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**Abstract**

The demographic composition of the United States (US) has transformed since the early 1990s with immigrant arrivals from Mexico and Central America. Education leaders frequently exit preparation programs without content focused on opportunities around working successfully with multilingual students. This qualitative case study explores the implementation of online learning modules focused on engaging multilingual students and their families that were embedded into advanced leadership preparation coursework. Utilizing data (e.g., classwork, fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews) collected from 10 participants, findings include recommendations for stronger preparation on multilingual learners and flexible learning experiences that encourage the application of knowledge in professional practice.

**Keywords:** educational leadership, multilingual students, educational leadership programs, equity

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In the last three decades, the site of this study in Oregon has experienced population growth and demographic change due largely to agricultural work in local produce, wine, and cannabis industries, becoming a receiving site for the new Latinx diaspora (NLD) (Hamann, 2003; Wortham et al., 2002, Hamann et al., 2015). Demographic change brings an expanding linguistic diversity and a greater opportunity for school leaders to be equipped to work successfully with multilingual students and families. The purpose of this paper is to explore the ways online learning modules enhance education leadership preparation.

Across the state of Oregon, in 2018 to 2019, 39.9% of students enrolled in public schools come from racially and linguistically minoritized backgrounds and 9.4% of the overall student population were identified as "English Learners" (Oregon Educator Advancement Council [OEAC], 2019). According to the state's equity report (2019), while the state is making strides to diversify its educator leader workforce, it is not shifting quickly enough; the gap is widening (OEAC, 2019). In 2018 to 2019 less than 1% of school administrators were from racially and linguistically minoritized backgrounds, a 39.1% gap when compared to students in the state (OEAC, 2019). In this study, we will define multilingual as students and families who use more than one language in their homes (Cenoz, 2009). This definition is more expansive than those used in school districts in Oregon, where "current English learners" are identified as, "… students who have limited English language proficiency either because English is not their native language or because they come from an environment where a language other than English has a significant impact on their English proficiency" (Oregon Department of Education, 2020).

School administrators participating in this study reflect the linguistic mismatch among students and educators in the region. Inevitably, the policies and practices multilingual students and their families experience in schools are guided by education leaders whose preparation and ongoing professional learning has lacked guidance on working with multilingual students and their families (Baecher et al., 2013; Bland, 2020; Buss, 2021; Buysse et al., 2005; Cutri & Johnson, 2010; Davis et al., 2012; Genao, 2020, 2021; Gitlin et al., 2003). Two primary research questions guided our study:

**Research Question 1:** How are practicing school administrators seeing, understanding, and responding to multilingual learners and families in their schools?

**Research Question 2:** How are schools developing meaningful and productive partnerships with multilingual students and families?

As education researchers and education preparation practitioners we have a collective responsibility to support transformation in the practice of pre-service and in-service educators in our K-12 schools as they serve multilingual students and families (Genao, 2020, 2021; Halloran, 2020). We describe the collaborative work of the International Consortium for Multilingual Excellence in Education (ICMEE), a federally funded grant at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and an advanced school administrator preparation program at a regional university in Oregon. In the summer and fall of 2019, the university offered elective coursework that embedded online professional learning modules entitled "Engaging with families of multilingual learners." Our findings, discussed in more detail below, highlight the need for (a) stronger administrator preparation and ongoing professional learning focused on multilingual learners and (b) flexible learning experiences for education leaders. Thus, one implication of this study points to online learning experiences, designed by experts in multilingual education that promote culturally responsive leadership actions as a promising approach to flexibly enhance graduate-level school leadership preparation programs and professional learning opportunities for pre-service and in-service school administrators

*Review of Relevant Literature*

Our review of literature focuses on school responses to the NLD as well as professional development afforded administrators in working with multicultural and multilingual populations.

*New Latinx diaspora and school response.*
The demographic composition of the United States (US) has transformed since the early 1990s with immigrant arrivals from Mexico and Central

America. Pew Research Center (2015 reports a Latinx population of first and second generation Latinx immigrants to reach nearly 40% of the US population by 2015). Receiving communities now extend to rural areas in states where newcomers and now-second generation Latinx families have not previously established permanent residences (Gray, 2020; Hamann et al., 2002; Wortham et al., 2002, 2013, 2015). The site of this study was listed among counties with the fastest (more than 75% increase) growth in Latinx population between 2000 and 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Schools responding to changing demographics, as Wortham et al. (2013) point out, lack "established systems to meet the new Latino population's needs" (p. 16) and educators often have limited experience with Latinx culture and limited bilingual staffing, making communication challenging (Hamann & Harklau, 2015; Hamann et al., 2002). In some of these cases, schools and community response is deficit-based, limiting and marginalizing, focusing on English fluency rather than on the cultural, linguistic, and academic assets students and families bring to the school and community (Evans, 2007; Hamann et al., 2012; Lowenhaupt, 2014; Soto-Boykin et al., 2021). Among empirical examples of communities and schools responding to the NLD across the US, there is a mismatch between the experiences and knowledges of primarily White, monolingual educators and multilingual students and families they now serve (Gray, 2020; Millard & Chapa, 2004; Paciotto & Delany-Barmann, 2011). We cannot wait for educator demographics to reflect student demographics; school administrators in regions of the NLD should possess basic knowledge of programs and services that will cultivate authentic engagement and support for multilingual students and their families.

*Education leader preparation for multilingual students.*
Education leadership preparation programs rarely include coursework with objectives focused on the pedagogical, program, or cultural skills and dispositions to support the learning assets of multilingual students, their teachers, or their families (Baecher et al., 2013; Bland, 2020; Buss, 2021; Genao, 2020, 2021; Halloran, 2020). Yet, school leaders play a central role in shaping the programs, policies, and practices that impact the ways multilingual students experience school.

While empirical studies have demonstrated some elements essential to the success of multilingual students in schools, such as relationships

with educators, development of academic language, cohesive professional learning, culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogies, additive policies, and systems of support (Araujo, 2009; Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Miramontes et al., 2011), the literature is lean in offering descriptions of what this looks like in education leadership preparation (Baecher et al., 2013; Callahan et al., 2019; Mavrogordato & White, 2020; Murphy & Torff, 2012; Reeves & Van Tuyle, 2014). Studies that detail examples of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions education leaders need to successfully engage with multilingual learners include: (a) connecting authentically with family and community (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011), (b) being knowledgeable of sociocultural and sociohistorical foundations of language education (Baecher et al., 2013) (c) collaboratively facilitating program planning and implementation (Baecher et al., 2013), (d) ensuring linguistically responsive instructional materials, curriculum, pedagogical practices and ongoing professional learning through supervision and evaluation processes (Baecher et al., 2016; Murphy & Torff, 2012), and (e) recognizing and working to dismantle systems of linguistic oppression in schools (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

*Online and professional learning for education leaders.*
Increasingly, education leadership coursework and professional learning is offered online for convenience, efficiency, and economy. The literature also documents online offerings for education leaders are limited (Bizzell, 2011) and research around education leadership and online professional development (oPD) is notably lacking.

The literature on online learning in educator preparation and ongoing professional development suggests that these programs can be just as effective as face-to-face modalities (Borko, 2004; Burnette, 2015; Fishman et al., 2013; Lara-Alecio et al., 2021; Mullen, 2020; Yoon et al., 2020). Design principles for quality online learning experiences include opportunities for participants to cultivate relationships; to become familiar with the tools, expectations, and timelines of the online course or modules; to engage in a range of content formats; and to interact with peers and with facilitators with a high degree of consistency and support (Viesca et al., 2017; Carr & Chambers, 2006; Carter, 2004; Smith, 2014). When principles like these are in place, studies assert that online learning experiences have a greater potential to transfer to practice and shifts in

practice (Bragg et al., 2021; Thannimalai & Raman, 2018). Traditional oPD, however, has been most often experienced as largely individual, content-driven learning with limited asynchronous contact with other learners (VanOostveen et al., 2016). However, collaborative engagement has been increasingly developed in inquiry or problem-based formats (VanOostveen et al., 2019) that are useful in the context of teacher and leadership development.

The literature specific to online professional development for education leaders consistently notes the limited research in this area (Grissom & Harrington, 2010), with further notations that oPD is seldom provided a digital format for education leadership (Bizzell, 2011). The existing literature around professional development specific to education leaders has been tied to beliefs and attitudes held by educator leaders (Boudreaux, 2015; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Moore & Kochan, 2013); identifying and addressing professional development needs for educational leadership (Allen & Weaver, 2014; Duncan, 2013; Duncan et al., 2011; Mohd Tahir et al., 2021; Ng & Szeto, 2016; Salazar, 2007), effectiveness of leadership professional development (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Thannimalai & Raman, 2018) and the provision of teacher professional development by education leaders including implementation of technology (Dexter & Richardson, 2020; Nabhani et al., 2014; Sterrett & Richardson, 2020; Uğur & Koç, 2019; Vu et al., 2014). Here, too, there is evidence of a shift to collaborative formats in professional learning (Afshari et al., 2012; Wright & da Costa, 2016).

There is, however, a glaring lack of attention to oPD offered for education leaders and research specific to language learners is, equally elusive. An ongoing program description and associated research agenda is described by Grant and Walters (2018), wherein professional development teams were made up of teachers and administrators in a partnership between Texas Education Agency and Children's Learning Institute (CLI). The oPD offered s16 courses for those serving language learners from 3 to 6 years old for the enhancement of instruction and learning outcomes, showing early promise as effective professional development. Overall, the findings across oPD for education leaders underscores a need for additional research, and particularly for the benefit of supporting multilingual learners. The following case highlights the growth that is possible when preparation programs intentionally embed content and pedagogies that provide opportunities for school leaders to

reflect on exclusionary practices and acquire knowledge and resources to develop inclusionary practices in their work with multilingual learners and their families.

## Conceptual Frame

Our study is grounded in the broad frame of Sociocultural Theory of Learning (SCT), as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), wherein, social interaction is the foundation for development of cognition. In this work, understandings of culture and formation of concepts are dependent on social exchanges in the online learning environment, mitigated by culturally constructed tools and symbols including reflections and discussion among participants and documents representative of schools and communities. Within the larger SCT framework we draw upon Muhammad Khalifa's (2018) *Culturally Responsive Leadership*, an approach characterized by specific practices (e.g., being critically self-reflective, promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts, engaging local contexts) requisite to effective, inclusive school leadership. Leaders need learning spaces grounded in SCL that include intentional emphasis on the ways a community of learners mediate content practice behaviors related to CRSL. Thus, Khalifa's work acts as a filter through which we explore leaders' learning and shifts in practice as they participate in the modules described in further detail below.

SCT-designed modules recognize that the learning experience is a prolonged, developmental process, requiring participation in practical activities, including collaborative social interactions with others. SCT has also previously proven a useful lens in the study of racially and linguistically minoritized learners (e.g., Lantolf et al., 2018; Meacham, 2001; Panhwar et al., 2016; Swain et al., 2015), in professional development (e.g., Eun, 2008, 2019; Scanlan et al., 2016; Shabani, 2016) and technology in education (e.g., Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2018; Ma, 2017).

### *Social Interaction and Internalization*

For transformative development to occur, SCT assumes purposeful engagement among individuals. The success of this online professional development experience was dependent on the development of a

collegial environment that allowed for meaningful shared reflection, analysis and questioning around shared professional concerns that promoted the kind of critical self-reflection Khalifa (2018) describes as essential to CRSL. This extended social engagement held the potential for building cognitive development and in shifting existing dispositions as expressed within the context of the group discussions and ultimately integrated by individuals. How this transformation occurs is dependent on supportive **mediation**, the second element of concern in structuring the workshop.

**Mediation**, also a central concept of SCT, is the use of physical or symbolic artifacts, especially language, as the tools used in social interactions that lead to knowledge construction and internalization. Ma (2017) describes three types of mediation identified by Vygotsky (1978) and applied to mediation in technology-based learning experiences for multilingual learners. The first of these is mediation by tools or physical resources, which includes technology tools. Second, mediation may occur through symbolic systems, generally written or spoken language, as well as other high-order psychological tools as numbers, music, or art. Finally, mediation may occur in engaging directly with other individuals or human networks, through assistance, or guided engagement in the zone of proximal development. The eWorkshop modules in this study used combinations of mediators, incorporating use of technology; language use through reading selections, videos, surveys, school documents; and guided interactions among participants, but also including direct engagement within the larger school communities with teachers, consultants, and community leaders, for example.

Finally, as SCT's name implies, these social interactions are mediated with consideration to the cultural beliefs, values, and dispositions in the specific, existing environment. In SCT, the tools of mediation are supplied by and adaptive to the culture and historical context in which it takes place, whether that be a particular classroom, eWorkshop, school, or community for example. This consideration of local context, both within a school and its surrounding communities is a central component of the lens of Khalifa's (2018) CRSL framework and attention to the teachers, curricula, and practices within the school and the epistemologies present in the communities around the school. Thus, our study uses SCT as the larger framework and CRSL as a lens to analyze participants' learning experiences.

## Method

This qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) draws on traditional interpretive methods of data collection and analysis, described in more detail below. We selected a multi-case approach because it allowed for depth of understanding of the complexities of each leader's professional learning situated within the sociocultural context of all case-participants' knowledge, experience, and the schools they lead. Researchers included the course instructor, the online module designer, and the grant PI that funded a series of online modules, faculty members at three institutions across the US.

### *Participants*

Case study participants were identified through their participation in an education leadership preparation program. We identified two elective graduate courses with content objectives that aligned online modules focused on multilingual students. Students were recruited to participate in the study and were assured that their student experience would not be altered based on their participation. All students, regardless of their type of school (e.g., public, private, charter) were invited to participate. Of the 14 students enrolled across the two courses, 10 students opted to participate, representing 8 different school districts in a rural, Oregon region comprising 13-school districts.

Participants described varied prior knowledge and experience working with the multilingual students and families who comprise a growing percentage of their school demographics in the beginning of each course. The **Table 1** below includes the names (pseudonyms), demographic information, and baseline self-reflection about their knowledge upon entering the course that provides a context for the change participants demonstrated following the completion of the course.

Data were collected between June 2019 and January 2020 and included content from student work in the online portion of the course, one day of face-to-face coursework, and semi-structured interviews scheduled 6 months following course completion. Modules followed a three-part learning cycle organized around guiding questions and constructs of *Exploring* (e.g., reading content, watching videos, engaging with peers in a discussion board), *Making it Work* (e.g., applying concepts

**Table 1.** Participants.

| Participant (pseudonym)/ professional role | Race/ ethnicity | Gender | Language background | Self-reflection/ Entering connection to Language Learners |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Angela Dennis** Educator/Regional Health Provider | White | Female | Monolingual English Speaker | "I support [medical] clinics' interpreter services and getting education to bilingual employees . . . we have a gap with families not wanting to use our translators but their children. I find that problematic." |
| **Brad Thomas** with Principal/Small, Rural Comprehensive High school | White | Male | Monolingual English Speaker | "I really don't know much about our multilingual students, but I have already started talking my front office staff about how we are communicating with multilingual families." |
| **John Cunningham** Principal/Small, Rural K-8 Charter School | White | Male | Monolingual English Speaker | ". . . my current relationship with these families is nil, but not for a lack of trying." |
| **June Smith** Principal/Small, Rural Elementary Community School | White | Female | Monolingual English Speaker | "I have always felt like our community school approach supported our multilingual learners and their families. I'd like to see if that is actually true." |
| **Kelly Lyons** Lead Teacher/Mid-Sized Elementary School | White | Female | Monolingual English Speaker | "This year there are three multilingual learners in my classroom. I try to create a warm a welcoming environment in the school and the classroom." |
| **Luis Taveras** Assistant Principal/ Small, Rural Comprehensive High School | Latino | Male | Bilingual Spanish/ English Speaker | "I am the Title III director for [my district]. We have 25 English Learners K-12. We live in a small community, so I know all the parents." |

| Participant (pseudonym)/ professional role | Race/ ethnicity | Gender | Language background | Self-reflection/ Entering connection to Language Learners |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Megan Williams** Assistant Principal/ Mid-Sized Elementary School | White | Female | Monolingual English Speaker | "As the Assistant principal my current relationship with families of multilingual learners has been more formal. . .I worry about the level at which we are prioritizing services to them [multilingual] in a school setting." |
| **Stacey Klein** Assistant Principal/ wide." Mid-Sized Middle School | White | Female | Monolingual English Speaker | "My current relationship with families of multilingual learners is fairly limited . . . I believe we seriously need to consider how we can better support our multilingual learners district- |
| **Sue Janzen** Assistant Principal/ Small, Rural Comprehensive High School | White | Female | Monolingual English Speaker | "We have a fairly small [but growing] multilingual population in our school and while relationships are cordial and I want to believe they are open; I don't believe we do enough as a school to actively seek out participation." |
| **Teresa Coleman** Assistant Principal/ Mid-Sized Elementary School | White | Female | Bilingual English/ Spanish Speaker | "I was a Spanish teacher and then helped create the two-way immersion (TWI) program for [my school district]. I work closely with our multilingual learners and their families on a daily basis as an assistant principal in the elementary school that hosts our TWI program." |

and new knowledge in practice according to a student's local context), and *Sharing* (e.g., sharing with peers, reflecting on practice, and providing feedback to one another) (Viesca et al., 2017).

Participants were first asked to consider their own school and community context, as well as their current relationship among stakeholders. Discussion online allowed administrators to understand the unique environment of each participant, as well as common areas of concern. This information offered a foundation and nonthreatening introduction to the online group. The second module shifted to understanding of the immigrant stages of experience. Here the action element of the module pressed participants to identify and address how they might better support specific groups of learners and their families. In the third module, the focus moved to communicating with families of multilingual learners, homing in on identifying and implementing practical adjustments in current policy and practice. The fourth module focused on the use of Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) as a means of moving toward more inclusive practice, considering local populations and how this information could be shared with teachers and school staff. Finally, the fifth module addressed new ways of considering family and care giver participation in schools, as well as including multilingual community members as active stakeholders, including leadership roles. Thus, the participants were guided from their current stance through materials that would encourage a stronger knowledge base, explorations of understanding of cultural, economic, historical, and psychological factors, and encouraged tapping the potential that exists among family and community. At the same time, course participants were able to build their own supportive professional community that acknowledged differences in school communities while offering practical, supportive discussion from colleagues.

*Data Analysis and Procedures*

Case study data analysis was an iterative process that encompassed review, coding of themes, and the development of analytic memos (Emerson et al., 1995; Krippendorff, 2018; Owen, 2014). Fieldnotes, documents, and artifacts were uploaded into MaxQDA, a qualitative research software to facilitate data curation and analysis. Initial *a priori* codes included *beliefs, leadership growth, family engagement, experiences, prior*

*knowledge, community of learning*. We used memos to uncover patterns and themes, which helped to surface categories and key moments of intersection across themes. Throughout these processes we applied our conceptual frameworks as we considered the ways participants were constructing meaning, mediating beliefs, and changing practices as they engaged with one another (SCT) and with content aligned to Khalifa's (2018) CRSL framework. For example, a theme that emerged among community of learning codes that aligned with our sociocultural conceptual framework, was the theme of critical friendship. Another theme that emerged among our family/community engagement codes was around authentic relationship-building, reflective of Khalifa's CRSL framework, and its emphasis on engaging local contexts. In these ways our case study approach allowed for an understanding of individual cases as well as connections across multi-cases. This allowed us to move to more analytic thought about our data (Owen, 2014) in relationship to our conceptual frameworks (e.g., leadership growth in relationship to culturally responsive practices). The lead author completed the data analysis and co-authors reviewed the analysis at various stages of the process. Findings were not only triangulated across data sources but were member-checked with participants. What follows is a review of key findings and a discussion of implications for educator preparation.

**Findings**

Leadership is a critical component of a school's effective work with multilingual students and their families (August & Hakuta, 1998; Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Just as Murphy and Torff (2012) found in their study of 75 school administrators in a large metropolitan area, school leaders in this study acknowledged their need to address gaps in knowledge and experience to meet the needs of multilingual students. All participants stated that they wished there had been more attention to working with multilingual students in their preparation or ongoing professional development and stated that opportunities were limited and often focused on teachers. As we detail below, participants demonstrated three core outcomes, (a) moving from surface access to authentic relationship building with multilingual students and families, (b) developing a community of critical friendship among school

administrators in the region, and (c) acting to engage multilingual students and families in the school in new ways.

*From Surface Access to Authentic Relationship Building*

Critics of traditional approaches to family engagement (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, family activity nights) point out that such practices are not very effective and can even further marginalize multilingual families (Chávez-Reyes, 2010; Valdéz, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). As Lowenhaupt (2014) pointed out in her study of school response to the NLD in Wisconsin, schools' engagement with multilingual families was often "superficial, ill-conceived, and inequitable" (p. 525). By the end of the course and in post-course follow-ups, in all but one case, participants described more proactive approaches in cultivating relationships with multilingual families.

In the first day of class participants described their school responses to multilingual students and families in terms of data on how many multilingual students were served or what translation services were provided by the school district, rather than the ways their schools were inviting family engagement. As one participant reflected in a discussion board at the beginning of the term, the responsibility to develop relationships with multilingual families was "other people's work." This kind of disposition was most clear in the cases of Megan Williams, Stacey Klein, and Sue Janzen. Klein, for example, described in a discussion board post that frequently, her first point of contact with multilingual families was in "child study team" meetings, where educators and the family meet to map out support and interventions for students. Thus, her interactions with multilinguals students and their families did not occur until a student was experiencing challenges academically, socially, or behaviorally

Participants described relying on classroom teachers or bilingual liaisons to facilitate the school's primary engagement with multilingual students or families. However, two participants (June Smith and Janzen) expressed a concern in discussion board posts about "not doing enough" or "not doing what we can" to make families "feel welcome" or "actively seeking or engaging in relationships" at the building level. Teresa Coleman, the bilingual assistant principal at the only school with a TWI program was the only exception in her approach to engaging multilingual families. She shared with classmates in a discussion board post that she

positioned her office in the main office of the school so that "I am the one [multilingual] parents and students encounter right after seeing the bilingual front office staff member." In the face-to-face class Coleman also described how she was intentional about learning about the strengths each multilingual parent/guardian was bringing to the school. "I find out what [each parent/guardian] is good at and I find a way to get them involved in some way in what we are doing."

As students participated in module content, discussions, "Make It Work" projects, and reflection on their own practice, there was an overall shift to thinking about their roles in engaging multilingual families. They began to discuss proactive and asset-based approaches to building relationships with multilingual students' families as part of the work of the building leader. They described ways to intentionally cultivate relationships with multilingual students and their families beyond structures of surface access (e.g., translation, invitation to parent-teacher conferences) for families.

This transformation began to emerge in the second module following an article and activity on immigrant stages (Han & Love, 2015). In the discussion board that followed, participants began to describe multilingual families beyond those students who were receiving language services in their buildings. They asked questions about data and ways to respond to the ways multilingual families experienced their schools (e.g., Williams, Klein, Taveras). By the fifth module, participants moved to active engagement in their buildings. This transformed from ideas about providing a single translator at parent-teacher conferences to systemic ways to include student/family voices in decision making (e.g., family advisory group). Janzen described how her approach to working with multilingual families had changed. At the beginning of the term, she stated that it was difficult to "seek out the participation of [multilingual] parents who are not motivated to do so." By Unit 6, Janzen described being responsible to develop "meaningful and productive partnerships" and being willing to ask questions. "Too often, we skip this step, relying on traditional routines, expecting others to provide us the information, or simply not realizing the impact that genuinely seeking input could have."

By the conclusion of the course participants recognized the importance of consistent outreach, which both Carreón et al. (2005) and Lowenhaupt (2014) also found as vital to building trust and authentic connections with multilingual families and Khalifa (2018) describes as

fundamental to sustaining CRSL. Even Coleman, the assistant principal at the school with the TWI program reflected on her growth in her post-class interview, from learning about the strengths multilingual families could bring to the school, to developing systematic ways to partner with families to gain insight on what activities might serve them better. She formed an advisory group to provide feedback on the way families were experiencing school in her building in the 6 months following course completion, another aspect of engagement Lowenhaupt (2014) found as particularly promising among schools.

*Community of Critical Friendship*

Participants developed a community of critical friendship that supported personal growth and planning for change initiatives in their schools. At the beginning of the course participants were hesitant to discuss specifics around their beliefs and practices in working with multilingual students. Developing a community of critical friendship (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Loughran & Brubaker, 2015) where students felt "safe" to express their vulnerability and to engage in critical self-reflection (Khalifa, 2018) while also being held accountable to one another was foundational to the shifts in thinking described above and the incremental changes participants implemented in their school contexts. The use of the term "safe" among participants was striking, particularly when contrasting that with how multilingual students and their families might describe experiencing schools in the region. It is likely that many would not use the term "safe."

By module two, which focused on the immigrant family experience, participants surfaced gaps in their knowledge and began to ask questions of one another's practice in discussion board posts. This became a central part of their learning experience that continued throughout the remainder of the course. An example of this was when Klein reviewed multilingual student data that Coleman shared in her "Make It Work" project. The data raised questions for Klein as she considered her own student population. In a discussion board post she stated that, "Your ML population data makes me want to dig deeper into our data. … I look through all of the Home Language Surveys for the district, but it makes me wonder if I may be missing something. Although our other

multilingual populations are very small, they still need to be important and considered…" Through viewing Coleman's data, Klein extended her thinking about multilingual learners and how she might act to respond.

Participants also began to request feedback and to interrogate one another's perspectives and ideas, transitioning from indifferent classmates to attentive colleagues engaged in one another's practice. In module four's discussion on using "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992), Cunningham, a principal of a rural charter school, who had the least experience working with multilingual students and families, made a comment about wanting to serve more multilingual students but feeling concerned about the current political context and how "visible" families might want to be, particularly if undocumented. Cunningham questioned whether a "funds of knowledge approach" would help him "tap into this community" to support his building's enrollment. Coleman critiqued Cunningham's post, reminding him that "ELL status does not inherently equate to documented/undocumented." She asserted that documentation status is not something that a school leader should address with families and encouraged him to pursue his own learning about the funds of knowledge and assets NLD families were bringing to his community. Coleman shifted the conversation in the discussion board challenging her peer to assume the role of the learner seeking to understand the "wants/needs/values the families you are courting are not having met," a practice that promoted anti-oppressive approaches (Khalifa, 2018) in a colleague's practice.

Finally, the community of critical friendship extended beyond the term. In the postcourse interview 6 months following course completion, 5 of the 10 participants described continuing contact with at least one other person in the course as a point of contact and resource in continuing to engage multilingual students and their families. The cultivation of a community of critical friendship among participants was essential to the learning experience during and following the completion of the course modules. These findings align with what Fahey (2011) found in his study of principal critical friend groups, that they are particularly effective when the learning is "connected to actual dilemmas that school leaders face" (p. 32) and when the relationships and collaboration extend beyond a fixed term.

*Acting to Engage Multilingual Students and Their Families*

Previous research has pointed to the importance of education leadership coursework focused on multilingual students' assets and needs, hypothesizing that better preparation would lead to stronger principal leadership on meeting the needs of sub-groups (Baecher et al., 2016; Murphy & Torff, 2012; Reeves & Van Tuyle, 2014). As Khalifa's work highlights, this kind of coursework prepares leaders to support culturally responsive teachers and curricula, to make decisions in policy and practice that are antioppressive, and to engage local communities and contexts in meaningful ways. Participants demonstrated this kind of engagement in local communities in the six months following course completion. In the early modules participants explained away their lack of engagement with multilingual families. As they engaged in module content, they began to describe their administrator roles in new ways and shared ideas about actions they might take.

Janzen, a high school assistant principal at a rural-comprehensive high school reflected that, "Prior to beginning this course, I would have been able to state that our engagement of multilingual learners and their families contained many opportunities for improvement (read: it's not good now), but I would not have been able to articulate much in the way of the specific thoughts for improving it. I would say the most significant outcome of this eWorkshop so far, for me, is increased of awareness [sic] of all the ways in which engaging with the school may be a challenge for multilingual families."

Post-course participants put their emerging ideas about next steps into action-plans tailored to their schools and communities. Examples of participant ideas turning into action included collaborating with a Latinx agency that serves as a hub for one community in the region, hiring a middle school teacher who works 0.5 of her full-time equivalency (FTE) as a liaison with multilingual families, and designing professional learning plans for faculty and staff in a high school in the region. In post-course interviews all but one participant reported that they had continued to seek opportunities to extend their learning and that they continued to find at least small changes they felt confident making in their buildings as a result of their participation in the online learning units.

## Discussion

Broadly, school leadership preparation and ongoing professional development that equips leaders to work with multilingual students and their families is lacking (Baecher et al., 2013; Bland, 2020; Buss, 2021). Our findings (a) underscore several factors for successful leadership preparation and oPD from a sociocultural perspective that address this gap and have implications for preparing leaders to enact CRSL as they engage multilingual students and their families.

First, experiences require understanding likely points of entry on the part of administrators and how to develop simultaneously supportive and challenging learning that promotes the kind of critical self-reflection Khalifa (2018) describes. The modules described above, embedded into coursework that provided the space for participants to develop a shared community of critical friendship that supported this kind of self- and collective-reflection.

Second, focused collaborative activity and extended time for engagement are requisite for new understandings and action. While our courses were each only 10 weeks, the cultivation of a community of critical friendship sustained learning beyond the fixed boundaries of the term, extending new understandings and action. Further, mediation in social interactions in various forms should be considered to meet the complex and varied needs of learners. Again, the content and approach supported the development of a community of learning that allowed participants with a spectrum of prior knowledge, experience, and belief systems to challenge themselves and to shift thinking and practice in their unique contexts. In the same way participants were supported in collaboratively mediating new and existing cultural, linguistic, and historical knowledge toward a more inclusive perspective, the teachers and students under their leadership require similar respectful and supportive spaces for socially constructed development that is culturally responsive to the school and community population, yet another example of Khalifa's CRSL framework.

Finally, it is through learning spaces grounded in SCT that attend to the skills and practices of CRSL that leaders' perspectives and actions shift, resulting in improved programs, policy, and more inclusive educative environments for multilingual students. In the same way these participants were supported in collaboratively mediating new and existing

cultural, linguistic, and historical knowledge toward a more inclusive perspective, the teachers and students under their leadership require similar respectful and supportive spaces for socially constructed development that is culturally responsive to the school and community population. The interactions undertaken in this collaborative experience, in pursuit of new understanding and skills to better address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse populations, holds potential for shifting participant perceptions, and precipitating action to improve programs and policy, resulting in a more inclusive educative environment that reflects CRSL dispositions and behaviors.

Our findings confirm Khalifa's assertion that cultivating CRSL includes equipping leaders to practice critical self-reflection, to promote anti-oppressive policies and practices in their school buildings, and to engage students' families and communities in meaningful ways. The online module experience was designed to encourage self-reflection and reflection on oppressive policies and practices that influence the ways multilingual students and families experience school. Findings suggest participants moved from critical self-reflection to culturally responsive efforts to change those practices. An example includes one participant's effort to partner with a local Latinx agency that serves as a hub in the region.

*Implications for School Leader Preparation*

A 10-week course with a series of embedded modules is not sufficient for sustained transformation of practice. The pattern of participants' shifts in dispositions and practice throughout and following course completion was consistent across both cohorts, however, we have only two cohorts and a limited number of participants. While the study is limited by scope, there are implications for school leader preparation and oPD as an exploratory undertaking.

The role of education leaders is vital to transforming multilingual students' experiences in school. To be effective, however, education leaders in preparation and in practice need to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions Khalifa (2018) describes in his CRSL framework, opportunities in leadership preparation and oPD that are grounded in a pedagogy of SCT. The participants in this study demonstrate the ways that administrators shift their practice when provided such opportunities. Future studies should consider ways to address the gap in preparation

for leaders to engage multilingual students and how addressing that gap fits within larger frameworks for CRSL as well as promising practices for the instructional approaches that sustain changes in practice that the learning addresses. Complicating this charge, is that education leadership preparation faculty themselves, frequently lack the expertise to carry out this work (Reeves & Van Tuyle, 2014). Thus, collaboration with experts in multilingual education to develop and provide access to content grounded in SCT with a commitment to CRSL in online module formats like those described here, are a promising site for future research.

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