of those most affected: students and teachers.



### **Relevant Literature**

The California Department of Education (2021a) passed legislation that required the California Preschool Foundations and Frameworks in TK classrooms to promote practices central to high-quality ECE. TK teachers must build social-emotional competencies to better promote self-regulation and positive development over the course of these early years of development. While preschool teachers are not typically certified through university programs, TK educators must possess a bachelor's degree along with appropriate ECE units (D'Souza, 2021). Nevertheless, TK teachers often do not have the necessary tools to properly guide their young students to teach students self-confidence and cooperation, along with early academic skills. According to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2016), it is difficult to transition ECE to the school district system because most early childhood educators do not have the credentials necessary to teach in the TK/K-12 public school system.

Research by Fong (2016) and Silva (2016) suggests that ECE coursework coupled with multiple subject teaching credentials does not provide the necessary tools to implement DAPs. ECE training simply has not been a concentration for universities in preparing public school educators (Golchert, 2019).

Children not exposed to the DAPs in TK programs may ultimately suffer academically. Children who enter kindergarten at a later age are more prepared, cognitively ready, to learn and mature (Huang & Invernizzi, 2012). Younger children, on the other hand, do not have the necessary social skills, emotional regulation, and foundations of learning to gain success in classrooms developmentally appropriate for 5-year-olds (Denham et al., 2012; Longobardi & D'Alessandro, 2017). Golchert (2019) explains that detrimental results arise when teachers are not sufficiently prepared to teach.

The American Institutes for Research (2015) reports that 75% of TK classroom teachers enter the profession lacking appropriate pedagogical preparation. Their training does not often include information on early brain development, social-emotional competencies, and DAP. Manship et al. (2015) indicate that only 65% of teachers earned some units towards ECE or childhood development. Public school teachers may not be adequately prepared with training in ECE programs and may not understand how to meet the needs of a preschool-aged child.

These findings point to the need to foster communication and collaboration among TK teachers and early childhood educators to support the needs of the young learners. PD programs are an essential way to bridge the gap to provide the best learning environments for our youngest children.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The four principles identified of early learning and instruction are based on sources of knowledge from the ECE frameworks. The first is Developmentally

### *Enhancing Transitional Kindergarten Programs*

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Appropriate Practice (DAP) which was designed by NAEYC to promote a child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based and play-based approach to learning that is joyful, engaging, and fun (NAEYC, n.d.-a).

Second, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) early childhood educators often use the term SEL to refer to a range of skills that children will require to become kindergarten-ready. While teachers should not lose sight of the fact that SEL is a process of acquiring specific skills, not just skills themselves, it is important to keep this in mind (Zinsser et al., 2018). In the framework of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model, SEL promotes educational equity and excellence by creating authentic relationships between schools, families, and communities to create learning experiences.

The third principle is Early Intervention (EI), which is a system of support provided to young children during their formative years. The Initial Practice-Based Professional Standards for Early Interventionists/Early Childhood Special Educators 2020 are the first set of guidelines explicitly focusing on preparing early intervention/early childhood special educators professionals (Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2022a).

A fourth principle pertains to Dual Language Learning (DLL) who speak a language in addition to English or are learning a second language. Based on The Early Language Development Standards theoretical framework, these standards describe a developmentally appropriate academic, instructional, and social language for children from 2.5 to 5.5 years old (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, 2022).

### **Methodology**

In this study, both kindergarten and TK teachers were surveyed to gain a broader perspective on early learning and instructional practices in public schools. An overview of the methodology used to address the following research questions:

RQ1A) To what extent are TK and Kindergarten teachers knowledgeable and confident with the four core principles of early learning and instruction identified in Chapter 2. And, do TK and Kindergarten teachers believe these principles are relevant to their classroom instruction?

RQ1B) Does the educational background and experience of TK and Kindergarten teachers affect their assessments of teachers' knowledge, confidence, and relevance?

RO2A) To what extent are elementary school administrators knowledgeable and confident with these core principles of early learning and instruction? And, do they believe these principles are relevant to their role as elementary school administrators?

RQ2B) Do elementary school administrators' perspectives align with those of TK and Kindergarten teachers?

RQ3) How can teachers and administrators support early learning and instruction in TK and Kindergarten classrooms? What are the affordances and constraints?

Carefully designed surveys were disseminated among TK and K teachers, as well as elementary school administrators, to bring varying perspectives on the value of ECE principles in TK and K classrooms (Macnaghten & Myers, 2006). The survey also collected self-evaluations of teaching efficacy to gain a deeper understanding of educators' knowledge and experiences. The survey concluded with space to discuss affordances and constraints around adopting ECE principles in TK programming.

Participant responses were recorded online using Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool. To better understand the perspectives of educators in TK and ECE in public schools, the survey asked participants to rate what they know and value about the ECE principles identified above. The survey also asked participants to reflect on the affordances and constraints of supporting high-quality early childhood instruction in TK. To understand values, affordances, and constraints at a systems level, similar questions were asked of K-8 administrators about their value of ECE.

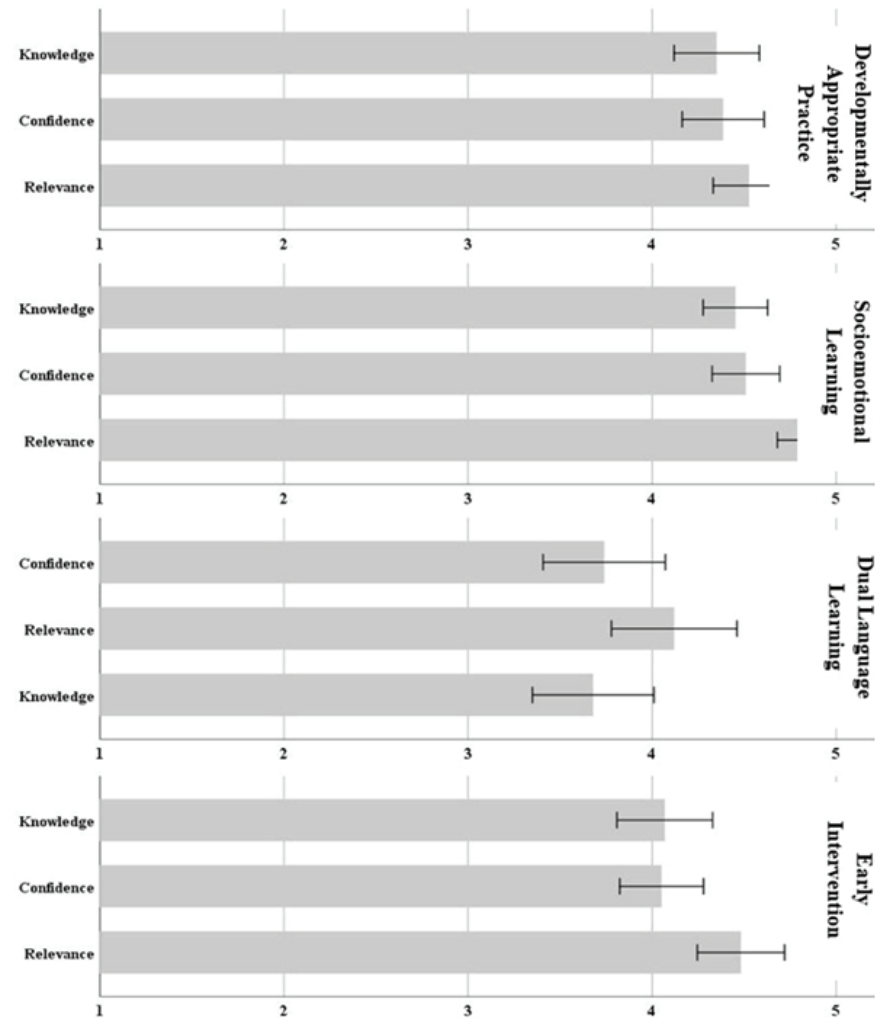
### **Overview of the Results**

This study addressed three research questions (RQs) concerning the knowledge, confidence, and relevance of core instructional principles—DAP, SEL, DLL, and EI—among Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and kindergarten teachers and administrators.

RQ1A explored teachers' self-assessments. Findings indicated that while teachers generally felt knowledgeable and confident about DAP, Play-Based Learning, and SEL, they consistently rated their knowledge and confidence lower in supporting DLL. SEL emerged as the most relevant to their classroom instruction, with teachers showing the highest confidence in implementing it, recognizing its critical role in positive long-term outcomes for students. RQ1B examined how these ratings correlate with teachers' educational background and experience. The analysis revealed that educational background had little impact on teachers' ratings of knowledge, confidence, or relevance. Instead, experience played a more significant role, particularly in Early Intervention, where experienced teachers felt better prepared and confident. Figure 1 accurately depicts the teacher responses (see Figure 1).

RQ2A focused on administrators' confidence in supporting these instructional principles. Administrators expressed confidence in supporting SEL and Early Intervention but acknowledged less knowledge and support capability for DAP, suggesting a need for further training. Like teachers, they found DLL to be the least relevant, indicating a shared area of concern. RQ2B compared perspectives between teachers and administrators. Teachers showed higher knowledge and confidence in DAP than administrators, who, despite their higher confidence in SEL, reported challenges in supporting developmental delays. Both groups agreed on the need for additional classroom aides and support services, but administrators also stressed the importance of instructional coaches. Figure 2 displays the responses of administrators based on the principles (see Figure 2).

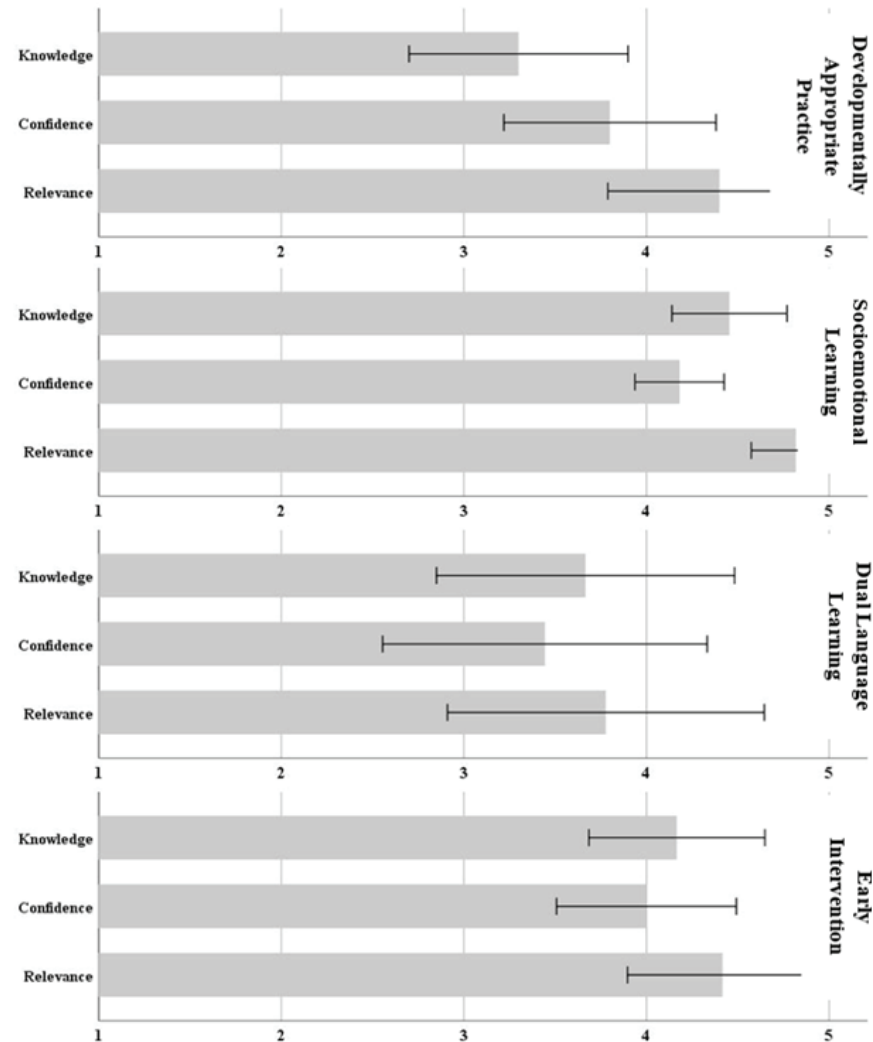
**Figure 1**  
*Teacher Participant Responses*



RQ3 identified affordances for implementing these principles. Teachers and administrators both highlighted the need for developmentally appropriate curricula, additional classroom support, and ongoing, meaningful professional development (PD). Teachers emphasized the importance of SEL-focused PD, while administrators sought PD to better understand the TK curriculum and expectations. Table 1 describes the resources and supports needed (see Table 1).

As shown in Table 2, teachers and administrators responded to the constraints

**Figure 2**  
*Administrator Participant Responses*



that they are experiencing to provide high-quality ECE. These are the specific factors and barriers that interfere with effective instruction within their TK and kindergarten classrooms. Table 2 describes the factors and barriers that interfere with instruction (see Table 2).

## *Enhancing Transitional Kindergarten Programs*

**Table 1**

***Resources and Supports Needed to Provide Effective Instruction in TK/K Classrooms***

<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Administrators</b>	<b>Example</b>
<i>Curriculum</i> (n=14) Developmentally appropriate  Play-based instruction Manipulatives and materials Hands-on lessons	Classroom materials such as manipulatives, fine motor activities, art supplies, realia, etc.	<i>Curriculum</i> (n=2) Quality curriculum and materials  TK based curriculum	Continued quality curriculum for TK.
<i>Instructional Support/ Aide</i> (n=9) Teacher assistants  Adult support and supervision Administrative support	A full-time classroom aide would be helpful so I could pull more small groups for targeted instruction throughout the day.	<i>Instructional Support/ Aide</i> (n=3) Intervention support  Instructional coaches	Resource teacher with early elementary instruction experience.
<i>Classroom and Facilities</i> (n=3)  Fewer students per classroom Additional classroom space Bathrooms inside the classroom	Smaller class size, classrooms that are equipped with bathrooms, larger classrooms.	<i>Classroom and Facilities</i> (n=1)  Fewer students per classroom	Smaller class size.
<i>Professional Development</i> (n=4)  Training and PD for TK teachers	SEL ongoing training and play- based ongoing training.	<i>Professional Development</i> (n=3)  Targeted PD's to support TK Insight on curriculum	Honestly, it comes down to funds to attend training and support in implementing the strategies.
<i>Time</i> (n=2)  Time for collaboration Time for effective implementation	Time and collaboration with other colleagues who have early childhood training.	<i>Time</i> (n=2)  Time for implementation	As all educators know, time is always a huge issue [to implement new teaching strategies].
<i>Other</i> (n=5)  Additional support services	More access to counseling and speech services... it's hard to get students tested and qualified for services in a timely manner.	<i>Other</i> (n=3)  Additional support services Opportunities for collaboration	Working on an island or silo is always difficult. Having more than a single TK section (teacher) to collaborate with would be a benefit.
<i>COVID</i> (n=2)  Relief from pandemic restrictions	Covid restrictions to be lifted enough for me to allow my students to work and play together.	<i>COVID</i> (n=1)  Support for teacher well-being	The last two years have put a strain on me as well as my teachers.

**Table 2**  
**Factors and Barriers that Interfere with Effective Instruction in TK/K Classrooms**

Teachers	Example	Administrators	Example
<i>Class Size</i> (n=5)		<i>Class Size</i> (n=4)	Better space for our TK/K students to play and learn.
Too many students		Need more space in classrooms	
Lack of classroom space	Lack of space and set up in various classrooms can be a real issue.	Too many students per classroom	
<i>Time</i> (n=5)	Never given any time for significant planning.	<i>Time</i> (n=4)	The number of TK and K instructional minutes make it difficult to get all the necessary instructions finished before students school day ends.
Not enough planning time		Half day schedules	
Restrictive scheduling		Requirements for instructional minutes	
<i>Budget</i> (n=4)	Need more funding for TK	<i>Budget</i> (n=2)	Lack of funding.
Lack of funding for TK		Lack of funding for TK	
<i>Staffing</i> (n=2)	Our students are young... (bathroom accidents, nurse visits, tying shoes)... we would benefit by having an aide all day in our classroom.	<i>Staffing</i> (n=1)	Only one T/K teacher at site.
Need for teacher aides		Singleton TK teachers	
Need for adult support supervision			
<i>Other</i> (n=5)	Not enough support on curriculum.	<i>Other</i> (n=1)	School unions.
Need for curricular support		Teacher unions	
<i>Expectations</i> (n= 8)	Lack of education in the community about what TK is and a hyper focus on academics over need.		
Parent/community expectations			
Lack of clarity on outcomes	other ar		

### Conclusion

Overall, the study underscores the critical role of experience, the need for targeted PD, and the importance of adequate support in enhancing early childhood education, aligning with each RQ's focus. With the creation of a new grade level in California's public-school system, it is important to consider how young 4-year-olds will be supported through play-based, developmentally appropriate learning. At present, TK is offered in a number of public schools throughout California and enrollment is expected to increase at a rapid rate over the next few years such that all 4-year-olds in the state will be eligible to participate. TK is designed to provide students with a high-quality early learning experience with a highly qualified teacher

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### *Enhancing Transitional Kindergarten Programs*

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who specializes in ECE. Considering the increased expansion rate, pre-service teachers, current TK, and kindergarten teachers, as well as administrators will need to be able to support students. To meet the child's holistic needs, TK will need to embrace DAPs, SEL, Dual Language support, and Early Intervention. To learn and apply these principles to students appropriately, educators and administrators are seeking additional support. Findings from this line of work can help increase stakeholder awareness of the importance of TK as a mechanism for universal access to developmentally appropriate, high-quality early learning and instruction in California.

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## **Teacher Self-Care Practices for Excellence in the Classroom**

**Joanne M. Van Boxtel & Rebecca Spady**

### **Abstract**

Many teachers report high levels of stress. To address this, strategies for self-care practices have been suggested in the literature (Harper, 2020; Lesh, 2020, Mansfield et al., 2016; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). The research examines self-care practices of both K-12 teacher educators and higher education faculty through an exploratory, mixed-methods approach. Literature recommendations were drawn from common self-care practices and created a survey with Likert scale items and open-ended, qualitative responses. Forty educators in K-12 and higher education participated. Results and themes emerging from this mixed-methods study showed the domains of self-care that are attended to the most are self-awareness/emotional, physical, and relationships. It is important for teachers to learn about and implement self-care strategies in their professional and personal lives.

*Keywords:* teacher-self care; teacher resilience

### **Introduction**

The necessity for teacher self-care has blossomed in recent years since COVID. In addition, teaching had been identified as one of the helping professions (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014) and dedicated educators invest their full selves on behalf

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of their students in the form of cognitive, mental, physical, spiritual, and social-emotional energy, not to mention financial resources. Though there is great joy in giving of ourselves to see our students reach their full potential, it does not come without a cost. Teacher shortages continue to persist with a main contributor being teacher attrition, with both younger and older teachers leaving the profession, particularly those serving in the highest need schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). With these challenges, it is critical to be proactive in teacher preparation and ensure teacher candidates have the tools necessary to develop resilience and attend to their wellbeing through self-care practices. Engaging in self-care practices can guard against burnout and it is a way to ensure we persist in the teaching profession as our best selves so we can be most effective and present for our students, especially for students who need skilled and compassionate teachers.

Spady and Van Boxtel (2024) were interested in exploring the self-care practices of both K-12 teacher educators and higher education faculty for the purpose of both understanding the frequency with which educators engage in recommended teacher self-care practices and to discover any differences between K-12 teachers and higher education faculty. Our ultimate aim was to highlight self-care practices recommended by seasoned educators as a way to illuminate teacher voice and share wisdom with new and veteran educators. Our research questions were:

- (1) What practices do K-12 teachers and higher education faculty use for self-care?
- (2) What similarities & differences exist in self-care practices between K-12 teachers and higher education faculty?

According to Marintez et al, 2021, self-care is “the ability to care for oneself through awareness, self-control, and self-reliance in order to achieve, maintain, or promote optimal health and well-being” (para. 42). Self-care is intentionally building ourselves up to become resilient and thrive as educators.

### **Literature Review**

In a Gallup Poll, Marken and Agrawal (2022) note, K-12 education workers reported the highest level of burnout of 14 industries in the United States with 44% of educators reporting feeling burned out at work. Teacher shortages continue to persist, with a main element being attrition of teachers, particularly those working in the highest need schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). As a helping profession, the cultivation of self-care practices is recommended to address burnout (Lesh, 2020) while robust studies of resilience that examine this phenomenon holistically by looking at “lived in resilience” are also recommended (Boon, 2020).

Resilience allows teachers to maintain a work/life balance by utilizing motivation and social emotional competence as well as problem-solving and goal setting strategies (Mansfield et al., 2016). Teacher self-reported resilience has been linked to well-being and teacher effectiveness (Boon, 2020). Preservice teachers have suc-

cessfully learned about developing resilience through a research-based framework is BRiTE which comprises the themes of Building resilience; Relationships such as support networks and working collaboratively; Well-being through practices like time management; Motivation; and Emotions of optimism, empathy, hope, humor, mindfulness, and more (Mansfield et al., 2016, Figure 15.2).

Self-assessments of self-care practices exist in the literature. One self-assessment proposed for music educators examined six domains including physical, mental, emotional, academic/professional, social and spiritual (Kuebel, 2019). Individual items of the adapted self-assessment proposed by Kuebel (2019) identify explicit self-care practices linked to the domain and respondents score themselves on a scale from frequently to never. Results promote self-reflection and indicate areas of self-care strengths and challenges and serve as a guide for a self-care plan. As Collier (2024) notes, “When we take time to nurture ourselves, we feel more self-kindness” (para. 19). Additionally, Collier states, “This allows us to be more present for our students and colleagues, with reasonable expectations of ourselves. It also models for students how they can take care of themselves, which is... critical to their social and emotional growth” (para. 19). While it is normal practice for educators to reflect on their teaching practice, it is important to also reflect on our self-care practices as well. Kise and Holm (2022) remind us that a work/life balance is a continuous journey and not a single destination.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework guiding our investigation of teacher self-care is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow’s motivational theory (Maslow, 1943) comprises five tiers within a hierarchical leveled pyramid. Once the needs in the lower level are fulfilled, a person can move towards the next highest level to fulfill and so on. The five tiers from lowest to highest are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Poston, 2009). “In regards to teachers, the basic needs of self-care need to be in effect in order to move up the hierarchy” (Leahy & Wolfe, 2021, p. 15) There are times when a teacher’s daily tasks can feel overwhelming, which can keep them from progressing to the next tier. Drawing from Maslow’s hierarchy, we assert that when teachers are practicing self-care and meeting their needs, they are more capable of helping their students. It is similar to what we experience when flying in an airplane. If the masks are needed, we are instructed to place the masks on ourselves before placing them on a child. This is true with teacher self-care as well.

### **Methodology**

This investigation was exploratory in nature as we were interested in the frequency with which educators routinely practice or do not practice self-care and we were interested in discovering any self-care practices that educators have found to be

effective that may not appear within literature of teacher self-care. We determined that a mixed-methods approach would be ideal in gathering more comprehensive data to answer our research questions. We analyzed quantitative using descriptive statistics including frequencies, mean, and standard deviation. We performed our qualitative analysis using domain and content analysis.

### **Participants**

Our participants were recruited via a blend of convenience and snowball sampling beginning with educators within the professional and personal networks of the researchers. Participants received an email link to an anonymous survey that required consent before allowing the participant to respond to the 29 three-point Likert scale and six open-ended teacher self-care survey items. Participants' identities were protected as they were not requested. We had a total of 40 K-12 and IHE participants. Forty-four percent of respondents taught elementary; 17% taught middle school, 15 % taught high school, 15% taught in a special education setting, and nine percent taught in higher education; 33 taught in public schools and seven taught in private. Participants identified as male at 21% and female at 79%. The majority of participants were new teachers with total years of teaching experience as follows: 50% at 0-5 years; 35% at 5-20 years; and 15% at 20 years or more.

### **Survey**

Using Qualtrics, the researchers created a 29-item survey with a mix of quantitative Likert scale responses ( $n=30$ ) and six open-ended responses that were drawn from literature on self-care for the helping professions and teacher self-care. Domains of the survey were self-awareness/emotional self-care; psychological self-care; relationship self-care; spiritual self-care; workplace and professional self-care (ReachOut Schools, 2018; Skovholt, & Trotter-Mathison, 2014).

Likert scale items with specific, explicit examples of teacher self-care practice aligned to the domain were presented and participants were asked to rate themselves using a simple 3-point rating. Participants were asked to self-assess the frequency with which they engaged in a specific self-care practice. Ratings options were: "I do this practice regularly," "I do this practice sometimes," and "I do not do this practice." For qualitative items, respondents were asked to reflect on the domains of self-care and share any other ways they practiced teacher self-care. They were presented with a statement about each of the six domains of self-care along with an explanatory example. For example, in the domain of emotional self-care, the prompt read *Self-awareness/Emotional self-care: being aware of your feelings and promoting positive emotions in yourself*.

### **Data Analysis**

We performed our analysis in two phases beginning with quantitative results, followed by qualitative results. Using descriptive statistics for the quantitative results, we examined each of the 29 Likert scale items and first grouped the questions with specific self-care practices according to the self-care domains to which they were aligned. For each item, we combined the total number of participants rating it as “practiced regularly” and “practiced sometimes” to get a combined raw score. We then ranked the total scores for the item subset in order and calculated the percentage from the set. For example, within the domain of relational self-care practices, there were four items (e.g., family time, time with friends, time with neighbors/church, social activities) with total combined raw scores ranging from 39-33. We then calculated a percentage for each item based on the total combined raw score out of the total number of participants. For example, from the set previously explained, 98% (n=39) of 40 participants spend time with family as a self-care practice. Finally, we then jointly ranked the total percentages to see which practices bubbled to the top over a threshold of 80% or higher.

For the qualitative results, we used an open, in vivo coding process using key words from the respondents to create minor themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Each researcher analyzed the results separately by creating tables of the most frequently occurring examples of self-care practices provided. We then compared our individual tables and synthesized findings into a master table. We triangulated our themes by returning to the literature on self-care practices and overarching domains to arrive at our final major themes.

### **Results**

The researchers used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative item results. No significant differences were evident within the survey results between K-12 teachers and higher education faculty. Trends from the quantitative data indicate that overall educators regularly or sometimes engage in self-care practices across the six domains of self-awareness/emotional self-care; psychological self-care; relationship self-care; spiritual self-care; workplace and professional self-care. Eight self-care practices rose to the top at the “regularly” level for most participants including embracing vulnerability, with 100% of participants practicing it regularly followed by the close second highest practice of reflection at 90%. In terms of practices “not practiced”, three practices were rated the least frequently. Those practices were: keeping a gratitude journal (63%), a self-care management plan (60%), and therapy (60%). A summary of the most and least frequent practices is provided in Table 1.

Qualitative data indicated other specific self-care practices that educators engage in that were not reflected in the quantitative results. Some participants expressed a desire to be more intentional about engaging in self-care practices across

all domains. A summary of the qualitative teacher self-care themes is provided in Table 2.

An interesting finding we discovered in relation to the domain of workplace and professional self-care is that the majority of practicing teachers believe that not taking work home and not responding to emails outside of non-work hours helps them to maintain a healthy work/life balance. In terms of the domain of relationships, many participants believe that taking the time to spend with their significant other, family, and friends as well as focusing on positive relationships helps them to ensure the relationships in their lives are enriching, positive, and supportive. For example, one educator explained: *“I was taking out my work stress on my relationships at the start of the year and as I learned to lean into my self-care and leave work at work it allowed me to be fully invested in my relationships and that allows my relationships to continue to thrive.”* Another educator indicated that ensuring relationships are enriching, positive, and supportive which means: *“Investing in one-on-one relationships in addition to group settings. Allowing myself to be extroverted when I am feeling drained from work.”*

**Table 1**  
**Highest Rated and Least Rated Teacher Self-Care Practices**

<i>Regularly Practiced</i>	<i>Not Practiced</i>
Embracing vulnerability (100%)	Gratitude journal (63%)
Reflection (98%)	Self-management plan (60%)
Family time (98%)	Therapy (60%)
Pedagogical improvement & collaboration (98%)	
Prioritizing (98%)	
Proper diet (93%)	
School confidant (93%)	
Meditation/relaxation (88%)	

**Table 2**  
**Teacher Self-Care Practice Themes**

Reflecting  
Journaling  
Walking  
Intentional spiritual development (e.g., church, prayer, meditation, Bible study)  
Time with family/significant other  
Time with friends  
Eating better  
Therapy  
Setting healthy boundaries  
Community involvement/advocacy

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the study adds to the literature on self-care practices for educators. The findings also support previous research that has examined domains of teacher resilience and speaks to recommendations of how pre-service teachers should conceptualize teacher resilience as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon (Mansfield et al., 2016). Our study provides several practical teacher self-care practices that preservice and in-service educators can implement to guard against burnout and promote resilience in the helping profession of teaching.

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# **Formative Feedback on Behavior That Heals, Not Harms**

## **Embracing a Trauma-Informed Approach**

**Carrie R. Giboney Wall**

### **Introduction**

Classrooms across the U.S. are frequently spaces of transactional bartering between teachers and students, wherein teachers trade prizes and privileges for “good” student behavior and penalties and punishments for “bad” behavior. Although often well-meaning and temporarily effective, such behaviorist practices can do more harm than good, especially for trauma-impacted students. For example, rewarding “good” behavior can unintentionally communicate that relationships exist for personal benefit, instead of to build mutual trust and affection. Conversely, punitive behavioral feedback can communicate that inflicting pain is an appropriate problem-solving strategy and can result in “criminalizing” and re-traumatizing students. As such, educators must make a systemic change away from harmful behaviorist practices and toward a healing-centered trauma-informed approach (TIA).

Trauma is defined as the inability to respond in a healthy manner to acute stress “experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening” (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7). Trauma-impacted children live in a “constant

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state of emergency,” impacting their brain’s functioning (Alexander, 2019) and their success in school (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Although trauma is pervasive with more than two-thirds of children in the United States having experienced at least one traumatic event by age 16 (SAMHSA, 2014), it has often been ignored within schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frame from which this research operates is that educators “cannot teach the mind until [they] reach the heart” (Wolpow et al., 2016, p. 18). The trauma-informed approach (TIA) is “a safe, supportive community that enables both students and teachers to feel safe, build caring relationships, regulate their feelings and behavior, as well as learn” (Alexander, 2019, p. 86). It shifts the focus from “what’s wrong with you,” to “what happened to you” (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014, p. 2), seeking to minimize harm and maximize learning and healing. The TIA emphasizes five core components as described throughout the literature: (a) supportive relationships, (b) social-emotional learning, (c) shared agency and control, (d) student self-regulation, and (e) structure and stability within the classroom.

This study’s purpose was to investigate two research questions: (1) How have students exhibited the impact of trauma in classrooms? and (2) How have teachers’ instruction, classroom management, and student support changed as a result of incorporating a TIA? Findings garnered from this study will inform educator practices as they seek to disrupt harmful discipline strategies and embrace healing-centered ones. Table 1 juxtaposes the behaviorist approach with the trauma-informed approach to highlight key differences. Although research has documented the power of a TIA, few studies have highlighted educators’ perspectives as this one has.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study investigated educators’ experiences with trauma-impacted students and the ways the focal school took a holistic approach to addressing trauma and fostering resilience. The focal school is a California Title 1 public elementary school in which approximately 75% of the students are considered economically-challenged and many are trauma-impacted. The school enrolls approximately 270 students—85% of whom classify themselves as Latinx. In response to what Principal Kristen perceived as students’ “biggest learning-related issue,” the school has embraced a TIA.

Questionnaire and interview data from teachers at the school centered on how students manifested the impact of trauma and how participants incorporated a TIA into instruction and classroom management. Of 15 teachers at the school, 13 agreed to complete the questionnaire along with the principal and the community liaison.

Nine of those participants also agreed to a one-hour interview. All participants were asked to sign a consent form indicating their agreement to participate in the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to protect their anonymity. The data were sorted according to the two research questions and read multiple times looking for recurring articulations among the participants. Codes used to sort and synthesize the data were tested against the data and then dropped, refined, or retained. During this process of “identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” (Patton, 1990, p. 381) through content analysis, themes emerged.

**Table I**  
**Comparison of the Traditional Behaviorist Approach**  
**with the Trauma-Informed Approach (TIA)**

<i>Traditional Behaviorist Approach</i>	<i>Trauma-Informed Approach</i>
Views students’ challenging behaviors as the result of individual deficits that are purposeful and personal.	Views students’ challenging behaviors as automatic responses to stress and trauma.
Wonders, “What’s wrong with you?” and “How do I stop this challenging behavior?”	Wonders, “What happened to you?” and “What is this behavior telling me about this child?”
Sees the student as intentionally <i>giving</i> a hard time and trying to <i>be</i> a problem.	Sees the student as one who is <i>having</i> a hard time and trying to <i>solve</i> a problem.
Focuses on changing the student to “fix” the problem.	Focuses on changing the environment to heal the student.
Gives “one-size-fits all” consequences to punish behavior and cultivate obedience.	Tailors approach to address individual differences to work through behavior.
Adheres “punishment paradigm” of withdrawing privileges, coercion, and shaming.	Implements positive discipline that focuses on teaching and reinforcing prosocial behaviors.
Talks <i>at</i> students and administers punishments <i>to</i> them.	Talks and problem solves <i>with</i> students by sharing agency in problem-solving.
Often excludes students from peers which exacerbates feelings of isolation and diminishes opportunities to build social skills.	Promotes communal responsibility by harnessing the positive impact of peer support in improving prosocial behavior.
Regulates student behavior by imposing sanctions by outside forces after behavioral infraction.	Equips the child to identify their triggers and dysregulation, self-regulate, and self-advocate for their needs before the situation escalates.

## **Findings**

### ***Impact of Trauma at School***

Trauma is pervasive at the focal school. Carol explained, “It would be harder to find kids here who *don’t* have 4 or 5 ACEs, rather than look for kids who do.” Not only do the students experience food insecurity, fatigue, unmet medical needs, crowded living conditions, and/or domestic violence, but their family members often fear deportation, struggle with substance-abuse, or are incarcerated. Academically, participants noticed an inability to focus, regression of knowledge, and difficulty meeting benchmarks and long-term goals. Emotionally, anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, and emotional hunger often led to tantrums, hitting, destroying property, and/or withdrawal.

### ***Ways Instruction, Management, and Student Support Changed***

The data revealed five themes among the ways participants embraced a TIA.

**Social-emotional learning.** Realizing that it is best to provide formative feedback and teach healthy behaviors instead of merely punishing undesirable ones, the school infused “The 7 Habits of Happy Kids” (Covey, 2008) throughout their curriculum. The habits are: (1) be proactive, (2) begin with the end in mind, (3) work first, then play, (4) think win-win, (5) listen before you talk, (6) creatively cooperate to problem solve, and (7) cultivate life balance. This explicit instruction on problem-solving and prosocial skills empowered students to break the cycle of relational dysfunction, improve social competency, and develop their potential.

**Growth mindset.** Almost every participant spoke of the school’s emphasis on a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) that focuses on improvement over achievement. Because success is traditionally measured by meeting proficiency goals, students used to give up because the goals were too lofty. Nina explained, “Holding our students to a goal that’s impossible to reach is actually quite harmful to them. Now, we celebrate their steps along the way.” Using pre- and post-tests provided differentiated formative feedback to help students quantitatively capture their progress (instead of whether they passed or failed) and motivated them to continue to persist.

**Shared control.** Many participants talked about differentiating feedback on student behavior as well as shifting from an authoritarian approach to an authoritative one that extends choice. Initially, Helen tried to “fix” poor behavior with a prize or punishment and Bruce battled a student to sit in his chair instead of hiding under his desk. By taking a TIA, Helen now focuses on relationships over reproach and Bruce keeps teaching when students go under their desks, assuming they will listen and learn better when they feel safer.

**Proactive and prompt responses.** Physical TIA supports mentioned by par-

ticipants included predictable structures, frequent “brain breaks,” snacks, student naps, walks outside, and sensory-calming strategies like dimming lights or playing music. Aware of the research on emotional escalation, participants responded quickly both to whole-group behaviors as well as individual ones. Collaboratively, Eric, Sue, and Bruce swiftly put an end to “red flag” trends such as student cutting or skipping class. Individually, teachers identified student triggers, acted quickly to avoid escalation, and taught self-regulation. For example, when anxious, Carol’s student handed her a card and Helen’s student made a sign-language “b” for “break” in an effort to self-advocate for their needs.

**Strong relationships.** At the core of the focal school was relationships that emphasized “conversation over consequence.” Student-student relationships were fostered by morning class meetings, affirmation times, and enforcing “The 7 Habits of Happy Kids” prosocial skills. Participants emphasized the importance of Monday class meetings since students were often “fully immersed in trauma” over the weekend. Student-teacher-staff relationships were also critical. Carol spoke of her student’s special connection with the custodian and allowed him to “go clean with Mr. Oscar” when he was feeling dysregulated. She observed, “It’s really about being with someone who cares about him and relationship-building.”

A collaborative teacher-teacher relational network was also cultivated at the focal school. Group texts comprised of grade-level teachers not only helped teachers document areas of concern, but also receive personal support throughout the day. Participants admitted that “it’s OK for it to not be going right” and found comfort in realizing “it’s not me,” but rather the child who was having a difficult time.

Student-parent relationships were also strengthened through a variety of programs organized by Maria, the Community Liaison. Adult enrichment programs such as English as a second language (ESL) classes, parenting seminars, mental health workshops, and classes on navigating the school system were well-attended. Three hundred parents district-wide attended a recent Saturday program designed to inspire parents to support their child’s academic success.

### **Discussion and Implications**

A foundational implication of this work is the importance of making a systemic change away from one-size-fits-all behaviorist models of punishment that have the potential to re-traumatize children and toward a more differentiated, holistic model that simultaneously heals and educates. When educators alter their assumptions of causes of difficult behavior from students trying to *be* a problem, to trying to *solve* a problem; they are less likely to stigmatize, “criminalize,” and/or re-traumatize students.

Second, although minimizing harm is a beginning, it is not enough. Educators must also provide contextualized, formative feedback to ignite the healing process. These data underscore the positive impact of trauma-informed practices

like cultivating caring relationships, sharing agency, facilitating social-emotional learning, addressing issues promptly, and embracing a growth mindset. Central to the effectiveness of a TIA is school-wide buy-in at all levels including administrators, teachers, instructional aides, front office staff, and custodians like Oscar. As the number of trauma-impacted students in the U.S. continues to grow, so should educators' knowledge of best practices that not only disrupt the cycle of trauma, but also enhance students' ability and potential to heal, succeed in school, and resiliently move forward.

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## **Rethinking Traditional Assessment**

**Shanna Del Rosario & Marni Fisher**

### **Abstract**

This practice-focused article explores the limitations of traditional testing methods, particularly multiple-choice assessments, in fostering critical thinking among students. Advocating for a shift towards an inductive teaching approach engages students in exploring factual examples, looking for patterns, and forming generalizations. By guiding students through the inquiry cycle—from investigating case studies to forming generalizations—we can promote deeper learning and help students articulate the relationship among key concepts. This approach not only enhances critical thinking but also empowers students to construct their own understanding, moving beyond memorization to achieve meaningful, lifelong learning while sharpening critical thinking skills.

*Keywords:* Inductive teaching, elementary education

### **Introduction**

Traditional testing methods are missing the mark in encouraging students to think critically. When we only assess using multiple choice tests we are testing a student's ability to memorize facts and not asking them to think deeply about their learning. Assessments that have students apply their learning require students to think deeply. However, if we truly want to promote critical thinking, then an

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inductive approach is needed where we lead students through a series of learning engagements where they uncover important concepts, look for patterns in information and processes, and ultimately state how concepts are related. When we lead students to construct the big idea rather than telling it to them, students must think deeply about their learning.

#### **Purpose/Objectives**

It is well established that common formative assessments require multiple measures (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006). Furthermore, both constructivism (Tobin, et al., 1994) and project-based learning take into consideration the importance of knowledge construction (Weshah, 2012). This suggests the importance of advocating for an inductive approach to teaching, where students are guided to understand concepts and discover relationships among concepts on their own.

#### **Point of View: The Third Grade Teacher**

I am currently a third grade teacher. However, in my 14 years as an educator, I have taught internationally in Beijing, China, and Doha, Qatar. I also have experience with Understanding by Design (UBD), International Baccalaureate, Primary Years Program, Project Based Learning, and Universal Design for Learning, and have certificates in the Erikson and Lanning Concept Based Curriculum as an instruction trainer.

Applying both knowledge and experiences, I move through an inquiry cycle with my students in order to help them build from facts and topics to concepts and ultimately state how key concepts in a discipline are related.

#### **Rethinking Traditional Assessment**

As explained by Erickson and Lanning (2014), traditional curriculum, and assessments encourage rote memorization in a breadth, not depth, model. This results in two dimensional learning on a vast plane of skills and facts without any depth. This is reminiscent of the patterns of standards-based instruction under No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) where the breadth of curriculum had little time for deeper learning or engagement with its push toward high stakes testing and rote memorization. Furthermore, the high stakes testing push affected public perceptions of teachers (Tye, 2000), blaming student failure on teachers while removing ownership of learning from parents and students (Apple, 2006), contributing to the de-professionalization of teachers, which was already a problem affecting the deep structures of education (Tye, 2000). Furthermore, according to Au (2011), “When we look at the research on how high-stakes testing is affecting US classroom practises [sic], it becomes quite clear that such testing is promoting the standardization of teaching that both disempowers and deskills teachers” (30).



Common core (CCSSSO & NGA Center, 2010) attempted to integrate higher level thinking skills (Bloom, 1956). However, curriculum programs provided by publishing companies often change the terms but not the structures, falling back into traditional assessments that encourage rote memorization. This is easy to grade and see if students can give definitions and recall information, but it does not provide an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts or state how concepts within a discipline are connected. Allowing curriculum to follow the breadth, not depth, model as educators teach skills and concepts does not give students the opportunity to demonstrate deeper understanding.

Countering rote learning, Elliot Eisner (2002) argued that education should engage students in meaningful conversations where they can explore complex questions, which involves “encoding and decoding meaning” (p. 581), developing advanced thinking skills (Fisher et al., 2015), and solving challenging, “wicked problems” (Rittel & Weber, 1972). A curriculum fueled by student engagement enables in-depth exploration of knowledge (Eisner, 2002), aligning with the principles of problem-based learning (Ontario School Library Association, 2010). Students should have ownership of their learning and be intrinsically motivated (Eisner, 2002; Fisher et al., 2015), fostering an environment that values and amplifies student voice (Eisner, 2002; hooks, 1994). This approach to learning also allows for differentiation to address individual student needs (Eisner, 2002). Ultimately, such an education creates learning experiences that extend beyond the school setting and into real-life contexts (Eisner, 2002).

A concept based inquiry model, however, builds three dimensions of understanding as students are required to demonstrate their understanding of facts and skills in addition to stating how concepts work together in a statement of generalization. (Erickson & Lanning, 2014; Erickson et al., 2017). Working beyond curriculum, the teacher is empowered and skilled.

### **Understanding Inquiry**

Inquiry is not just students choosing what they want to learn about and, thus, having no real direction that may not necessarily cover the educational standards. This is not inquiry, it is discovery learning. Teaching, however, lies on a continuum, and it is up to teachers to use the model of instruction that best fits with the goal.

Inquiry can still be very teacher guided as we get students to develop an understanding of the chosen concepts and skills. Part of this is including direct instruction and concept formation, especially during the initial stages of the learning/unit. Furthermore, as Marschall and French (2018) explain, the teaching continuum ranges from structures, with direct instruction at one end, moving through structured inquiry, guided inquiry, and open inquiry to discovery learning on the far end where there is more student agency and less teacher centered direction, which aligns with Dewey’s (2016) suggested student-centered, teacher guided model of instruction;.

### **Key Elements of Practice**

In teaching, using a variety of learning strategies engages students and moves them through the inquiry process. Furthermore, effective feedback compliments this by helping students organize their learning and ultimately make generalizations where they can state a big idea explaining how key concepts in a discipline are related. It is also important to create a culture of reflection in the classroom, encouraging students to reflect on the feedback given on their assessments. Key practices to consider include: written feedback, promoting student agency, teaching parents, and utilizing concept based inquiry.

#### **Written Feedback**

When considering typical feedback, when students receive a basic score, something like “+4/5,” they may take a moment to look at the results--boast about it if they had a perfect score--then stuff it in their backpack. For a student, this type of score gives little feedback on how to improve, and, for a parent, it does not tell how to help their scholar or what the student’s struggles encompass.

A better model for feedback includes explicit notes on their work identifying where their thinking excelled, where their strategy went wrong, and ways to make corrections. Teaching students to look over these notes helps them own their learning and consider future strategies.

#### **Promoting Student Agency**

Prior to having students reflect on their own learning, it helps to model reflection. The example used in this classroom was how the teacher took photos of cakes during the Covid shut downs to track how her baking skills improved. This was an immediately interesting topic for students—because cake—but the pictures (See figure 1) also set a clear model for her to discuss key things she learned and next steps to explore. As a result of this modeling, students were able to build their own understanding of what reflection is.

**Figure 1**  
**Cake Reflection Images**



Next steps for promoting student agency then included using a Student Reflection form that prompts students to:

1. **Reflect:** What is something you did well?
2. **Choose:** What is something you want to improve next time?
3. **Act:** What steps will you take to improve?

It also includes teaching students how to understand and use rubrics to understand their successes and challenges.

### ***Teaching Parents How to Understand Feedback***

In teaching parents how to engage and understand feedback, there are two key practices. These included how: (1) parents were shown the differences in traditional and detailed feedback, and, (2) they examined the importance of modeling a goal.

The first step is sharing feedback strategies with parents. For example, at Back to School Night, parents were shown pictures of scores vs. pictures of paper with notes for students, and you could see the ah-has on their faces. Time in class to reflect on their results builds their metacognitive skills (Weshah, 2012), but it also encouraged parents to check student's toolkits once a week to read over comments on assessments with their scholars. This provides a second opportunity for students to look over their assignment and give parents an understanding of how their child is doing in class.

This type of teaching takes longer than simply marking a score, but there is a connection between feedback and student perception and learning (Can & Walker, 2011), and it makes re-teaching go more quickly. It helps to have some grading time built into the week or within a co-teaching model, since, like all reflective practices, feedback takes time.

The second step was modeling goals with parents. Through sharing the earlier cake model with parents at Back to School Night, the teacher was able to explain the importance of modeling for students how to work towards a goal. This included letting their children see their parents reflecting and continuing to work until they reach their goals. The goal could be anything; it's the practice of goal setting, reflecting, and moving forward that is beneficial for students to see. The teacher then follows this up with sharing a personal goal with both parents and students and reporting on the goal's progress throughout the school year.

### ***Concept Based Inquiry***

Having set the educational stages for written feedback, student agency, and supported parent knowledge, the question then becomes: How do we support students in connecting concepts? We go through the concept based inquiry cycle.

Students begin by engaging in the learning then they learn facts and skills

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during the focus phase. From there students investigate case studies chosen by teachers. This could include videos, articles, books, science experiments, math problems, etc.

Once students have had the opportunity to investigate many case studies, teachers then help students to organize their findings. Then, towards the end of the unit teachers help students to organize their thinking/findings from the case studies so they can make sense of how the concepts connect. After that students are then asked to think about the target concepts and explain how they are connected.

#### **Generalization/Transfer Phases**

Learning, as a process, means that students do not always understand the first time they see a concept. It is important to continue learning, hold small group conferences, and provide opportunities to refine thinking. This also helps to build perseverance and grit. This can include an opportunity to stress test, give an example of connection between concepts studied in the unit, make the generalization, and then continue the unit/project working towards the next generalization before finally returning to prior generalizations and checking to see if they still hold true. It is also imperative to include a variety of assessment opportunities and choose the method across the continuum of teaching to best fit the goal of the lesson (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006).

#### **Conclusion**

Traditional assessments, particularly multiple-choice tests, often prioritize memorization over critical thinking and deep understanding. To counter this, an inductive, inquiry-based approach is better for engaging students in discovery while recognizing patterns, relationships, and overarching concepts.

Constructive feedback is a crucial element for inductive learning, since it builds metacognition and personal growth, allowing students to reflect on their work, identify improvements, and set goals. Involving parents in understanding feedback further strengthens both instruction and accountability beyond the classroom.

Ultimately utilizing concept-based inquiry supports students in connecting isolated facts to broader ideas, enabling the transfer of knowledge across contexts, fostering critical thinking, student agency, and deeper, more transferable learning. This approach fosters trust in teachers' skills by allowing them to design, guide, and assess student learning beyond standardized methods while leveraging teachers' expertise to create meaningful learning experiences, adapt to diverse needs, and promote deep understanding—validating them as skilled professionals. In addition, inductive learning gives teachers the flexibility to adapt lessons in real-time, allowing them to make professional judgments that enhance student engagement and comprehension. This approach also validates the educator's personal reflection and growth while engaging in practices that enhance their skills as educational leaders.

Furthermore, moving away from a flat, standardized model, this approach values teachers' creativity and their capacity to cultivate critical thinking and higher-order skills, ultimately fostering a culture of trust, positioning teachers as the indispensable professionals they are for building students' intellectual and personal development.

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## **Project-Based Learning and Inclusion Feedback That Supports Growth for All Students**

**Ingrid Beaty, Danelle Tickel, Jeremy F. Cavallaro,  
Kelsey Wan, Robin Cerato, & Marni E. Fisher**

### **Abstract**

A leadership team at a K-8 charter school explains their school's research-based practices, which include their integration of adaptive leadership, project-based learning (PBL), professional learning communities (PLCs), and restorative justice to create an inclusive and effective learning environment. Adaptive leadership ensures that all voices, including traditionally minoritized ones, contribute to problem-solving. PBL immerses students in real-world challenges, building cognitive and metacognitive skills, while PLCs promote shared accountability and continuous professional growth. Restorative practices strengthen community connections, fostering an empowering atmosphere. Together, these approaches highlight the importance of inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment in preparing students for success in a diverse world.

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*Keywords:* Adaptive Leadership, Project-Based Learning, Professional Learning Communities, Restorative Practices

### **Introduction**

The intrusion of politics on education (Pinar, 2012) combined with the 2020 pandemic (Fisher et al., 2021) has created an era of rapid change and increasing complexity in education. This has resulted in a need for educational leaders and systems that can pivot quickly to address change as well as develop innovative frameworks and strategies essential for fostering effective learning environments. The benefits of a small charter school acting as its own Local Education Agency (LEA) is that, like a small school district, it can develop a culture that supports innovation and ideas while also maintaining standards of learning mastery. For this charter school's leadership team, adaptive leadership empowers educators and students alike to navigate challenges by promoting collaborative problem-solving and critical thinking. Integral to this paradigm is project-based learning (PBL), which not only promotes the development of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills but also engages learners in addressing real-world issues. To continue to develop as educators working to implement dynamic approaches, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide a supportive structure for continuous collaboration, reflection, and shared accountability in pursuit of high-quality student learning. This is aided by implementation of restorative practices that emphasize healing relationships and community connections while addressing behavioral challenges. Collectively, these structures underscore the significance of collaboration, inclusivity, and empowerment in promoting a transformative educational experience, ultimately preparing students to thrive in an interconnected and diverse world.

### **Point of View**

Leaders at a k-8 charter school were invited to discuss how a charter school integrates feedback within their unique educational model. The Executive Director of Education, who would be the equivalent of the charter's small district superintendent, as a school founder, embraces adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Laurie, 2003) as his primary leadership model. A person-oriented leader, he also set into place the original mission statement and charter, which established the k-8 charter as a project-based school.

The Elementary Director, who is the equivalent of a k-5 principal, has served with the charter school since the beginning, first as an educator, then a teacher leader modeling change, eventually promoting to elementary principal. An expert in the implementation of project-based learning, she has led the professional development and presented at several conferences on building project based learning connected to common core standards while also improving student learning. She has also been a foundational voice in the school's development of professional learning communities (PLCs).



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The Elementary Admin Associate, who is the equivalent of the k-5 assistant principal, was a teacher leader before moving into administration two years ago. Another foundational voice for developing the professional learning communities, she offers insight as both a recent elementary teacher-leader and as an educational leader on PLC development and maintenance, including restorative PLC circles and managing the multiple tiered student supports (MTSS) (CDE, 2023) in alignment with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (PBIS, 2023).

The Middle School Director, as the equivalent of a middle school principal, originally stepped in to temporarily fill a vacancy two years ago, then stayed permanently due to the strength of the leadership team and her passion for the school. Handed a program that had previously repeatedly been fragmented and disconnected, her task became re-unifying with the school so that middle school both maintained a sixth through eighth grade appropriate focus while also being part of the whole community. Additionally, she launched a more effective MTSS system while strengthening the middle school in both grade level and subject-specific collaboration.

The Director of Special Education has worked closely with past special education coordinators and directors, working with the leadership team to unify the school's vision for inclusion while also launching restorative practices. A key actor in the unification of the leadership team, she was involved in the first successful steps toward a unified school.

Special Projects is a unique leadership position. Originally brought into the school as part of a whole-school improvement project a decade ago, she continues to work with the school in various areas, depending on need, including research, systems development, leadership, and student support programs.

### **Key Elements of Practice**

Four key elements of practice were identified. These included the integration of adaptive leadership, the school's focus on project-based learning, the implementation of successful professional learning communities, and integrating restorative conversations in the PLCs.

#### ***Adaptive Leadership***

The school founder embraces an adaptive leadership style, which determined that hiring focused on individuals who are flexible learners, while also ensuring that the school could pivot quickly to address identified needs. Within this adaptive model, Heifetz and Laurie (2003) outline five steps to mobilize a team for adaptive work: (1) recognize adaptive challenges, (2) regulate distress by pacing the change, (3) "maintain disciplined attention" (sec. 3) on the core issues, (4) "give the work back to the people" (sec. 4) by creating a safe environment for the team to navigate conflict, and (5) safeguard the voices of all team members—including



unpopular and minority perspectives—while fostering “architects and explorers” (sec. 5).

Furthermore, solutions arise from the team’s “collective intelligence” (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p. 124) and direct others’ focus (Heifetz, 1994). In the context of education,

Leadership in education means mobilizing school, families, and communities to deal with some difficult issue—issues that people often prefer to sweep under the rug. The challenge of student achievement, health, and civic development generate real but thorny opportunities for each of us to demonstrate leadership every day in our roles as parents, teachers, administrators, or citizens in the community. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004, p. 33)

In addition to the foundational concepts of adaptive leadership, the literature highlights: the inclusion of adopting a person-centered approach (Kuluski et al., 2021), the importance of local context (Gallagher, 2009), fostering collaboration (Woolard, 2018), integrating adaptive leadership into civic learning and democratic engagement (Noble & Kniffin, 2021), and applying it in reconciliation processes for conflict resolution (Leigh, 2002). In terms of feedback, adaptive leadership protects all voices, especially those who are traditionally minoritized, unpopular, and in the community minorities, ensuring that all voices are part of managing problem solving.

### **Project-Based Learning**

In the early 1900s, progressive schools emerged that began shifting learning goals toward higher-order thinking and inquiry skills, positioning educators as facilitators rather than traditional instructors (Dewey, 1916; Weshah, 2012). This approach enabled students to develop broad knowledge, skills, and values, empowering them to become agents of positive change in their communities (Weshah, 2012).

More than 30 years ago, project-based learning (PBL) emerged as an alternative to conventional educational practices (Barrows, 2002). PBL is praised for enhancing students’ cognitive and meta-cognitive skills and for supporting knowledge retention (Weshah, 2012). It actively engages students by involving them in complex, relevant real-world challenges (Barrows, 2002). Barrows and Tamblyn (1980) defined PBL as learning driven by the pursuit of understanding or solving a problem, while Torp and Sage (1998) described it as focused, experiential learning around complex, real-world issues (Hill & Smith, 2005).

PBL supports a variety of teaching and learning strategies, with a strong emphasis on building both knowledge and skills (Weshah, 2012). The PBL process includes selecting content, skills, resources, problem statements, motivational activities, guiding questions, and evaluation methods (Weshah, 2012). This approach encourages natural inquiry and hands-on implementation, incorporating elements like authentic learning and maker spaces (Dewey, 1916). Additionally, a significant

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benefit of PBL is its inclusivity, making it adaptable for diverse student populations and interdisciplinary curricula (Weshah, 2012).

From the beginning, this school's foundational mission has been to integrate project based learning at all educational levels. The foundational charter identifies the effectiveness of project-based learning on not only academic achievement, positive attitude toward learning, use of higher-level cognitive skills, and higher performance scores, but also that:

the juxtaposition of these attitudes are best explained by J. Boaler in research comparing a school using a project-based approach to mathematics and a school using a more traditional approach... "Students taught with a more traditional, formal, didactic model developed an inert knowledge that they claimed was of no use to them in the real world." In contrast, "students taught with a more progressive, open, project-based model developed more flexible and useful forms of knowledge and were able to use this knowledge in a wide range of settings." (Cavallero & Fein, 2014, p. 22)

As such, this shift in thinking builds better connections between students, between students and teachers, and between teachers.

For students, the metacognitive aspects of project-based learning are also important keys for learning. Metacognitive questioning guides students toward a central question and ultimately toward effective problem-solving (Barrows, 2002; Ontario School Library Association (OSLA), 2010). These metacognitive skills are crucial for understanding the nature of the problem, choosing the most appropriate problem-solving strategy, translating mental concepts into visual representations, gathering information from relevant sources, and consistently monitoring and assessing potential solutions (Weshah, 2012). Students also learn how to give each other warm and cool feedback throughout the process (CLEE, 2024), develop an understanding of the importance of multiple revisions to create professional products that showcase their learning, and, ultimately, reflect on what they discovered, connecting their learning (Fisher et al., 2023).

### ***Professional Learning Communities***

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are built on four core principles: (1) prioritizing high-level student learning, (2) establishing a PLC framework to support this goal, (3) ensuring principal support to guide the process, and (4) recognizing the principal's essential role in facilitating and sustaining the community (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). From this foundation, establishing PLCs requires creating teams centered on learning, allowing time for collaboration, and structuring campus systems to support shared accountability for student learning (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). PLCs emphasize shared goals, collective accountability, and a results-focused approach. This includes identifying behaviors that contribute to positive outcomes and setting SMART goals to drive progress (DuFour & DuFour, 2012).

This process emphasizes shared goals, collective accountability, and a results-driven approach within PLCs, including identifying behaviors that lead to positive outcomes and implementing SMART goals (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). Van Meeuwen et al. (2020) proposed three primary concepts for PLCs: the professional learning community itself, the community of practice, and a focus on lesson study. These concepts are paired with elements of individual and collective learning—collaboration, reflection, feedback exchange, and experimentation; group dynamics—fostering mutual trust, collegial support, and social cohesion; and professional orientation—centering on a shared vision, responsibility, and learning for both students and teachers.

Individual and collective learning support a focus on change, whether through implementing change (Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Kohler-Evans et al., 2013), managing it (Edwards et al., 2021), or developing educator thinking (Owen, 2016; Vossen et al., 2020). Group dynamics enhance this approach by addressing teacher well-being (Webb et al., 2009). Lastly, professional orientation remains student-centered (DuFour & DuFour, 2012), aiming to improve efficacy (Battersby & Verdi, 2015), identify student needs (D’Ardenne et al., 2013; Kristmanson et al., 2011), support learning (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Damjanovic & Blank, 2018; Zhang et al., 2021), and build student agency (Robertson et al., 2020; Wennergren & Blossing, 2020).

In practice, there are four types of PLCs within the school. The Directors PLCs maintain the unity of the leadership team. The General Education PLCs integrate all teachers at each grade level, which revolves around 4-6 general education teachers and a grade level special education instructional facilitator. This also strategically includes the education specialist, who attend at least one grade level PLC each week, and may also include elective teachers, depending on the curriculum focus. The special education PLC meets weekly with an agenda built out of community input with a focus on their collective voice. There is also a “specials” PLC for elective teachers, which include the teachers for library, garden, art, PE, and music.

Every PLC creates space for feedback, since data on students, struggles, ideas, implementation of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, curriculum planning and project development are all common topics. Based on the purpose of each meeting, the PLCs follow different protocols to ensure that all topics are addressed and all voices are heard.

### **Restorative Conversations in PLCs**

Restorative justice, or restorative practices, focus on fostering social harmony within communities by healing relationships and strengthening connections (Boulton & Mirsky, 2006); Song & Swearer, 2016; Warner et al., 2010). It emphasizes that people are more likely to act positively when they feel connected to others, and it promotes democratic practices (Benade, 2015) that empower both individuals

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and communities (Apple & Beane, 1995; Sehr, 1997) while diminishing dominant power structures. This approach increases the community's capacity to maintain discipline by supporting all members and utilizing community power to regulate behavior. Restorative practices also distinguish between the individual and their behavior, acknowledging culture and personal voice, and encouraging fair processes that reduce misbehavior and systemic inequity. By prioritizing healing and relationship-building over punishment, restorative practices emphasize the role of community involvement and empowerment.

Working within an adaptive leadership model, teachers focus on being problem solvers who explore what is best for all students (Heifetz & Laurie, 1994; 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Rittel & Webber, 1972; Stephenson, 2011). The PLC literature establishes PLC Norms while also clarifying what we do and do not want to see as well as holding each other accountable to these norms (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). Additionally, Boulton and Mirsky (2006) identified how regular restorative community circles for the faculty can be used to maintain community health at the educator level.

The integration of restorative circles ensures that everyone has a chance to speak. Again, since the PLCs use protocols, the integration of this into agendas as well as the previously established pattern of beginning PLCs with clearings offers an easy integration of restorative circles for faculty. In cases where a PLC was previously struggling or damaged, an administrator might step in, as needed to help with facilitating the restorative process.

### **Conclusion**

The integration of adaptive leadership, project-based learning, professional learning communities, and restorative practices presents a holistic approach to addressing the complexities of modern education. By embracing adaptive leadership, educators can cultivate environments that prioritize collaboration and critical thinking, enabling students to engage deeply with real-world challenges through project-based learning. Professional Learning Communities further enhance this process by fostering a culture of shared responsibility and continuous improvement, where educators can reflect, collaborate, and grow together.

Moreover, the principles of restorative practices serve as a crucial complement, emphasizing the importance of community, healing, and empowerment in addressing behavioral issues and fostering a sense of belonging. Together, these frameworks not only support individual student growth but also contribute to the development of inclusive, equitable, and resilient educational communities where all voices are heard. As educators and leaders navigate the ever-evolving landscape of education, embracing similar interconnected strategies continue to be essential in preparing students to thrive as engaged citizens in a diverse and dynamic world.

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## **Prismatic Narrative Inquiry**

### **Examining K-8 Perspectives on Professional Learning Communities**

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### **Abstract**

Working out of a k-8 school's self-study project, the purpose of this research was to consider different perspectives from educators that are currently or have in the past worked with the school. The goal was to analyze effective traits and areas of importance through the professional learning community experience. Utilizing collaborative prismatic narrative inquiry, this research examines seven researcher-participants' narratives, reflecting their experiences and expertise as educational professionals with experiences in professional learning communities.

*Keywords:* PLC, Narrative Inquiry, K-8, Self-Study

### **Introduction**

Professional learning communities (PLCs), first introduced in the early 2000s (DuFour, 2002), are collaborative groups of educators focused on enhancing teaching practices and improving student learning outcomes (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). These communities offer a space for educators to engage in continuous dialogue, exchange best practices, analyze student data, and collaborate on instructional strategies. By cultivating a culture of ongoing learning and teamwork, PLCs seek to drive school improvement and support the success of all students.

Working out of a k-8 school's self-study project, the purpose of this research was to consider different perspectives from educators that are currently or have in the past worked with the school. The goal was to analyze effective traits and areas of importance through the professional learning community experience.

### **Relevant Literature**

Van Meeuwen et al. (2020) categorize professional learning communities into three main areas: individual and collective learning, group dynamics, and professional orientation. Consequently, the literature was organized according to these categories. Individual and collective learning encompasses the focus on change, whether it involves implementing change (Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Kohler-Evans et al., 2013), managing change (Edwards et al., 2021), or fostering the development of educators' thinking (Owen, 2016; Vosen et al., 2020). Group dynamics considers the importance of teacher well-being (Webb et al., 2009). The professional orientation of PLCs emphasizes a student-centered approach (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Damjanovic & Blank, 2018; D'Ardenne et al., 2013; DuFour & DuFour, 2012; Kristmanson et al., 2011; Robertson et al., 2020; Wennergren & Blossing, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Prismatic theory (Fisher, 2016), which is heavily influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizomatic theory, focuses on mapping the parameters of

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information rather than merely retracing previous paths. This approach targets the deterritorialization of established paradigms (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and challenges hegemonic structures (Fisher et al., 2022).

### **Methodology**

Collaborative prismatic inquiry integrates diverse perspectives across various educational levels and disciplines (Achieng Evensen et al., 2017). Prismatic narrative inquiry specifically involves collecting researcher-participant narratives centered around a common theme to gather multiple viewpoints (Fisher, Dorner et al., 2021). The participants then engage in discussions about the data and share experiences that were not explicitly captured in the narratives, leading to a dialogic analysis (see, for example: Bakhtin, 1981; [Bakhtin]/Volosino, 1976; Fisher, Chun et al., 2021; Herndl, 1991).

For this study, nine researcher-participants were invited as educational professionals to share their experiences and expertise, answering the prompt, “What aspects of a PLC are most important to you?” They represented general educational leaders, special education leaders, and educators from the general education, special education, electives, and counseling programs.

### **Narrative Analysis**

The narratives were sorted into three general categories. These were: leadership perspectives, educator perspectives, and special education leadership perspectives.

#### **Leadership Perspectives**

The three general education leaders identified four key impacts: (1) the strength of co-creation; (2) a unity of vision around student success; (3) the ability to overcome disunified leadership, staff turnover, and a lack of consistency; and (4) the development of collaborative systems.

General education leaders identified a successful transformation from a fragmented, outsourced special education program to a unified, internally managed one. Originally:

*A shared vision for all was a challenge because leaders for the [special education] department were off site with little background knowledge on the overall systems and goals for the school as a whole. Turnover in staffing and [special education] oversight also created a lack of consistency for all with continual changes to protocols, documentation and norms for referrals and support.*

However, upon successfully transitioning the program,

*Changing to our own program meant that we could establish a culture that could survive staffing changes. However, we then had to not only overcome years of “us” and “them” thinking to build a team that worked together but also build a*

*special education team large enough to tie into different general education teams without spreading the educational specialists too thin. The first step toward success involved developing a leadership group that worked collaboratively toward this as a united team.*

This transformation was driven by cultural integration, leadership alignment, structural changes, and increased collaboration, all of which contributed to a more cohesive and effective approach to supporting students.

While it was identified that “*The largest impact was the ability for all stakeholders to co-create and share one vision that centered around students’ success,*” unification led to larger improvements.

*Case managers and instructional facilitators are now able to be in PLC during content planning sessions, reviewing grade level data and becoming experts in the content. This, along with their ability to be in the classroom directly supporting all students for a majority of the school day, has made a significant impact on how the two departments can now work together in supporting student success as opposed to the general education and the special education teams working in isolation of each other.*

Ultimately, the unification of systems was needed to develop a more inclusive model, starting at the educator level. Furthermore, leaders identified that the strengths of the unified vision included establishing a culture that could pivot quickly to address change with timely implementation.

### **Educator Perspectives**

The four educator perspectives reflected a general education elective teacher, a special education specialist teacher, a school counselor, and a general education teacher. The overarching findings focus on the strengthened relationships and the benefits of cross-program collaboration, which improved learning for everyone. As the elective teacher identified, “*I wanted to use music and performance to add depth and interest to particular units for the students and to work collaboratively with the general education teachers on campus.*” The education specialist similarly identified how a larger, integrated special education team allowed:

*each colleague to focus on one grade level at a time, supporting continued development in our inclusive model. Special education staff members have the time to collaborate with general education teachers at the grade level they are assigned, therefore improving the quality of instruction and methods of teaching within the co-taught classroom. Additionally, this new approach to general education collaboration allows for a full inclusive look at the students on campus, focusing on how each staff member can support ALL students versus the ones they are “assigned.”*

Similarly, the counselor identified how the integration of social emotional supports and lessons within general education “*increased accessibility to counseling resources and psychoeducation for general and special education students.*”

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Educators identified how the shift to an internally managed special education program had profound effects on staff retention, collaboration, and the quality of education. *“Not only is there continued staff retention, but the team has double in size over the last five years.”* Again, this has developed a stronger special education PLC while allowing the educational specialists to focus on an individual grade level, strengthening inclusive supports. The increased retention and team size led to deeper relationships and more effective specialization, improving instructional quality and student support. The full inclusion model and integration of counseling services also created a more comprehensive and holistic approach to student success, benefiting both general and special education students.

One of the changes also seen by the educators was a change in physical location that unified previously isolated programs. Part of this was the decision by all leaders to move their office spaces around the edges of the PLC room, so that all leaders were accessible to the educational teams. Furthermore, a future development that highlighted improvement was the decision to move the special education team out of a separated classroom and base them within the general education classrooms at each grade level. This improved access and connection between general education and special education.

#### **Special Education Leadership Perspectives**

Special education leaders recognized how the integration of special and general education through collaborative leadership led to a more inclusive, responsive, and effective educational environment.

*The leadership PLC gives members the opportunity to look at the work holistically from a high altitude and collaborate cross-functionally in ways that collectively lift the quality and effectiveness of instructional practices and student outcomes. When you look at the teams that each one of us manage, the PLC keeps our teams from becoming towers. No team is working in isolation, and we are able to spot when teammates have pulled back. From their role or have stepped outside of it.*

The patterns revealed a strong emphasis on shared responsibility, holistic leadership, and the ability to adapt quickly to meet student needs. This approach not only improved the quality of interventions but also fostered a culture of inclusion and accountability, leading to better outcomes for all students.

The special education leaders also identified the unified school-wide vision of inclusive learning, which improved Tier 1 changes toward a universal design for learning. They also identified how unity of leadership

*enables us to have nuanced conversations about the chain of responsibility and accountability that drives student outcomes. We are now able to effectively intervene when team decision-making is reliant on biased information or presuppositions around instructional fidelity.*

*The leadership PLC gives members the opportunity to look at the work holistically*

*from a high altitude and collaborate cross-functionally in ways that collectively lift the quality and effectiveness of instructional practices and student outcomes.*

A key element identified was how this unity broke down the barriers that originally isolated teams into separate educational towers, unifying the previously isolated elementary, middle school, and special education teams into a whole.

### **Dialogic Analysis**

The use of professional learning communities enhanced collaboration and professional development, contributing to a positive and supportive school environment, and all five leaders (both general and special education) agreed that leadership unity was key for school transformation during post discussions. However, the changing of physical spaces was remarked upon most by educators during the post-discussion about the findings. The previous isolation into the “towers” of the elementary, middle school, and special education programs persisted despite years of working toward connections. Moving the leadership team around the edges of the PLC room changed the dynamics so that they were all on the same page and could easily be accessed by one another and all educators, which might be considered the ultimate form of transparency and open door policy. While the special education team continued to have their own meetings to maintain their PLC, and specific small group spaces exist to take children for intervention and services as needed, growing the team large enough and then physically moving the special education specialists into the general education classrooms changed patterns of access and understanding, finally overcoming the divide between general and special education. The special education team needed to be large enough, and the previous structures of special education operating at a minimal capacity with a couple specialists spread thin across several grade levels and a dozen or more classrooms to service the maximum number of children possible always failed to integrate. The larger team held in a separate space also failed to integrate. Both the growth of the team and the dispersal of spaces throughout the school were needed to change the isolated “towers” into a unified, inclusive school.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of the PLC model paired with the transition to an internally managed special education program has significantly enhanced staff retention and collaboration within the school. The team has grown in size and stability, allowing education specialists to focus on specific grade levels and work closely with general education teachers. This shift has improved the integration of the education specialists into grade level PLCs and into general education classrooms while fostering deeper relationships, improving instructional quality, and promoting a more inclusive approach where all students benefit from comprehensive support. The integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Multi-Tiered System of

Supports (MTSS) has further enriched student well-being and academic engagement. Additionally, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have reduced isolation among educators, providing valuable opportunities for collaboration and professional growth, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and effective educational environment.

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## **Middle School Administrators' Perceptions and Processes in Supporting Their Teachers and Students**

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Benjamin E. Seipel, Erika Daniels, & Rong-Ji Chen**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the perceptions and processes of middle school administrators in California regarding the support for their students and teachers. Through semi-structured interviews, the study reveals how administrators conceptualize their roles, determine student needs, and ensure the provision of appropriate support. Key findings highlight the importance of a student-centered approach, the integration of social-emotional learning, and the significance of equity and inclusion in middle school leadership. These findings have implications for policy and practice, particularly in the context of professional development for middle school administrators.

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*Keywords:* adolescent development, educational leadership, middle level education, school administrators

## **Introduction**

In the early 1900s, the American educational system developed “junior high schools,” which were intended to support students as they transitioned from elementary school to high school (Alexander, 1995). However, there was little attention paid to the developmental differences among students in each of the grade spans with the focus instead on the academic content to be taught. As the century wore on, there was a call to consider evidence that young adolescents are not merely “big kids” or “small teenagers” (Alexander et al., 1968). This call evolved into the middle school movement and asserted the students who inhabited junior high schools had unique developmental needs and further insisted the schools were not meeting those needs. Beginning in the 1960s, middle school advocates explained the need for a school structure that looked different from elementary and high school to better support the academic, social, and emotional needs that are unique to the developmental phase known as young adolescence (Schaefer et al., 2016).

Young adolescence poses specific challenges and offers distinct opportunities as humans move from childhood to adulthood. This is especially true within the context of education because the adults who work in schools play a pivotal role in shaping educational experiences that affect students’ academic, social, and emotional well-being. Principals, as the top-level leaders in a school, have been repeatedly demonstrated to significantly influence the operations of the schools in which they serve (Grissom et al., 2021), thus positioning middle school administrators to directly impact not only the instructional climate but the degree to which their schools emphasize providing for middle grades students’ developmental and socioemotional needs. As such, the purpose of the study was to explore how middle school administrators conceptualize their roles, define the needs of young adolescents, and ensure that their schools attend their students’ academic and non-academic needs.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The authors (Seipel et al., 2022) previously explored the impact of the absence of specific middle grades teacher preparation requirements on California middle school educators’ ability to identify essential attributes and characteristics of successful middle schools in California, their perceptions of young adolescents’ needs and responsive teaching practices, and their opinions of middle level education in California. Findings indicated that California middle school teachers (1) moderately agree that middle schools in California represent the defined essential attributes and key characteristics of successful middle schools, (2) agree that middle grades teachers’ practice is responsive to early adolescents’ developmental needs but does

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not emphasize student choice and community interaction, which are hallmarks of a traditional middle school approach, and (3) overwhelmingly agree that the overall state of middle level education in California is inadequate.

As we further discussed these findings regarding teachers, it rose to our attention that persons serving as California middle school administrators (defined in our current work as middle school principals and assistant principals), similar to California middle school teachers, have no specific middle grades administrative preparation required of them before serving as California middle school administrators (Bickmore, 2016). Even fewer have administrative credentials specific to the middle school context (DiGaudio & Bickmore, 2019). Rheaume, Brandon, Donlevy, and Gereluk (2021) recently examined the adherence of Canadian middle school administrators to the Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Leadership (DRMLL) model (Brown et al., 2002). With no requirement in California for school administrators to have either (1) teaching experience in a middle school, or (2) administrative pre service experiences (i.e., practica, internship, etc.) in middle school settings prior to appointment as a middle school administrator and in light of the findings of our prior study of middle school teachers, we questioned the degree to which California middle school administrators might enact practices consistent with the DRMLL model and established effective middle grades practices in today's schools, vis-à-vis those highlighted in the fifth edition (2021) of Bishop and Harrison's work, *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe*. If "[school] leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (Leithwood et al., 2004, 5), then uncovering the beliefs, decision-making practices, and evaluation skills of California middle school administrators - potentially with no personal experience teaching or leading in middle school environments before their appointments as middle school administrators - is an important first step in establishing whether their enacted practices are consistent with the literature on successful middle grades school environments. The DRMLL model and the principles outlined in *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe* (Bishop & Harrison, 2021) inform the theoretical framework for this research.

### **Methods**

Based on our literature review of middle-level education, we had four overarching research questions for administrators in California listed below:

1. How do middle school administrators view the middle level concept?
2. How do middle school administrators determine what young adolescents need?
3. How do middle school administrators ensure middle school students receive what they need?
4. What areas do middle school administrators identify as gaps in teacher performance and ability to meet the needs of young adolescents?

### **Participants**

Via email, personal contacts, and social media, we recruited a convenience sample of six current and former middle school administrators from California. They have served as administrators for an average of 8.33 years ( $SD = 4.41$ ; min. 1, max. 12); and 4.33 years as middle school administrators ( $SD = 3.44$ ; min. 1, max. 9). They primarily served suburban districts ( $n = 4$ ). One administrator served an urban district; one administrator's setting was unknown.

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol had four broad sections that reflected the research questions in addition to a demographic section. The first section focused on the administrators' personal beliefs regarding the current state of middle level education in California. The second and third sections asked administrators how they determine the needs of adolescents and how they meet those needs of adolescents. The final section of the interview addressed perceived gaps in teacher preparation in regard to meeting those needs of adolescents.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

Interview recordings were transcribed using Otter.AI (Otter.AI, 2023). Identifiable data was redacted from the transcripts prior to coding. Transcripts were initially coded by ChatGPT 4.0 (OpenAI, 2024) by interview topic to identify overarching themes. The research team directed the GPT engine with prompts such as "Analyze the following transcripts of middle school administrators' interviews and highlight statements that provide insights into how middle school administrators determine what young adolescents need." Human coders checked the themes for accuracy, frequency, and reliability. Subsequently, using a combination of ChatGPT with human coders, quotes and examples were identified as supporting evidence for the themes identified.

### **Findings**

The main purpose of the study was to explore how middle school administrators conceptualize their roles, define the needs of young adolescents, and ensure that their schools attend their students' needs. A total of six middle school administrators participated in one-on-one interviews. Analysis of the interview transcripts yielded many themes. In this manuscript, we focus on the three most outstanding themes and their connections, followed by a discussion of the implications for research, policy, and school administration. Bishop and Harrison (2021) include "leaders are committed to and knowledgeable about young adolescents, equitable practices, and educational research" (pp. 47-48) as one of the 18 characteristics of successful middle schools. The following themes align mostly with this characteristic.

***Administrators' Understanding of the Middle Grades Concept and Meeting Young Adolescents' Needs***

All participants recognized the unique transition phase of the middle school years and noted the significant changes and challenges specific to young adolescents instead of elementary or high school students. The participants identified the difference in maturity levels and behaviors between grades, especially between sixth and eighth graders. The administrators highlighted the importance of helping students become independent learners, finding connections between academic content and their worlds, and exploring different identities. As one participant commented on the middle school stage of development, "I think it's where students are... trying on different identities, trying on different learner profiles, and experimenting with that. And it's very complex." The leaders understood the importance of this transition phase, and they focused on teaching behavior alongside academics, highlighting the intertwined nature of these aspects in middle school. They wanted students to develop positive behavior, effective study habits, and foundational skills, particularly in reading and math. These would prepare middle school students for evolving educational landscapes and future challenges. The administrators reported using a student-centered approach to priority setting. We asked them to rank the following four items in order of most to least importance: state mandates, district requirements, parent priorities, and student needs. Finding a balance among these priorities was a common challenge. Five of the six participants put student needs first, understanding the unique challenges of middle school students, and adapting strategies to meet these needs. One principal stated, "I think that student needs drive everything... We show up not to implement a state initiative. We show up to give kids everything that they deserve and more."

***Operationalizing Visions for Middle Schools***

As discussed above, the administrators adopted a student-centered approach; they prioritized student needs and academic success and strived to ensure a safe, nurturing learning environment. One way to operationalize this vision was through incorporating cultural relevancy and social-emotional learning into the curriculum. A participant shared an example: "we went into this year with creating a more multi-dimensional, culturally relevant classroom experience. And the way we do that is to bring the students' real-life experience into the classroom and to use a lot of reflection, a lot of metacognition." By and large, the administrators reported efforts to help students find a sense of connection and belonging, which are crucial at this age. This is related to young adolescents' mental health. The leaders discussed strategies their schools used to help students develop self-regulation skills and coping mechanisms. In addition, the schools made efforts to help students find a sense of connection within the school environment, acknowledging that this age group is actively seeking a place to belong. Some schools introduced advisory periods

to ensure each student has a consistent adult connection at school. Extracurricular activities were also used for team building, trust building, and relationship building, which are essential for students' connection with school and adults, and, may also help students express themselves and figure out their identities.

The administrators discussed additional methods of operationalizing their vision, such as through structured frameworks and setting strategic goals and implementing them through various programs and initiatives. For example, the schools would engage parents and the community in the educational process. Another strategy was utilizing data for decision making. The administrators repeatedly discussed the importance of gathering both quantitative and qualitative data to understand patterns in student learning, behavior and needs. The data informed interventions, highlighting the importance of evidence-based approaches.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion were a part of the participants' vision for their schools. The administrators thought that middle schools should focus on providing equitable access to learning and support for all students, including those from diverse backgrounds and with varying needs. This is evidenced in a principal's vision for "inclusion and understanding when something is different that they can still be accepted or have that be an acceptable thing. When their peers are different than them, it's okay, that it's not a bad thing to be different." Besides the strategies described above (culturally relevant pedagogy, community engagement, building relationships, etc.), targeted and intentional support systems were implemented. For example, the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) was a means to operationalize support and address a range of issues more effectively.

### ***Professional Growth and Collaboration***

The participating administrators emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development for themselves as leaders and to better support young adolescents. They actively sought opportunities for further learning such as attending workshops and courses, which indicates a commitment to continuous improvement in their roles. First of all, they are members of professional organizations such as the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). They also read articles at professional websites such as EdReports and participated in educational and administrative forums. These engagements provided them with insights and resources that aid in addressing challenges within their schools, particularly in aligning educational practices with the varied students' needs.

Mentorship from experienced colleagues was frequently mentioned as a crucial aspect of their professional growth. Indeed, the administrators valued ongoing collaboration with colleagues, using it as a means to enhance their leadership and educational strategies. A participant reflected on her professional development and said, "I think the training was on-the-job training and relying on my colleagues

### *Middle School Administrators' Perceptions*

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and experts that had been in the role either before me or correspondingly with me at neighboring schools.” The administrators also valued real-world experiences, such as prior roles in teaching or other fields, for developing practical skills. Two of the administrators grew their leadership skills by implementing action learning projects, where they applied leadership theories in real-world situations.

Overall, the middle school administrators valued a combination of formal education, real-world experience, mentorship, and a commitment to ongoing learning. For successful job performance in their leadership roles, they considered it crucial to have the ability to use data effectively, adapt to challenges, and maintain a student-centered focus.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study highlight critical insights into the perceptions and processes of middle school administrators in California. The administrators acknowledged the unique developmental needs of young adolescents and emphasized the importance of addressing both academic and socio-emotional needs within their schools. This aligns with the principles of the middle school movement, which advocates for a holistic approach to education during this transitional phase (Schaefer et al., 2016).

One of the key themes identified was the administrators’ understanding of the middle grades concept and their strategies for meeting young adolescents’ needs. The participants recognized the significant changes that students undergo during the middle school years and the necessity of fostering independence, positive behavior, and effective study habits. This reflects the developmental responsiveness advocated by Bishop and Harrison (2021), where educational practices are tailored to the unique characteristics of young adolescents.

The study also revealed how administrators operationalize their visions for middle schools through a student-centered approach. This involves prioritizing student needs, incorporating cultural relevancy, and promoting social-emotional learning. The emphasis on creating a sense of connection and belonging within the school environment underscores the importance of mental health and well-being for this age group. The use of advisory periods and extracurricular activities as strategies to build relationships and support identity exploration demonstrates a commitment to holistic student development.

Furthermore, the administrators highlighted the significance of equity, diversity, and inclusion in their schools. They employed various strategies to ensure equitable access to learning and support for all students, including those from diverse backgrounds. They urge the use of data-driven decision-making and targeted support systems, which reflects an evidence-based approach to addressing the varied needs of students.

Professional growth and collaboration emerged as crucial components of the

administrators' roles. The participants actively sought opportunities for further learning through professional organizations, workshops, and mentorship. This commitment to continuous improvement and collaboration with colleagues enhances their leadership and educational strategies, ultimately benefiting their schools.

The findings also underscore the importance of formal education, real-world experience, and ongoing learning for successful middle school administration. The administrators valued a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, which enables them to adapt to challenges and maintain a student-centered focus. The integration of leadership theories into real-world situations through action learning projects exemplifies the practical application of professional development.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions and processes of middle school administrators in California. The administrators' commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of young adolescents is evident in their student-centered approaches, emphasis on equity and inclusion, and dedication to professional growth. These findings have important implications for research, policy, and school administration, particularly in the context of developing effective middle-level education practices.

The study highlights the need for targeted professional development for middle school administrators, focusing on the unique developmental needs of young adolescents and effective leadership strategies. Policy-makers should consider the importance of specialized training and credentials for middle school administrators to ensure they are equipped to meet the challenges of this critical educational phase. Future research could further explore the impact of specific professional development programs and leadership models on the effectiveness of middle school administrators.

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## **Practices for Engagement Implementing Constructivism and Project-Based Learning in Higher Education**

**Meredith A. Dorner, Marni E. Fisher,  
Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi, & Jeremy F. Cavallaro**

### **Abstract**

This practice piece explores how three professors integrate constructivism and Project-Based Learning (PBL) in higher education. The first applies PBL to English composition and humanities, the second utilizes it in special education credentialing, and the third in the sciences. All emphasize metacognitive reflection, real-world problem-solving, and collaborative feedback to enhance student engagement, skill development, and learning outcomes. Each professor tailors their approach to their discipline, highlighting the adaptability and impact of constructivist pedagogy. Collectively, they underscore the importance of dynamic feedback systems, interdisciplinary learning, and student responsibility in fostering deeper intellectual growth.

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## ***Practices for Engagement***

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*Keywords:* Constructivism, Engagement, Feedback

### **Introduction**

Constructivist philosophy underpins Project-Based Learning (PBL), where learners construct knowledge through contextualized, real-life problems, initiating with an event and progressing through metacognitive questioning (Hill & Smith, 2005; Barrows, 2002; Wilder, 2015). PBL fosters critical and creative thinking by engaging students in authentic, ill-structured problems that are relevant to their lives and careers (Wilder, 2015). It also promotes interdisciplinary learning across various educational levels and subjects, enhancing collaboration and communication skills (Al Salami et al., 2017; Fan, 2022; Hill & Smith, 2005).

A focus on practice compared perspectives from three professors who have borrowed from constructivism and Project-Based Learning (PBL) for their higher education courses. One professor considers the usefulness in English composition, education, and humanities classes, the second examines the benefits of PBL in special education credentialing, and the third considers the importance of constructivism in the sciences for higher education.

### **Constructivism and Project-Based Learning**

Constructivism interprets knowledge through the lens of human fallibility, asserting that while reality exists, it cannot be fully captured as a single set of truths (von Glasersfeld, 1989). As such, “learning is a social process of making sense of experience in terms of extant knowledge” (Tobin et al., 1994, p. 47), residing within the individual mind. This perspective challenges traditional objectivity by valuing social and cultural dimensions, emphasizing the inseparability of personal and social constructions of knowledge (Tobin et al., 1994). In educational contexts, constructivist pedagogy is particularly significant as it acknowledges that learning is inherently social. Constructivist methods stress that the ability to build and assess concepts depends on one’s capacity to explore and evaluate diverse ideas—an essential component of learning (Tobin et al., 1994).

Constructivism pairs well with PBL, which emphasizes the importance of meta-cognitive reflection that supports knowledge retention and transfer (Hill & Smith, 2005; Weshah, 2012). This student-centered approach empowers learners to take responsibility for their learning, with teachers guiding and supporting them through the problem-solving process (Ackerman, 2003; Savery, 2006; Hill & Smith, 2005).

### **Key Elements of Practice**

Through a prismatic lens (Fisher, 2016), this practice based piece considers the use of the Center for Leadership and Educational Equity’s (CLEE) feedback rubric in a k-8 school and three perspectives with the goal of recognizing how an

engaged pedagogy (Fisher et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2017) from k-12 is useful higher education. While all three professors have constructivism and project driven learning in their classes, each has a different focus. This difference was based on both the subject and the personal commitment to implementation. The use of multiple perspectives was key for engaging in the prismatic lens, which uses multiple perspectives to consider the usefulness of a phenomenon across educational levels and in different subjects (Achieng-Evensen, et al., 2017).

### **The Feedback Rubric**

CLEE's (2024) feedback rubric was shared by a project-based k-8 charter school's principal. The k-8 school uses this protocol to teach students how to give warm and cool feedback that is authentic and balanced. Students are gradually taught to give and receive hard feedback. In higher education, professors one and two integrated the CLEE feedback rubric for different purposes while focusing on the project-based elements of their courses. The third professor focused on the importance of the constructivist approach to learning in the sciences.

### **Professor One: Student Centered Research**

One professor teaches three perspectives on the research process in her advanced English composition classes, including the Ontario School Library's (OSLA) (2010) description of project development. Students contrast this with Mongan Rallis's (2014) analysis of Galvan (2006) and the Saddleback College Library's (2024) Library Basics LibGuide on how to start research, then collaboratively develop their own understanding of how to approach research. Students choose their own research topics, and the course uses backward design (McTighe & Thomas, 2003) to scaffold and build research skills, culminating in a complex research project. Throughout the process students work in collaborative teams (Palloff & Pratt, 2005), discussing their research at different stages and giving feedback on writing. Paired with this, students use a critical response menu, which allows them to choose how to respond to content readings. Responses are shared with their team, who gives them warm and cool feedback using CLEE's (2024) feedback rubric.

### **Professor Two: Projects to Test Future Practices**

The second professor teaches in a Teacher Education Masters program. Projects that this professor gives to students prepares them to hit the ground running in their own classrooms. Often projects are used to prepare them for what is to come; for example, their Signature Assignment has to do with developing a literacy intervention for a student who is struggling with reading. This project requires the student teacher to learn how to obtain student information, including interviewing parents and gathering information on the skills and needs of a child by conducting

### *Practices for Engagement*

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reading assessments, such as the Dynamic Indicators of Beginning Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). This also requires the student teacher to familiarize themselves with the needs of the student and implement an intervention that can help develop the student's literacy needs. The student teacher explores evidence based practices that can help the students with their needs. In doing these projects, the professor also likes to have student teachers begin thinking how their portfolio can also showcase their learnings. Therefore, the professor encourages students to create their portfolios using Google sites to showcase how their learnings connect to the CalTPEs.

This professor's use of CLEE's (2024) feedback rubric targeted improving students' discussion board posts. While she uses a discussion board rubric (See Table 1), providing CLEE's (2024) feedback rubric gives students an idea of how the feedback and engagement can be approached to support quality responses.

### **Professor Three: Constructivism in the Sciences**

The third professor considers how, at the collegiate level, employing a constructivist approach can introduce novel methods for assisting students in comprehending scientific problems that are more theoretical rather than observable. Lawson (1999) suggested that although college students are relatively proficient at formulating basic hypothetical-deductive reasoning arguments for observable causes, they struggle when required to analyze "unseen entities" (p. 406). In fact, in an earlier study, Lawson et al. (1997) found that only 25% of college students were able to produce arguments for unseen entities, while over 90% could do so for observable causes. Since the understanding of evolution often involves 'unseen entities', this presents a significant challenge for science education. Lawson (1999) proposes that to help students progress through stages of intellectual development, they should be exposed to various hypothetical contexts and scenarios, as well as substantial social interaction that promotes equilibration. After mastering this process at a more descriptive level, it can then be extended to more theoretical contexts.

### **Analysis**

While projects are common in higher education, they are not always designed thoughtfully and purposefully. The question of the purpose behind a project, the backward design to build skills, centering the topic around student interest, creating spaces for students to construct their own knowledge, and integrating metacognition so students reflect on their learning are all important aspects.

Each professor integrates key elements of practice that align with constructivist pedagogy but adapts them to their specific educational context. Areas of importance include feedback rubrics and collaborative learning and thoughtful consideration for project-based learning with real-work applications. The benefits of the CLEE's (2024) feedback rubric, and any clear rubric, is that it develops consistency. For the

**Table 1**  
**Canvas Discussion Board Rubric**

<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Frequency &amp; Involvement in Dialogue</b>	<i>Outstanding</i> Student posts at least 4 content-engaging posts a week (original plus 3 responses to other students' postings).  Student postings consistently demonstrate that the learner is both reading others' posts, and reflecting upon them, through relevant responses.	<i>Respectable</i> Student posts at least 3 content-engaging posts a week (original plus 2 responses to other students' postings).  Student postings usually demonstrate that the learner is both reading others' posts, and reflecting upon them, through relevant responses.	<i>Acceptable</i> Student posts at least 2 content-engaging posts a week (original plus 1 responses to other students' postings).  Inconsistent demonstration of thought regarding other students' postings, but when it's there, it does demonstrate reflection & cognition.	<i>Needs Work</i> Student posts at least 1 content-engaging post a week (original or response to another student's posting).  Inconsistent and weak demonstration of thought regarding other students' postings.	<i>0</i> Student posts 0 content-engaging posts a week
<b>Quality</b>	<b>Relevant facts &amp; Construction of Understanding</b>	Postings consistently offer both information from class reading and valid outside sources.  Student postings consistently demonstrate the involvement in one's own cognition in the process of figuring out not only WHAT the student is thinking but HOW & WHY the learner is coming to such conclusions.	Posts sometimes offer EITHER information from class reading or valid outside sources.  Student postings sometimes demonstrate the involvement in one's own cognition in the process of figuring out not only WHAT the student is thinking but HOW & WHY the learner is coming to such conclusions.		Posts rarely offer facts, and when resent, these facts are top level, easy to find, and only from required readings.  Student postings demonstrate a weak effort in student self-involvement in the cognition in the process of figuring out not only WHAT the student is thinking but HOW & WHY the learner is coming to such conclusions.	
	<b>Elevating the Discussion</b>	The student consistently brings new insights or asks questions that truly open new avenues for thinking, reflecting, discussing, the concepts & topics.	The student sometimes brings new insights or asks questions that truly open new avenues for thinking, reflecting, discussing, the concepts & topics.		The student rarely posts new insights or asks questions that truly open new avenues for thinking, reflecting, discussing the concepts & topics,	

### *Practices for Engagement*

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CLEE (2024), in particular, the feedback explains basic ways that feedback can be warm, cool, or hard, which develops both students' and instructor's thinking. This consistent focus on feedback and collaboration across the narratives underscores the importance of peer interaction in constructivist learning environments.

Real world applications can vary, depending on the subject area. Thoughtful consideration of the purpose of the skills development is emphasized over projects that simply demonstrate cumulative knowledge.

The narratives of these three professors illustrate the flexibility and adaptability of constructivist pedagogy across different educational contexts. While all three share a commitment to project-driven learning and constructivist principles, their unique approaches reflect the varied demands of their subjects and the educational levels they teach. The use of multiple perspectives, as emphasized in prismatic inquiry, is evident in how each professor tailors their methods to foster deep engagement and intellectual growth among their students.

### **Conclusions**

The three professors described in the narratives share a common pedagogical foundation in constructivism and project-driven learning, but their unique focuses reflect the diversity of their subject areas and personal commitment to implementation. This diversity in approach highlights the importance of multiple perspectives, a key element in prismatic inquiry, as noted by Achieng-Evensen et al. (2017). Each professor's narrative showcases a distinct application of constructivism, emphasizing how a phenomenon's usefulness can vary across educational levels and disciplines. Furthermore, this analysis highlights the effectiveness of constructivist approaches in creating dynamic and responsive learning environments that cater to diverse educational needs.

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## **Accessibility, Engagement, and Connections**

### **Dual Perspectives on Multimodal Feedback**

**Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi & Marni E. Fisher**

#### **Abstract**

This practice-based paper explores how two professors approach student writing feedback through contrasting methods. One focused on multimodal feedback, incorporating voice and video responses to engage students through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. The other restructured grading hours into one-on-one student conferences, fostering personal connections and tailored feedback. Both approaches emphasize the need for dynamic, interactive feedback and personal connection to enhance student engagement and success. These methods align with UDL and differentiation models, promoting inclusivity, student autonomy, and deeper learning. The session aims to provoke discussion on effective feedback strategies and tools for diverse student needs.

*Keywords:* Universal Design for Learning, higher education, feedback

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## **Introduction**

In higher education, effective feedback is central to student success, yet the ways feedback is communicated vary widely across instructors and disciplines (Ambrose et al., 2010). Exploring contrasting approaches taken by two professors to provide feedback on student writing investigates how distinct teaching philosophies shape the feedback process—balancing accessibility, engagement, and meaningful connections with students. Furthermore, this practice-based comparison highlights the affordances of multimodal feedback methods with a focus on fostering more inclusive and participatory learning environments.

## **Purpose/Objectives**

Two professors contrast their perspectives on the advantages of multimodal feedback for students. One focuses on changing up her engagement, focusing on both universal design and the humanizing aspect of leaving voice or video feedback on papers. The other, who originally studied Lucy Calkins's (2008) *The Art of Teaching Writing*, restructured her grading hours into student conferences in order to have individual conversations with students about their research.

## **Pedagogical Approach**

Working from a prismatic lens (Fisher, 2016), two perspectives were examined then tested through dialogic and catalytic validity (Anderson et al, 1996). Additionally, two pedagogical approaches were considered: (1) aspects of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Delaware State Department of Education, 2004) and (2) differentiation (Tomlinson et al., 2003).

## **Universal Design for Learning**

The concept of Universal Design originated from architectural design (Delaware State Department of Education, 2004). It was initially introduced by architect Ronald Mace in 1978, with the primary goal of creating accessible spaces, environments, and products (Jiménez et al., 2007; McGuire et al., 2006). The adaptation of these principles to education, known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), began as an effort to incorporate the ideas of access and universal design into the educational setting (Jiménez et al., 2007). The focus of UDL was to eliminate barriers that students encounter in learning (Delaware State Department of Education, 2004). This approach aligns with the social model of disability (Shakespeare, 2010), which attributes disability to the social barriers that individuals face in society, including environmental, attitudinal, and organizational structures that marginalize individuals with disabilities. Universal Design for Learning advocates for an educational framework that is accessible to all students (Benton-Borghi, 2013), challenging both the stigmatization of disability (Lalvani, 2011) and the dominance of normative standards (Davis, 2010).

## **Differentiation**

Differentiation emphasizes the importance of providing each student with what they need to succeed, which may include considering their readiness, interests, and learning styles (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Additionally, it recognizes and values the unique perspectives that each student brings to the classroom (Nieto, 2010), including their cultural background (Dewey, 1916). This approach is aligned with models of democratic (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dewey, 1916; Sehr, 1997) and socially just (Darder et al., 2009; Marshall & Oliva, 2010) education.

## **Key Elements of Practice**

Each professor focused on the multimodal aspects of their teaching pedagogy. However, both identified forms of discussion as important aspects of multimodal feedback.

### ***Professor One: Building Dialogue***

A professional development course was attended, focused on providing feedback on student writing. In this course, the leading professor shared that many students do not read track changes, suggesting it is not an effective method of addressing writing issues. This led to consideration of the reasons why students might overlook this type of feedback. Reflecting on personal experiences with students, it became clear that while some did engage with track changes, others required more connection and feedback. It was not just about receiving feedback to meet a requirement; many students sought human connection when receiving their feedback. Understanding that not all students have the same needs, various forms of feedback were integrated into courses to accommodate different preferences.

Classes begin with an email to students, accompanied by a TEAMS message, to highlight the professor's feedback. This dual approach provides a direct line of communication for initial feedback, emphasizing that learning, writing, and feedback are reciprocal processes instead of one-directional processes. Although the syllabus outlines various communication methods, initiating contact early fosters more open and fluent exchanges. Breaking the initial uncertainty encourages students to communicate more freely through email or TEAMS.

At the start of the course, the different types of feedback offered are discussed with students. The variety of feedback models how students, as future educators, can communicate effectively with the families of their own students that they will be teaching. Multimodal feedback is provided via track changes, voice recordings, video feedback, the LMS system, and via email. Time is also allotted during class for students to reflect on the feedback they receive and share insights with peers, promoting collaborative learning. This exchange reinforces that feedback is not a one-way process that is one-directional, but a mutual learning opportunity.

Additionally, students are encouraged to utilize tools such as Natural Reader, a free text-to-speech software, to support their writing. Many second-generation students, raised in households where English is a second language, often develop strong spoken language skills, correcting their family members' grammar, but may struggle with writing. Tools like Natural Reader and Kurzweil help students by reading their papers aloud, allowing them to identify grammatical errors, redundancies, or incorrect word usage. These tools not only enhance writing skills in the classroom but also prepare students for effective communication in their future roles as educators.

### ***Professor Two: The Beauty of the Student-Professor Writing Conference***

This practice started through recognizing that the individual student-teacher writing conference is effective (Calkins, 2008). It allows the teacher to differentiate for each student while also assessing the student's growing skills and/or needs.

The strength of this is sometimes lost in higher education with the implementation of TurnItIn, Canvas, or the LMS as the primary format for feedback on writing drafts. The image of the professor churning through piles of papers in isolation, then handing those drafts back highlights how it fails to build connections when engagement (Kasturkar & Gawai, 2020) and community (Sorensen et al., 2020) are key elements of student success.

Grading writing takes time and effort on the part of the educator and sets the stage for frustration if students then fail to implement suggested changes. Bean (2011) suggests that minimal feedback is more effective than marking and explaining every error. All too often, students fall into the pit of just fixing what the professor marked, rather than understanding the error and learning how to correct it in the future.

Converting those grading hours into office hours, then requiring students to meet before submitting drafts so they have live, dynamic one-to-one feedback and support resulted in packed office hours. Pairing the requirement for professor reviews before the final draft with the opportunity to rewrite, gaining extra time and extended deadlines as long as the writing demonstrates growth, resulted in students finally learning to effectively revise their papers.

The one-on-one meeting can be a few minutes during class to check that a draft is back on track, a 30-minute office hour, or a zoom meeting, depending on the writing needs and availability. The conversation is dynamic, depending on what is displayed in the writing. Circling or highlighting an error and asking the student to identify the issue is often effective while implementing Bean's (2011) suggested minimal markup. The growth in writing is pronounced, regardless of grade level, the intervention is immediate, and the opportunities for enrichment and pushing skills forward is equally expeditious.

### **Practice Analysis**

Looking at the two perspectives reveals a shift away from traditional, one-directional feedback structures. While these methods using the Learning Management System or TurnItIn may be efficient, they often fail to engage students or foster the meaningful connections crucial for learning. Instead, since the development of relationships is important for student success (Ackerman, 2003; Apple & Beane, 1995; Dewey, 1916; Eisner, 2002; Nieto, 2010), there is a strong emphasis on the importance of personal connection between students and educators. This connection is facilitated through direct communication, such as personalized emails or one-on-one meetings, making students more responsive and engaged when a human element is involved in their feedback process. In addition, providing resources that help students orally hear their own work can help learners process and examine their own writing independently.

The narratives also highlight the value of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson et al., 2003), where feedback is tailored to the individual needs of each student. This approach moves away from a one-size-fits-all model and recognizes the unique learning styles of students. Feedback is depicted as a dynamic, ongoing process rather than a static, final assessment.

There is also a trend towards reducing feedback overload by providing minimal yet targeted feedback, as suggested by Bean (2011). This approach prevents students from merely correcting marked errors without understanding the broader context of their mistakes. Furthermore, by encouraging students to engage in one-on-one meetings before submitting drafts and allowing them to rewrite their work, the narratives promote student autonomy and a deeper understanding of the writing and revision process.

### **Conclusions**

This shift in feedback and student-teacher interaction is significant to education because it addresses key challenges in fostering meaningful learning. Traditional methods often fail to engage students or support their growth. By adopting more personalized, interactive approaches, educators can better meet diverse student needs, promote critical thinking, and improve learning outcomes.

Emphasizing personal connection and differentiated instruction reflects a commitment to inclusivity and equity, helping bridge understanding gaps and fostering a more inclusive learning environment. Additionally, this approach encourages student autonomy, making them active participants in their education and helping them develop essential skills like critical thinking and self-assessment.

Building a sense of community within the classroom is also crucial, as it enhances student engagement, motivation, and academic success. Overall, this shift represents a move towards a more holistic, student-centered approach that aligns with modern educational goals of developing well-rounded, engaged learners.

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## **Additional Research Presentations from the CCTE Fall 2024 Conference**

Following is a listing of the research sessions that occurred at the CCTE Fall 2024 Conference which are not represented by articles in this monograph. Many of them can be viewed on the CCTE GoRect channel.

### **Concurrent Research Presentations:**

*Priorities of transformative praxis: Preparing minoritized and multilingual educators.* Edward R. Curammeng, Minhye Son, & Jessica Z. Pandya, California State University Dominguez Hills.

*Using AI feedback capabilities to develop student self-assessment, self-regulated learning (SRL), and social emotional skills.* Lara Ervin-Kassab, Jila Maleksalehi, Shivani Gupta, Vasudha Ramanarasiah, Cristian Cortez, San Jose State University.

*The AI playground for intelligence augmentation: Let's dive in!* Samaa Haniya & Reyna Garcia Ramos, Pepperdine University.

*Building from a strong core: Expanding teacher preparation pathways to support and sustain residency partnerships.* Aja LaDuke, Rhianna Henry Casesa, & Paula Lane, Sonoma State University.

*Our goal is retention: An examination of structural supports in a California residency program.* Yesenia Herrera, Frank Ramos, & Briana Ronan, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo.

*Multimodal assessment: Teaching and learning beyond the written word.* Katherine Felter, University of San Diego.

### ***Other Presentations***

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*The UC/CSU Collaborative for Neurodiversity and Learning: Equity in assessment Issues for multilingual populations.* Kai Greene, California State University Dominguez Hills.

#### **Panel Presentations:**

*What teacher education can learn from Ethnic Studies: Principled exemplars of Ethnic Studies teacher development and feedback.* Chair: James Fabionar, University of San Diego. Discussant: Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, San Francisco State University. Panelists: Edward R. Curammeng, California State University Dominguez Hills, Cheralen Valez, University of California Santa Cruz, Patricia Lopez, California State University Fresno, Guadalupe Cardona, Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing, Artnelson Concodia, University of California Los Angeles, & Jesse Mills, University of San Diego.

*From the classroom to the board room: Teacher-led efforts for equity and excellence.* Donja Harding, Natomas Unified School District, & Pia Wong, Mimi Coughlin, & Eric Claravall, California State University Sacramento.

*Nurturing future educators: Innovative partnerships in expanded learning.* Steve Bautista, Santa Ana College, Joya L. Chavarin, Berkeley City College, Aleah Rosario, Partnership for Children & Youth, & Barbara Ige, Woodcraft Rangers.

*Supporting and celebrating less-commonly taught languages: A vision of building district-university partnerships through feedback rich systems.* Nirmla Griarte Flores & Myriam Casimir, California State Polytechnic University Pomona, & Julie Goldman, Izela Jacobo, & Eva Pando Solis, San Diego County Office of Education.

*Preparing for Ethnic Studies: Questions and answers from teacher educators.* Antoinette Linton, California State University Fullerton, & Miguel Zavala, University of California Riverside.

#### **Workshops:**

*Evaluating and transforming for equity: Integrating anti-racist pedagogy with the ARCSI Framework.* Daniel Soodjinda & Cassandra Drake, California State University Stanislaus.

*Humanizing assessment and feedback in writing instruction: Social annotation as a tool for deeper learning.* Michele McConnell, California State University Fresno, & Kelly Metz-Matthews, San Diego College of Continuing Education.

*Systems feedback: Scaling residency programs.* Heather Michel, CDE Foundation, & Amy Bennett, Santa Clara County Office of Education.



### *Other Presentations*

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#### **Research Roundtable Presentations:**

*Translanguaging practices in teacher preparation programs: Navigating challenges, contextualizing feedback.* Lyn Scott, California State University East Bay & Rhianna Henry Casesa, Sonoma State University.

*Preparation experiences, equitable access, and teaching performance assessment results in California.* Susan Kemper Patrick, Learning Policy Institute, & Lillie Ko-Wong, University of California San Diego.

*Evaluating educative potential: Analyzing international teaching performance assessments.* Lara Ervin-Kassab, San Jose State University, Mistilina Sato, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, Karen Escalante, California State University San Bernadino, Damian Maher, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, Daniel Soodjinda, California State University Stanislaus.

*The IEP Simulation: A transdisciplinary formative feedback event across educator preparation programs.* Cindy Collado, Jenna Porter, & Pia Wong, California State University Sacramento.

*Dyslexia simulation: Fostering equity by deeply understanding the dyslexic student experience.* Madeleine Mejia, California State University Fullerton, & Amber Bechard, University of La Verne.

*Preparing effective reading specialists and literacy coaches through situated apprenticeships and reflective practice.* Lisa Bennett, California State University Fresno.

*Addressing the “Greatest Civil Rights Issue of Our Time”: Evidence based practices in language and literacy.* Kimiya Sohrab Maghzi & Barbara T. Conboy, University of Redlands.

*How resident teachers perceive inclusive practices through shared experiences with their mentor teachers.* Kate Herman, Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation.

*Feedback for us: How aspiring teachers experience the racial climates of teacher education programs as reported in the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climate Survey.* John Pascarella & Jihye Kwon, University of Southern California.

*Feedback for all: Preparing for deeper learning for equity and excellence in the California classroom.* Cindy (Ai-Ling) Li, Mount San Antonio College.

*Critically reflecting on culturally sustaining feedback: Engaging a student-educator feedback loop.* Selena E. Van Horn, Frederick P. Nelson, & Patricia E. Lane, California State University, Fresno.

### ***Other Presentations***

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*Trauma responsive pedagogy and care in the early childhood classroom.* Jocelyn Navarro, California Baptist University.

*Leadership in transition: Changing paradigms in early childhood education.* Christina Laney & Ruth Piker, California State University Long Beach.

### **Poster Session Presentations:**

*Justice focused teacher education.* Antoinette Linton, California State University Fullerton.

*Improving ITEP student experiences and graduation rates: Key practice considerations and invitation for IHE collaboration.* Sara Werner Juarez, Christina Chavez-Reyes, & Giselle Navarro-Cruz, California State Polytechnic University Pomona.

*Implicit bias: Evaluators' perception of bias in scoring teacher performance assessments. Connecting research to practice.* Terrelle Sales, Pepperdine University.

*Trauma responsive pedagogy and care in the early childhood classroom.* Jocelyn Navarro, California Baptist University.

*Strategic partnerships: Creating strategic staffing.* Laura Craig, Sarah Garrity, Lynne Bercaw, Sera Hernandez, & Laura Hall, San Diego State University.

*The effect of a strength-based education program on the stress levels of parents of 2e children.* Gayle Bentley, Bridges Graduate School of Cognitive Diversity in Education.

*Science Circus Whittier: Understanding key practices of a college and community's informal science learning project.* Lauren Swanson, Whittier College.

*Nontraditional grading to focus on feedback and equity.* Amy K. Conley & Kim Vincent-Layton, California State Polytechnic University Humboldt.

*Developing and sustaining high school Grow Your Own programs.* Erin Whitney, Nora Aguilar McKay, Ben Seipel, Claudia Bertolone-Smith, Catherine Lemmi, & Karen Schreder, California State University Chico.

*Bilingual high school teacher preparation: Why it's needed and how we can strengthen it.* Leslie Banes, California State University Sacramento.

## **Information on the California Council on Teacher Education**

Founded in 1945, the California Council on the Education of Teachers (now the California Council on Teacher Education since July 2001) is a non-profit organization devoted to stimulating the improvement of the preservice and inservice education of teachers and related school personnel. The Council attends to this general goal with the support of a community of teacher educators, drawn from diverse constituencies, who seek to be informed, reflective, and active regarding significant research, sound practice, and current public educational issues.

Membership in the California Council on Teacher Education can be either institutional or individual. Colleges and universities with credential programs, professional organizations with interests in the preparation of teachers, school districts and public agencies in the field of education, and individuals involved in or concerned about the field are encouraged to join. Membership includes announcements of semi-annual spring and fall conferences, receipt via email in PDF format of the journals *Teacher Education Quarterly* and *Issues in Teacher Education*, emailed newsletters on timely issues, an informal network for sharing sound practices in teacher education, and involvement in annual awards and recognitions in the field.

Each academic year the California Council on Teacher Education holds a Fall Conference that features significant themes in the field of education, highlights prominent speakers, and affords opportunities for presentation of research and discussion of promising practices, and a Spring Policy Action Network (SPAN) Conference in Sacramento which considers current and future policy issues in the teacher education field and includes visits with legislators and legislative offices.

For information about membership in the California Council on Teacher Education, please contact: Alan H. Jones, Executive Secretary, California Council on Teacher Education, 3145 Geary Boulevard, PMB 275, San Francisco, California 94118; telephone 415/666-3012; email [alan.jones@ccte.org](mailto:alan.jones@ccte.org); website [www.ccte.org](http://www.ccte.org)

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California Council on Teacher Education  
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