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Effective Teachers of Multilingual Learners: A Mixed-Method Study of UK and US Critical Sociocultural Teaching Practices

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Abstract

This convergent parallel mixed-method study (quan + QUAL) relies on systematic classroom observations of mainstream teachers considered highly effective with multilingual learners in the United Kingdom and the United States (N = 9). Using a critical sociocultural theoretical lens, we use an established quantitative observation rubric and lesson field notes to capture real-world teaching practices. Using deductive reasoning to merge closed- and open-ended observation data, we illuminate the features of highly effective teaching for multilingual students. Evidence demonstrates that elements of challenge in activity design and teacher presentation, prioritizing language and literacy development, and modeling, were practices with the highest consistency across countries. At the same time, other features leave room for future growth. Lesson analysis unpacked various ways

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teachers enact effective teaching based on country context. Despite educational policies that may conflict with strong teaching for multilingual students, linguistically responsive teachers in both countries transcend curricular and testing constraints by intentionally enacting lessons that richly scaffold learning.
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INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom and the United States are English-speaking nations with long histories of educating children of migrant families. Given the dominance of English globally, educators face complex questions in teaching multilingual[1] learners when countries rely on monolingually oriented education policies (Anderson, Foley, Sangster, Edwards, & Rassool, 2016; Menken & Solorza, 2012). In both countries, complexities are exacerbated by the shared challenges of under-attainment (DfE, 2019; McFarland et al., 2019) and the under-preparation of teachers (Flynn, 2019; López & Santibañez., 2018). Still, these educators face the challenge of learning and enacting teaching practices that support multilingual learners' (MLLs) linguistic and content achievement.

Many scholars view critical sociocultural theory as foundational to advancing learning outcomes for MLLs (e.g., Lucas, Strom, Bratkovich, & Wnuk, 2018; Viesca et al., 2019). Critical social theory elucidates marginalization, ethnicity, culture, and language (e.g., Gottesman, 2016). Vygotsky's (1978 and 1997) sociocultural theory of cognitive development envisioned knowledge as cultural, learning as social, and teaching as mediation. Esmonde and Booker (2017) and Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) have argued a focus on identity, power, and agency would enrich sociocultural theory. Nevertheless, Vossoughi and Gutiérrez (2016) identified common ground between critical and sociocultural perspectives in considering humans as social and historical beings, teachers as mediators of learning, and connecting home to school knowledge.

To date, there have been very few, if any, collaborative studies that compare UK and US mainstream[2] teachers considered highly effective with MLLs, perhaps because of differences in contexts (Murphy &

[1] We use the asset-based term "multilingual learners" to describe students who draw on more than one language in their home and school lives.

[2] We use the term "mainstream" teachers to describe non-specialist elementary general education or content teachers.

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Unthia, 2015). Our study contributes original insights into *how* effective teachers engage MLLs in both countries through critical sociocultural practices called the Enduring Principles of Learning[3] (Teemant, Leland, & Berghoff, 2014; Tharp, 2006). By looking for commonalities, we share international perspectives and potential solutions for serving MLLs with equity, contributing much-needed practice-defining data to a scant knowledge base (Faltis & Valdés, 2016). Moreover, we propose that by describing the pedagogical practices and mindset of sociolinguistically conscious teachers (Lucas & Villegas, 2013), we unlock ways to surpass prescribed curricula in ours and other English-speaking jurisdictions.

RELATED LITERATURE

In this section, we underscore the array of pedagogies operating in the classrooms of highly effective teachers of MLLs from critical sociocultural perspectives. We turn to Freire's (1994) critical pedagogy to examine teaching through sociopolitical concerns, and we turn to Vygotsky's (1978, 1997) theory to focus on learning as a socially and culturally embedded activity. While distinctive in origins and emphasis, we interweave these theories' shared interests in the cultural and relational nature of learning with the centrality of dialogue. Finally, we present the Enduring Principles of Learning (EPL) as representative of critical sociocultural teaching.

Theoretical Roots of Quality Teaching

From critical and sociocultural perspectives, learning is considered inseparable from cultural context. Vygotsky (1978) viewed knowledge as cultural and competent participation in diverse cultural, linguistic, and knowledge communities. Similarly, Freire's (1994) 'liberating pedagogy' demanded that teachers and students are jointly responsible for mutual growth through dialogue (p.53). As Vossoughi and Gutiérrez (2016) observed, both theories view knowledge as a tool for action, not solely an outcome.

From critical and sociocultural perspectives, learning is also relational and occurs through negotiated dialogue and with support from others. Freire (1994) viewed discussion rather than teacher

[3] The Enduring Principles of Learning (EPL) were previously known as the *Standards for Effective Pedagogy* (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). The terminology was updated from *standards* to *principles* in Teemant and Sherman (2022) to reflect a focus on student learning rather than standardization of teaching practices.

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transmission of knowledge as central. He argued that dialogue allowed authentic learning to emerge as a reflection of one's identity, agency, and positionality. Freire's "problem-posing pedagogy" (p. 56) assumes that learning is a transformative inquiry process that challenges the status quo. Students' learning and life chances change when teachers position them as co-investigators in "live and creative dialogue in which everyone knows some things and does not know others, in which all seek, together, to know more" (Freire, 1971, p. 61). This humanizing pedagogy counters the dehumanizing pedagogy students might experience when teachers ignore their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Salazar, 2013).

Effective teachers of MLLs, therefore, arm themselves with knowledge: They know about students' lived experiences; They question their own positionality; and they acknowledge students need to operate in the dominant language and culture while maintaining their own linguistic and cultural resources (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004). Pedagogically, the teacher maximizes multilingual students' learning potential by orchestrating a shared context for learning that invites and affirms students' cultural, linguistic, and community experiences in genuinely dialogic ways.

Vygotsky (1997) described the interactional space between teachers and learners as active in dialogue, assistance, and assessment. Akin to Freire's description, students and teachers occupy the same socially mediated and creative dialogue space. Crucially, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978)—the difference between what a learner knows and what they come to know through social interaction—presents educators with a way of framing activities to account for MLLs' linguistic and cultural norms. According to Lucas et al. (2018), the linguistically responsive teacher combines Freire's teacher-as-activist stance with dialogically informed sociocultural practices, intentionally foregrounding talk as a classroom learning tool.

UK and US researchers champion this notion of "dialogic practice" (Alexander, 2004; Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Mercer, 2007; Wegerif, 2008; Wells, 2006 inter alia). Drawing on a Vygotskyan model of practice, and reflecting Freirean pedagogical principles, Mercer and Howe (2012), for example, argue that dialogic teaching requires understanding how to use talk as the primary pedagogical tool. Specifically, teachers use dialogue to promote higher-order thinking and problem-solving as a route to learning. Crucially, when used with MLLs, dialogue empowers culturally minoritized students (Haneda & Wells, 2008) as teachers and students master the use of exploratory talk together (Freire, 1971).

Several UK and US studies have also examined the positive impact of dialogic teaching on student outcomes. In the United Kingdom, Jay

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et al. (2017) reported on a 20-week randomized control trial using Alexander's (2015) dialogic teaching intervention with classes of 9- to 10-year-olds in 38 schools. Alexander frames dialogic teaching as expanding students' dialogic repertoires: "Students learn to reason, explain, justify, argue, speculate, evaluate, and in other ways think for themselves" (Jay et al., 2017, p. 6). Positive effects on all pupils' confidence and engagement were reported by school administrators; but most specifically on those from minoritized groups.

In a US case study, Boyd and Markarian (2011) described how a teacher listened attentively to students' answers and responded with scaffolding dialogue, which cultivated "students' foreknowledge to readily receive school knowledge and dispositions" (p. 523). Whereas in a 7-year longitudinal study of 10 teachers, Haneda and Wells (2008) explored dialogic practices in creating classroom communities of inquiry. They noted that newly arrived MLLs benefited from engaging in meaningful, shared activities that provided a challenge, a purpose, and an audience for their developing talk.

To summarize, effective teaching for MLLs is characterized by critical sociocultural perspectives presented by linguistically responsive teachers deploying dialogic approaches that acknowledge and engage students' social, cultural, and linguistic resources. Teachers' fine-grained knowledge about their students and understanding of the empirical drivers for their dialogic practice support a pedagogy of 'armed love' (Freire, 1971). However, existing literature draws only a limited picture of what this higher-order teaching looks like. While there is some recognition of the benefits of critically engaged dialogic practice in both the United Kingdom and the United States, no research from the United Kingdom applies it to teaching for MLLs, and only small-scale case study research exists from the United States. Current studies primarily focus on specific literacy interventions using quantitative measures (e.g., Oxley & De Cat, 2019). Furthermore, there is scant literature on teacher professional development for MLLs (Murphy & Unthia, 2015). Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand better what happens between effective mainstream teachers and their MLLs (Teemant, 2020) by merging qualitative and quantitative data sources.

Critical Sociocultural Practices

In seeking to draw a more detailed picture of higher-order teaching for MLLs, our study uses an established rubric for observing critical sociocultural practices—the EPL (Teemant, 2014). Drawing on Tharp et al.'s (2000) work, an original five principles included: *Joint Productive*

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Activity—through which teachers and students work together to create new understandings; *Language and Literacy Development*—whereby the design of activities actively fosters curriculum-related language and literacy use; *Contextualization*—activities connect students' home, community, and school experiences; *Challenging Activities*—through which teachers stimulate and assist more complex thinking; *Instructional Conversation*—where the teacher intentionally listens and assists student talk in small groups. Teemant et al. (2014) established *Critical Stance*—whereby the teacher designs classroom experiences that address inequities, challenging, reflecting, and acting upon the status quo—as a Freirean principle of learning. The seventh principle of *Modeling* (Tharp, 2006) captures how a teacher uses explicit modeling to scaffold understanding.

The Standards Performance Continuum Plus (SPC Plus) is an observation continuum for measuring teacher use of the EPL (Teemant et al., 2014; Tharp, 2006; see Appendix S1). The continuum moves from behavioristic/banking model practices to critical sociocultural practices. At the critical sociocultural end, teachers ensure knowledge is collaboratively and dialogically co-constructed, assistance and feedback are plentiful, clear expectations are communicated and modeled, and new learning is richly contextualized and actionable in students' lives.

Research using this rubric has focused on teacher learning and student outcomes. For example, studies of pedagogical coaching demonstrate that educators' mindsets and practices shift using this pedagogy (e.g., Teemant & Sherman, 2022; Teemant, Wink, & Tyra, 2011). Individually and in combination, the EPL has also been linked to improved student academic and language learning in a wide range of experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational, and mixed-methods designs (e.g., Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, & Tharp, 2003; Estrada, 2005; Portes, González Canché, Boada, & Whatley, 2018; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999; Teemant et al., 2014; Teemant & Hausman, 2013; Teemant, Hausman, & Kigamwa, 2016).

This study used the EPL pedagogy to illuminate teacher–student interactions when classroom practice intentionally supports language and content learning. To this end, our research questions were as follows:

RQ1 Quantitative: Using the SPC Plus rubric, what critical sociocultural principles capture quality instruction among highly effective mainstream teachers of multilingual learners?

RQ2 Qualitative: How do highly effective teachers enact critical sociocultural principles in practice using lesson field notes?

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RQ3 Mixed Methods: Using merged findings, what commonalities, differences, and implications emerge from the highly effective multilingual practices of UK and US mainstream teachers?

METHODS

This study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (quant + QUAL; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to investigate the teaching practices of highly effective UK and US mainstream teachers of MLLs. Quantitative and qualitative classroom observation data were collected in parallel, analyzed separately, and merged. Using the SPC Plus (Teemant et al., 2014), quantitative data captured UK and US teachers' critical sociocultural teaching practices. We used the quantitative data to select the high-scoring teachers from both countries and identify aspects of their teaching to explore qualitatively. Qualitative lesson field notes described how these teachers responsively enacted critical sociocultural practices. Our integration of closed- and open-ended data allowed UK-US comparisons to generate a more nuanced picture of highly effective teachers of MLLs than quantitative or qualitative results alone. The description of the contexts, research team, participants, data sources, and analyses follow.

National Policies and Practices

Although English is the target language in the United Kingdom and the United States, different policies and practices for teaching MLLs govern educators. MLLs make up around 20% of primary and 17% of secondary-aged students in the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) and 9.5% of the US student population. One striking difference is in management of funding for MLLs. The United Kingdom only funds new arrivals for the first 3 years of schooling; this equates to only 1% of district expenditure on student needs, and there is wide variation in allocations across districts and across the United Kingdom's four nations (DfE, 2022). The United States provides Title III federal funding to each state, states annually provide funding to districts, and competitive federal funding supports teacher preparation. Certification for multilingual specialists is required, but these expectations vary considerably across states, with some states (e.g., California, Florida) articulating minimum qualifications for mainstream teachers (Leider, Colombo, & Nerlino, 2021).

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A similarity between the countries is that locally or nationally mandated curricula assume a monolingual, English-speaking learner (Flynn, 2019; Teemant, 2014). Each UK nation has a centralized, government-driven national curriculum for teaching but a paucity of multilingual education policy (Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). The US curricula vary by state and districts within states; this is also the case for support services for MLLs. Moreover, in both countries, students are subjected to high-stakes national testing in English that shapes teachers' and school leaders' priorities and potentially marginalizes MLLs (Anderson et al., 2016; Menken & Solorza, 2012). The United States also requires yearly language proficiency testing (Morita-Mullaney, 2016). Thus, the teachers we observed for this study were bound by English-oriented curriculum and assessment frameworks that did not necessarily highlight or engage in the learning assets MLLs bring to the classroom.

Research Team

The research team for this study was part of a larger four-nation study in Germany, Finland, the United States, and the United Kingdom (specifically England) (Viesca et al., 2022), which explored the international applicability of the SPC Plus for observing practices for MLLs. The team intentionally included teacher educators and researchers of multilingualism from four nations who established inter-rater reliability on the SPC Plus through online and face-to-face learning. During observations, some researchers captured field notes while others focused on documenting evidence for SPC Plus ratings. The team discussed their quantitative and qualitative evidence to ensure consensus. Data analysis and interpretation likewise relied on merging perspectives. Ethical approvals/IRB for the study were obtained from all authors' institutions.

Participants

As part of the more extensive study (Viesca et al., 2022), we observed 18 teachers (10 from seven US schools; 8 from four UK schools). All schools were in districts populated with low-income families from minoritized groups.

Using the SPC Plus, we focused on identifying patterns of practice. Observed teachers were recruited using opportunity sampling from schools known to local research team members or recommended by school principals as excellent practitioners. In this context, "excellence"

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referred to observed effective practice with MLLs measured by school-level monitoring systems. During observations, it became apparent that there were nuances of difference between US and UK classrooms that invited further examination and comparison; specifically, we wanted to unpack the practices of high-scoring teachers.

Table 1 presents the classroom demographics of the nine teachers identified as the highest implementers of critical sociocultural practices for this UK-US study. We list the year/grades (student ages, ranging 4–15), content areas (8 or 89% = English or English Language Arts-ELA; 1 or 11% = history), number of students, and the number and percentage of MLLs in each class (ranging 5%–100%) by participant. Despite differences in the ages of students, lessons were comparable because of their focus on language and literacy development (LLD).

Data Collection and Sources

The study began with identifying highly effective teachers in urban settings in US and UK school districts with much higher numbers of MLLs than national averages (UK district 73%; US districts 30%). Table 1 shows more MLLs in the UK than in the US classrooms. However, we were focused on teacher practices, which were not dependent on the classroom ratio of students.

With limited time and the expense of international travel, we gathered quantitative and qualitative observation data concurrently in a one-week visit to each country. At least two researchers observed each lesson for a minimum of 30 minutes. Two research team members observed the teachers in both countries, and all four researchers were part of the wider four-nation team. The US and UK data were the third and final sites of the larger study.

TABLE 1
US and UK High-Scoring Teacher Classroom Demographics

Teacher	Year/grade (ages)	Content focus	# Students	# MLLs	% MLLs
UKT1	Year 0 (4–5)	Phonics/reading	14	11	79%
UKT2	Year 5 (9–10)	History	19	15	79%
UKT3	Year 5 (9–10)	English-reading	27	5	19%
UKT4	Year 3 (7–8)	English-writing	30	24	80%
UKT5	Year 6 (10–11)	English-writing	27	27	100%
UST1	Grade 5 (10–11)	ELA	26	15	58%
UST2	Grade 9 (14–15)	ELA	20	1	5%
UST3	Grade 4 (9–10)	ELA-gifted	20	2	10%
UST4	Grade 6 (11–12)	ELA	22	6	27%

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The SPC Plus observation rubric (see Appendix S1) captured quantitative ratings of critical sociocultural teaching for individuals and groups by individual EPL and total score. The SPC Plus is a five-level continuum, where each of the seven EPL can be rated as not observed (0), emerging (1), developing (2), enacting (3), or integrating (4). The enacting level represents the highest level of implementation for individual principles. If researchers scored three or more EPL at the enacting level (i.e., the 3 × 3 rule), those scores were raised from 3s to 4s to recognize teacher skill in integrating multiple EPL into practice. With a total score of 28 points possible, four value ranges determine the fidelity of implementation: (a) emerging <7.50; (b) developing = 7.50–12.49; (c) enacting = 12.50–17.49; and (d) integrating = 17.50–28.00. Several studies document the reliability and validity of the SPC Plus rubric (e.g., Doherty, Hilberg, Epaloose, & Tharp, 2002; Teemant et al., 2014).

Qualitative lesson field notes, captured in classrooms by two researchers who observed all teachers in both countries, were open-ended and continuous: resulting in a detailed description of teacher and student interactions, activities, transitions, and classroom configurations during the observation. The research team also collected photographs of classrooms, worksheets, and other artifacts.

Data Analysis

We used a three-phase data analysis process. In phase one (RQ1), we calculated descriptive statistics (means = M, standard deviations = SD, and modes = M) for the SPC Plus data by each principle and total score for individuals and country groups. We identified the nine highest-scoring teachers (5 UK and 4 US) among the highly effective teachers for inclusion in this study and made individual teacher and national group comparisons.

In phase two (RQ2), analysis of qualitative lesson field notes focused on high and consistent use of three of seven EPL (based on means and modes): Challenging Activities (CA), LLD, and Modeling (MD). We chose an a priori/deductive approach to coding field notes based on shared understandings of the SPC Plus, especially the enacting level features of critical sociocultural practice. There are recognized challenges to establishing validity in research that is "close-to-practice" and seeks to evaluate teachers' pedagogical decisions (Winch, Oancea, & Orchard, 2015). It was, therefore, crucial that we closely aligned our analysis of the SPC Plus ratings and the field notes. To this end, Table 2 presents a coding taxonomy of a priori codes reflecting the

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TABLE 2
Study Coding Taxonomy

Challenging Activities (CA)	Language and Literacy Development (LLD)	Modeling (MD)
CA 1 Teacher assists more complex thinking CA 2 Teacher gives clear standards or expectations CA 3 Teacher provides performance feedback	LLD 1 Activity generates content vocabulary LLD 2 Activity generates student language use LLD 3 Activity generates student literacy development LLD 4 Teacher assists student language use LLD 5 Teacher assists student literacy development	MD 1 Teacher assists during practice MD 2 Teacher models behaviors for task MD 3 Teacher provides a model of the product

enacting levels of CA, LLD, and MD which were used to frame the analysis of the field notes.

Analysis was conducted by the lead author and shared with the team for discussion and agreement that the codes were appropriately matched to observed practices. Using NVivo 12 (QSR, 2018), descriptive fieldnotes were transformed into codes, and the coding hierarchy function revealed an ordered "weighting" for different codes in each lesson. Using the weighted visualizations, we created individual narrative profiles for each class.

In phase three (RQ3), we converged observation data to understand how teachers enacted critical sociocultural practices in the real world. The field notes amplified the SPC Plus ratings by recording each lesson's granular, qualitative detail. We discuss and draw implications about how similarities and differences manifest across classes for CA, LLD, and MD.

FINDINGS

In this section, we present quantitative (RQ1) and qualitative (RQ2) findings focused on the practices of effective teachers of MLLs.

Quantitative Perspectives

Table 3 presents each UK and US teacher's ratings on the SPC Plus by each EPL and total score. Using the total score, UK teachers (M = 20.00, SD = 0.71) enacted the EPL at a higher level on average than US teachers (M = 17.75; SD = 2.83), although both groups were at the highest integrating level of implementation (M > 17.49). Seven

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TABLE 3

Enduring Principles Ratings with Means, Standard Deviations, and Modes by Individuals, Principles, and Total Score

Teacher	JPA	LLD	CTX	CA	IC	CS	M	Total	Level	Mean	Mode
UKT1	2	4	4	4	1	2	4	21	4 Integrating	3.00	4
UKT2	2	4	4	4	1	2	4	21	4 Integrating	3.00	4
UKT3	2	4	1	4	1	2	4	18	4 Integrating	2.57	4
UKT4	4	4	1	3	2	2	4	20	4 Integrating	2.86	4
UKT5	2	4	2	4	2	2	4	20	4 Integrating	2.86	2
UST1	4	4	4	4	2	2	0	20	4 Integrating	2.86	4
UST2	1	4	1	4	1	1	4	16	3 Enacting	2.29	1
UST3	4	4	3	2	4	2	0	19	4 Integrating	2.71	4
UST4	2	3	3	3	1	1	3	16	3 Enacting	2.29	3
Mean	2.56	3.89	2.56	3.56	1.67	1.78	3.00	19.00	4 Integrating		
SD	0.00	0.71	0.71	0.71	0.00	0.71	0.71	3.54			
Modes	2	4	1, 4	4	1	2	4				

of nine teachers used more than three EPL at the enacting level (3 × 3 rule) in their lessons, with six teachers having 4 (integrating) as their mode. Based on mode and mean analyses, we found that teachers uniformly used LLD (M = 3.89; SD = 0.71), CA (M = 3.56; SD = 0.71), and MD (M = 3.00; SD 0.71) at the highest integrating level (4) by these teachers.

On average, Contextualization (CTX) was used (M = 2.56; SD = 0.71) with more variability among teachers with ratings recorded at the emerging, developing, enacting, and integrating levels (UK: M = 2.40, SD = 1.41; US: M = 2.75, SD = 0.71). Joint Productive Activity (JPA) and Critical Stance (CS) were implemented at the developing level. US teachers used small group collaborative activities or JPA (M = 2.75; SD = 1.41) slightly more than UK teachers (M = 2.40; SD = 0.00). Teachers rarely worked as full partners with small groups of students to co-construct and directly assist learning, as represented by JPA and Instructional Conversations (IC) averages (UK: M = 1.40, SD = 0.71; US: M = 2.00, SD = 0.71). To a greater degree, US teachers held brief ad hoc ICs with small groups more often.

Teachers used Critical Stance at the developing level across groups (M = 1.78; SD = 0.71, Mode = 2) with some variation (UK: M = 2.00, SD = 0.00; US: M = 1.50, SD = 0.71). Teachers used variety (e.g., multiple modalities, perspectives, texts, or languages) and asked students to engage in open-ended tasks or reflection from numerous perspectives. However, none of the teachers designed lessons asking students to act within their spheres of influence to address the challenges they encounter.

The descriptive statistics provide evidence of the practices of highly effective mainstream teachers of MLLs captured along the SPC Plus

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continuum. Collectively and as separate groups, they averaged at the highest integrating level of implementation, using more than three EPL in their activities. From high to low use, effective teachers used the EPL in this order: LLD, CA, MD, JPA/CTX, CS, and IC.

Qualitative Lesson Profiles

Considering the observation that effective teachers in both countries prioritized LLD, CA, and MD in their teaching, RQ2 findings describe individual teacher use of each of these principles, using the weighted deductive coding of lesson field notes. Four example teachers (UK teachers 2 and 5 and US teachers 1 and 4), representative of the array of pedagogies exhibited between high-scoring practitioners, are now discussed. Tables 4–7 show the weighted deductive coding identified for their lessons' CA, LLD, and MD elements.

Individual teacher profiles. UKT2 taught 19 students (aged 9–10) in a school of 79% MLLs. Her history lesson was about Victorian Britain; explicitly understanding how and why 19th-century politicians had sought to clean up the then highly polluted and disease-ridden River Thames. The context for the lesson was richly meaningful for the students because they lived by the Thames. As shown in Table 4, the teacher designed the activity to generate content vocabulary (LLD 1) and student language use (LLD 2), and this rested on multiple scaffolds in the form of carefully chosen web-based materials and the teacher's recreation of the River Thames in a tank (MD 3). With each scaffold, the teacher got students talking and thinking in-depth about

TABLE 4
Coding of UK Teacher 2's Lesson

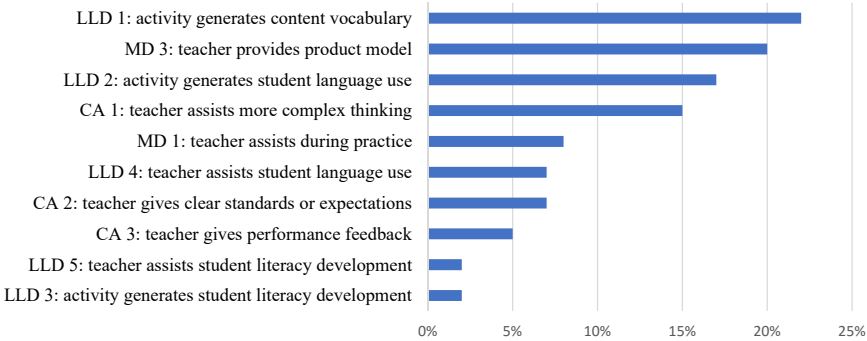

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TABLE 5
Coding of UK Teacher 5's Lesson

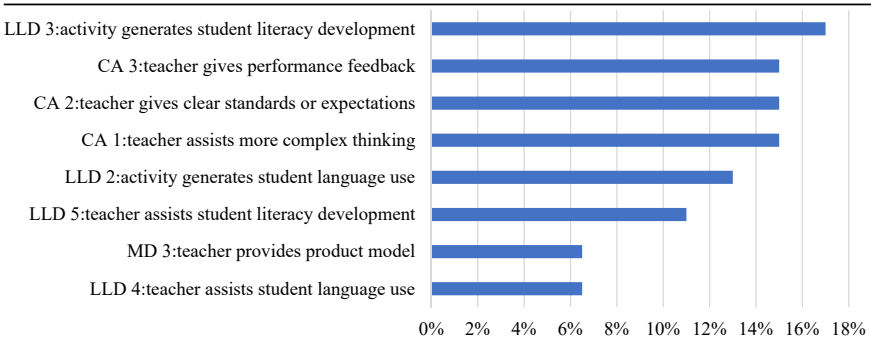


TABLE 6
Coding of US Teacher 1's Lesson

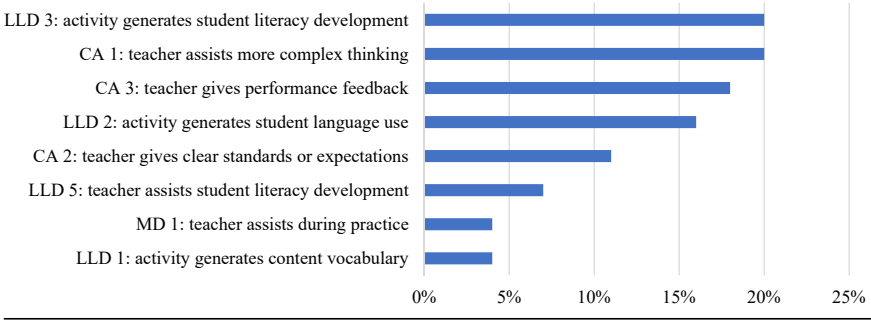
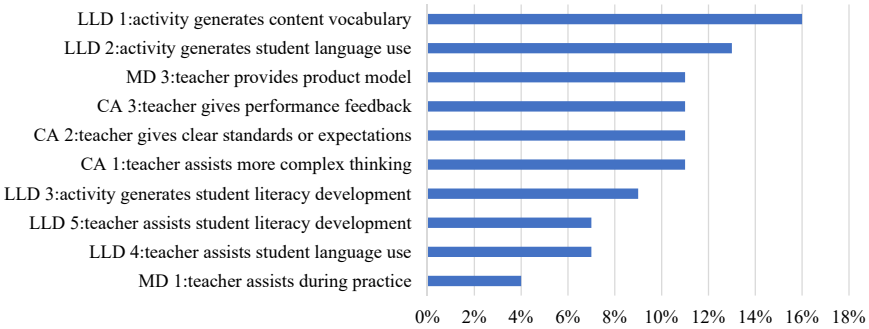


TABLE 7
Coding for US Teacher 4's Lesson



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the challenge facing the Prime Minister of the time (CA 1). The main activity of the lesson involved the students working in pairs to recreate a dialogue between two key political figures. This roleplay supported students' understanding and appropriate use of the content vocabulary for the lesson (LLD 1 and 2).

UKT5 was in a school with 100% MLLs where the senior management team had explicitly committed to dialogic practice (Alexander, 2004) as key to ensuring high academic outcomes. UKT5 taught 27 students aged 10–11. Table 5 shows that her lesson design generated student language and literacy development (LLD 2 and 3). The teacher–pupil interaction advanced complex thinking (CA 1), and she gave feedback against clear standards (CA 2 and 3) that fostered high-quality talk and writing from the students. The teacher required students to create a new character for each parallel world in their class reader *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman (2002). The students were actively encouraged to talk throughout the lesson to deepen their thinking and vocabulary to describe their characters (LLD 2). The teacher positioned herself alongside student groups and pairs to engage in dialogue with them, consisting mainly of open-ended questions (LLD 4 and 5). When talking to the whole class, she deferred to peer evaluation of writing rather than passing judgment herself. In this way, the students were equal partners with her in making meaning and taking ownership of their work.

UST1 taught 26 students aged 10–11 in a school of 58% MLLs (Table 6). The lesson was called "Book Club," in which the emphasis on dialogic exchanges between the students was intentionally planned (LLD 2). She emphasized activities designed to generate literacy development (LLD 3) while the teacher's task was to promote complex thinking with students using clear standards, assistance, and feedback (CA 1–3). Using systematic prompts and activities in the Socratic mindset central to dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2015), students were grouped in threesomes to discuss and analyze a book they were all reading. The entire class stayed on-task for 45 minutes in small groups with minimal teacher intervention. Observed in late spring, the teacher did not need to model a product or behaviors: students were autonomous and self-regulating.

UST4, the final teacher in our illustrative sample, taught 22 students (aged 11–12) in a class of 27% MLLs. The lesson (Table 7) focused on understanding the difference between myth and truth in the context of reading Greek myths. The teacher carefully contextualized myths as a literary genre in the previous lesson. They worked with partners on a reading comprehension activity with the single question: "What is a myth?" Moving on, students stood in a collaborative circle and played the game "telephone whispers," passing a message around

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the circle to replicate how stories became altered when transmitted orally. As with UKT2's history lesson, the weightiest codes scaffolding students' progress were related to the generation of content vocabulary and language use (LLD 1 and 2), modeling (MD 3), and challenge (CA 1–3).

The differences between these teachers' lessons exemplify the different routes to excellence that linguistically responsive teachers might take. In the following sections, we consider all nine teachers' practices.

Summary of practices across all lessons. Taking the scoring across all lessons (Table 8), several dominant trends in the weighting of the different codes within each domain stood out across teachers.

Challenging activity. Effective teachers made prevalent use of Challenging Activities. The most pervasive practice (43%) was to provide teacher assistance to promote more complex thinking (CA1). Providing clear standards or expectations (CA2, 29%) and performance feedback (CA3, 29%) were used equally, albeit less than teacher assistance (CA1). How teachers promoted students' more complex thinking differed according to age and lesson objectives. For UKT1, for example, the cognitive challenge was clarifying errors and misconceptions in spelling and ensuring the understanding of a simple plot of the class reader. Working with older children, UKT3 challenged students by deepening their capacity for inferential comprehension in a complex text. UST2 harnessed the power of targeted questioning and repeated reference to her high expectations for the character analysis in *Romeo and Juliet.*

Teachers challenged students' thinking in different ways as well. For UKT2, her challenging dialogue was held at the whole class level, predominately teacher-led. However, for UST1 and 3, there was very little teacher input. Despite this, everything that they did say engineered higher-level student talk. We might almost describe their practice as "intentionally absent." An interesting exception in the analysis is UKT5, whose practice was weighted equally across the three Challenging Activity codes.

Language and literacy development. Lesson success in terms of LLD appeared to lie specifically in activity design (LLD1: 19%; LLD2: 25%; LLD3: 25%) rather than on teacher assistance per se (LLD4: 13%; LLD5: 16%). Of all our findings, this is perhaps the most valuable in shedding light on what successful teachers of MLLs do in practice. For example, one element of success was the teachers' choice of a high-quality and familiar core text as the focus for all activity designs. Teachers engaged the students with activities that: resonated with

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TABLE 8
Summary and Disaggregated UK and US Lesson Field Note Coding Elements

Principles	SPC Plus Enacting Level Field Note Coding Elements	Code frequency by principle across all lessons	Percentage of code frequency by principle and country	
			UK	US
Challenging Activity	CA 1: Assists Complex Thinking	43%	45%	39%
	CA 2: Clear Standards Provided	29%	31%	26%
	CA 3: Feedback	29%	25%	36%
Language and Literacy Development	LLD 1: Content Vocabulary Use	16%	21%	34%
	LLD 2: Student Language Use	25%	25%	26%
	LLD 3: Student Literacy Development	25%	20%	16%
	LLD 4: Assists Language Use	13%	17%	16%
	LLD 5: Assists Literacy Development	16%	17%	9%
Modeling	MD 1: Assists During Practice	24%	18%	43%
	MD 2: Models Behaviors for Task	8%	10%	0%
	MD 3: Provides Model of Product	68%	71%	57%

them socially, culturally, and linguistically; built on and expanded vocabulary and language use; and enabled students to engage critically with literature. Thus, their craft embodied the practices of the linguistically responsive teacher (Lucas & Villegas, 2013), Freire's (1994) student empowerment through language and literacy, and Vygotsky's (1978) linking of language and thinking.

Teachers' pedagogical journeys to student empowerment differed. For UKT2 and UST4, deepening vocabulary related to a historical period equipped students to understand the actions of historical figures more fully. Similarly, for UKT1 and 4, the focus on language unlocked access to the lessons' objectives. For UKT5, UST1, and 3, the activity design was about emboldening students to operate independently of their teacher while still making tangible progress. For UST2, activity design enabled students to grapple with literary complexities that others might think too challenging for students from minoritized backgrounds.

Modeling. Regarding teacher use of modeling, effective teachers emphasize showing a completed product (MD 3: 68%) as a leading strategy for supporting student success. For example, UKT1's practice

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to make concrete the vocabulary of a phonics lesson for her young students relied on such modeling. Similarly, where teachers introduced new lesson content, product models dominated their practice (e.g., UKT4 and UST4). UKT5, UST1, and UST3 used very little or no modeling; however, rather than being a negative lesson feature, this practice was a testament to how self-regulating students were in their learning. Finally, another pattern showed teachers were more likely to assist students during practice (MD 1: 24%) than model behaviors needed to complete a task beforehand (MD 2: 8%).

MIXED-METHODS DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

To illuminate what works more comprehensively (RQ3), we converge our mixed-methods data to discuss UK and US commonalities and differences in how highly effective teachers engage with MLLs. We then discuss implications for advancing theory, research, and practice for understanding quality teaching for MLLs.

Commonalities and Differences

The UK and US contexts present key distinctions in classroom norms. In the United Kingdom, teachers used a whole class organization in which the teacher differentiates activities, and learning is scaffolded to be responsive to students' learning assets. This norm is partly generated by the UK's national curricula rather than policy-related guidance for MLLs; indeed, there is little evidence that policy influences practice (Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). In the United States, observed pedagogical norms appeared to be more mixed. Some teachers used small group tasks related in content but different in design (UST1 & 2). Yet other US teachers' (UST 2 and 4) teaching and differentiation were more akin to the UK whole-class approach.

Against this backdrop, Table 8 disaggregates elements of fieldnote coding by groups to compare teaching practices of effective teachers of MLLs at the highest or enacting levels of CA, LLD, and MD. Some caution is needed in interpreting findings because the groups were unequal. In addition, a coding element's dominant or limited occurrence does not imply better or worse practice. Still, the comparative data help us understand which aspects of practice might appear the same or different in either national context.

Teachers attended to students' LLD using whole class and small group configurations. Table 8 shows that teachers in both countries used all the enacting level elements of LLD and CA in their teaching,

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and both groups used MD less than LLD and CA. US teachers tended to focus on content vocabulary (34%) more while assisting students' literacy development the least (9%).

Other differences are less noticeable and perhaps more likely attributable to lesson content/focus differences than anything more fundamentally pedagogical. For LLD, effective teaching lay more with pre-lesson planning (LLD1-3) than teacher presentation (LLD4-5). This focus on lesson design does not mean teachers' input did not influence lesson effectiveness. Still, it indicates that these teachers knew their MLLs' language and literacy strengths very well and could design finely-tuned lessons to nurture students' abilities.

UK and US teachers emphasized assisting students toward more complex thinking. The drivers for how elements of Challenging Activities were employed reflected subtle differences, with UK teachers using clear standards or expectations (31%) and US teachers using feedback (36%) more often.

The only striking difference between these excellent UK and US teachers is in Modeling, where occurrences are higher among the UK teachers—particularly for teachers providing students with a product model (M3: 71%). We could explain this difference by the student-led lessons from UST1 and UST3, in which modeling was not observed (0). It could also be true that the UK norm of teacher-led whole-class practice explains this difference. For example, UKT1 used modeling extensively for young children in a phonics lesson (UKT1), and UKT4 modeled the new vocabulary needed for writing a playscript. This difference might also be attributable to US teachers' norm of working in "workstations" where students carry out different activities independent of the teacher or where modeling of a product might only take place at the group level or on other days than our observations recorded.

In summary, there were some context-specific differences and arguably some age-related differences, but overall, the commonalities outweighed the differences. Excellent mainstream education teachers of MLLs shared intentionality in lesson planning using the elements of cognitive challenge, language and literacy use and development, and modeling as means of assistance.

Implications

We investigated if and how the practices common to critical sociocultural pedagogy were embedded in the methods of exemplary teachers, being both dialogic and linguistically responsive. This section considers the implications for theory, research, and teacher education given these UK-US findings (RQ3).

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Theory. *This study provides empirical evidence that critical sociocultural practices unpack the real-world teaching of highly effective teachers of multilingual students.* Our quantitative and qualitative data are held together theoretically by a shared critical sociocultural framework with seven EPL. The SPC Plus supported identification of what happens between teachers and students when teachers use collaboration, language use, contextualization, modeling, challenge, inquiry, dialogue, and social action. Importantly, the lesson analysis honors how teachers prioritize pedagogical choices, giving more direct assistance when a lesson is cognitively challenging and investing more in lesson design than immediate assistance to promote LLD. While subtle, such merged findings enrich our understanding of what works pragmatically for teachers from a theoretical perspective. Findings also go some way to identifying what happens in the interactional space between teachers and MLLs when practice is intentionally dialogic (Teemant, 2020). Theory and practice can be held in tandem to exemplify best pedagogical practices without those practices being prescriptive for teachers or dehumanizing for students. Rejecting the banking model of teaching (Freire, 1994) and teacher professionalism, we argue that critical sociocultural theory supports creative, flexible, and lively possibilities for understanding multilingual teaching across classrooms, schools, and our different national contexts.

Research. Among teachers recognized for their excellence in teaching MLLs, our findings indicate more similarities than differences in teachers' practices across our countries. However, differences highlight how pedagogical norms might generate organizational differences in students' classroom experiences. Still, the similarities were what truly illustrated the actions of these linguistically responsive teachers (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Merged individual and group findings also demonstrated that each EPL, with different features, offers growth opportunities among even highly effective teachers. Despite research supporting the efficacy of Instructional Conversations with MLLs (e.g., Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999), these exemplary teachers were not always using the dialogic potential of small group conversations with students to their benefit. More research—and perhaps soul searching—is needed to understand and honestly name what liberates and constrains teachers in using the full range of linguistically responsive practices. For example, we need greater insight into how teachers can incorporate students' sociocultural, sociohistorical, and sociopolitical experiences in the learning process (i.e., CTX and CS).

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Teacher education practice. We acknowledge limitations in what can be inferred from the practice of small numbers of teachers in specific districts of the United Kingdom and the United States. However, our data give nuanced and original insights by comparing international practices for MLLs. In the practices of these highly effective mainstream education teachers, we observed the intentionality of practice in using cognitive challenge, LLD, and modeling. The remaining EPL were also visible but to a lesser degree. Overall, the order of use of the EPL (i.e., LLD, CA, MD, JPA/CTX, CS, and IC) provides insights into how, and to what degree, teachers are dialogic and linguistically responsive and where they need support to elevate the use of additional practices.

Thus, in educating teachers for linguistically diverse classrooms, the curriculum must include not just the subject matter knowledge and language/literacy knowledge required for teaching multilingual students: It must teach rich understanding of how pedagogical practices, such as the EPL, create meaningful and impactful learning opportunities for students from a variety of backgrounds. Indeed, our observations suggest that the real test for linguistically responsive teachers is whether they can relinquish control of classroom dialogue and allow student discourse to drive the lesson and their learning.

All these teachers operated in sites governed by high-stakes English testing and prescribed curricula developed for monolingual English speakers. What is striking about their practice is that it is not about "the test." These exemplary teachers intentionally set out alternatives against the prescribed curriculum to create opportunities to learn demanding content, language, and literacy matched to MLLs' learning assets and opportunities for growth. They refused to allow the prescribed curriculum or tests to act as instruments of oppression. Therefore, these practical exemplars challenge existing classroom norms that enable the banking model (Freire, 1994) of teaching and learning to go unchallenged.

We offer three recommendations for teacher education to consider based on our findings. First, empower teachers with critical sociocultural theory and practices capable of transcending constraints limiting them in identifying and growing MLLs learning assets. Second, preparation should foreground and reinforce the importance of intentional dialogic practice in a critical sociocultural approach to pedagogy. The limited use of the Instructional Conversation and Critical Stance, for example, suggests these practices deserve greater emphasis in teacher preparation as practices for supporting student inquiry and voice. Third, teachers should be encouraged to be agents of change by asking questions about the curriculum they present and its fitness for the students they teach, particularly if their students are from minoritized

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groups. Our study illustrates that highly effective teachers use critical sociocultural practices in highly constrained curriculum contexts to engage students in meaningful and impactful learning opportunities. Teacher educators and professional development providers can play a vital role in making all mainstream education teachers highly effective with MLLs.

CONCLUSION

We set out to unpack what reputed excellent mainstream education teachers in the United Kingdom and the United States do and say to promote equity for their MLLs. We discovered that they intentionally design language-rich activities that grow multilingual students' learning assets. In terms of what they say, we found that teachers may say a lot or deliberately say very little, but each word in their lesson discourse challenges their students to higher levels of attainment. The critical sociocultural practices captured by the EPL are well aligned with the literature (e.g., Freire, 1994; Lucas et al., 2018; Vygotsky, 1997) and well documented in teaching highly effective teachers of multilingual students. Critical sociocultural theory and practice also portend a lifelong professional learning curriculum capable of helping teachers to name their excellence and challenges, reflect on each from new perspectives, and use pedagogical innovation to improve learning. This study of mainstream teachers of MLLs adds mixed-method evidence documenting common international ground and future directions for studying highly effective teachers across international contexts.

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We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

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