

Article

Centering Identity and Multilingualism in Educational Leadership Preparation Programs

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Abstract

As the population of multilingual learners identified as English learners (ELs) grows in the United States, it is critical that education leaders are equipped to create school environments that are affirming and welcoming with high expectations for these students and their families. Nationwide, 10.4% or 5.1 million students were classified as EL in 2019. The state of California has the largest EL student population in the nation at 19.1%. This qualitative study explores the experiences of 25 school and district leaders in the Central Coast of California in their educational leadership preparation programs. Document review and critical content analysis were conducted of educational leadership preparation program websites including the course requirements, testimonials and mission statements. Leaders predominantly attended preparation programs at public universities that are Hispanic Serving Institutions. While they were interested in learning technical skills like education law and budgeting, they found it helpful to learn about a variety of topics such as instructional coaching and data analysis. However, they did not feel that there was enough of a focus on the needs of multilingual learners. This article examines how we might strengthen educational leadership preparation so that programs more effectively center the needs of multilingual learners as well as candidates' identities as a resource.

Keywords: educational leadership; preparation programs; bilingual education; identity

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1. Introduction

As the population of multilingual learners identified as English learners (ELs) grows in the US, education leaders must be equipped to create school environments that are affirming and welcoming, with high expectations for these students and their families. Nationwide, 10.4% or 5.1 million students were classified as EL in 2019, up from 9.2% to 4.5 million in Fall 2010 (NCES, 2022). The state of California has the largest EL student population in the nation at 19.1% (CDE, 2022). Multilingual learners are often subject to a deficit orientation in schools that focuses on what they are assumed to lack rather than the assets that they bring from their multiple languages and cultures (Wong et al., 2024). The term EL itself assumes that racialized multilingual learners are lacking in their ability to speak and understand English (García et al., 2024). Multilingual learners face many challenges and opportunity gaps in their educational journey posed by a number of structural imbalances as well as this deficit framing—such as economic hardship, segregation, interrupted schooling, under-resourced schools, lack of ESL/bilingual certified teachers,

low expectations, and rigor. These structural factors and deficit perspectives, among others, influence the educational attainment of these students (Jimenez-Castillo, 2022). It has been found that the importance of effective education leaders in driving positive outcomes has been found second only to that of teachers with some research finding that leadership quality surpasses teacher quality in importance (Grissom et al., 2021). Educational leadership preparation programs are an important part of the training of educational leaders. However, little is known about how they center candidates' identities and how much of a focus the needs of multilingual learners are in the course content.

There is currently a "representation gap" between education leaders and students (Grissom et al., 2021). In 2021, 55% of public school students nationally identified as a student of color (with Latine students comprising the greatest percentage at 28% (NCES, 2023b), while 80% of teachers and 78% of principals identified as White (NCES, 2023a). Research has found that teachers and principals of color address persistent achievement gaps (Bartanen & Grissom, 2021). For example, Latine leaders adopt strengths-based perspectives in working with students and families, rejecting deficit perspectives (Rodela et al., 2021). Further, it has been found that principals of color are effective in increasing the proportion of teachers of color through increased hiring and retention (Bartanen & Grissom, 2021).

Despite the growing understanding of the importance of diversity in leadership, research points to a number of hurdles. In the United States, male principals tend to follow a linear career pathway from teacher or athletic coach to assistant principal to principal. Women and teachers of color are less likely to reach leadership positions and when they do, time to promotion is typically longer (Cheng et al., 2023). Latina educational leaders find that their bilingualism is an asset and liability in their early careers. They have to demonstrate deep persistence in the face of racism and sexism and often experience isolation as either the one or one of a few leaders of color in their districts (Rodela et al., 2021). Latine administrators also face White dominant administrative spaces, where their equity visions are often in conflict with district equity initiatives (Rodela et al., 2021). A lack of formal, professional mentorship is a frequent barrier for women and education leaders of color as well (Kim & Smith, 2024).

In previous research, I found that a range of motivations and experiences facilitated education leaders' pathways into leadership positions (Kim, 2023; Kim & Smith, 2024). While leaders expressed an affinity for a culturally responsive critically self-aware social justice orientation to leadership, none developed this orientation during their educational leadership preparation programs. Rather, they developed this approach through personal experiences in childhood or college or professional experiences as teachers or even once they had begun in a leadership role.

There has been a wave of research evaluating educational leadership preparation programs, (see, for example, Ni et al., 2022) but less is known about how the needs of multilingual learners are presented, if at all, in their content. Much of the work on leadership from an equity lens examines how to prepare leaders to engage in social justice oriented practices, the importance of developing the critical consciousness of aspiring administrators or the leadership practices of culturally responsive leaders (MacKinnon, 2024). Applying an equity lens to content taught in leadership preparation programs such as building relationships, culturally diverse practices, and practical opportunities for learning can lead to both improved student outcomes and educator retention, particularly for teachers of color (Grooms et al., 2023). Further, it is important that educational leadership preparation programs use frameworks that address the issue of race within a broader context of social justice including self-reflection, a grounding in a critical theoretical construction, a prophetic and pragmatic edge, praxis, and the inclusion of race language. Educational leadership preparation programs should foster critical consciousness, inclusive

environments and culturally responsive instructional leadership (Gooden et al., 2023). Some educational leadership preparation programs have been found to be effective in training leaders to reframe their past experiences, respond to current injustices and re-envision educational leadership (Lac & Diaz, 2023). However, educational leadership preparation programs largely do not prepare candidates effectively to work with multilingual learners (Bonanno, 2023; Oliver, 2023). The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of school and district leaders in the Central Coast of California in their educational leadership preparation programs as well as the level of focus on the needs of multilingual learners in their preparation. Research questions include:

1. What motivated candidates to enter an educational leadership preparation program?
 - a. What did they hope to learn in their educational leadership preparation program?
2. What would they have liked to learn in their educational leadership preparation program?
3. How are the needs of multilingual learners reflected in the course requirements and the missions of the programs they attended?
 - a. How much of a focus was there on the needs of multilingual learners?

1.1. Educational Leadership Preparation Programs in California

California has a two-tier credential structure for the Administrative Services credential. A five-year preliminary credential is the first credential issued after an individual meets basic requirements. A clear credential is issued when all credential requirements have been completed. Individuals must complete one of the following: (1) a Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) approved program of specialized and professional preparation in administrative services, including the California Administrative Performance Assessment (CalAPA), (2) a one-year approved administrative services intern program consisting of supervised in-service training resulting in the formal recommendation by the college or university where the program was completed or, (3) achieve a passing score on the California Preliminary Administrative Credential Examination (CPACE) (CTC, 2024b).

There are currently 96 CTC approved institutions that offer programs of specialized and professional preparation in administration at either the intern or traditional level in California. Of those 96, 21 are California State University (CSU) campuses, 3 are University of California campuses, 18 are private/independent institutions, 53 are local educational agencies (LEAs) and one is other. Only 21 approved institutions offer the intern option; 13 of which are CSUs and eight are private/independent institutions including online programs like National University and University of Massachusetts Global. In the area of study, there are two local options; CSUs and county offices of education (COEs); neither of which offer the intern option (CTC, 2024a). In addition, 3926 candidates across the state took the CPACE in 2015–2020 and it had a 33% passing rate (Taylor & Mendoza, 2021). Thus, the vast majority of administrators in the state enter a program in order to attain their credential.

The required courses for a Preliminary Administrative Services Credential (PASC) in California vary by program, but typically include coursework in leadership, equity, and fieldwork. Many programs include courses such as: Educational Leadership in P-12 Educational Organizations, Professional Learning and Growth Leadership, Effective Practices in Instructional Coaching, Resource Leadership in P-12 Educational Organizations, Educational Policy & Advocacy for Students & Families in P-12, Multicultural Community Partnerships and two semesters of Field Experience. They are aligned with California Administrator Performance Expectations (CAPEs) and California Professional Standards for

the Teaching Profession (CPSEL). Universal concepts in the course expectations include student-centered learning and well-being, cultural proficiency, systems knowledge, data use, collaboration, communication skills, continuous improvement, change process and evidence-based practice (CTC, 2017).

The CPACE was originally developed in 2011 as a custom California assessment for the examination option for earning a Preliminary Administrative Services Credential. The Commission updated the CPACE in 2015 to include both updated content assessment and performance assessment components. The set of administrator knowledge and skills described in the CPACE include Visionary and Inclusive Leadership, Instructional Leadership, School Improvement Leadership, Professional Learning and Growth Leadership, Organizational and Systems Leadership and Community Leadership. To pass the CPACE, an examinee must pass two components or subtests: the Content Examination and the Performance Assessment. Approximately 1000 people take the CPACE every year, but the overall passing rates remain very low (about 30%). Far more people pass the content assessment than the performance assessment. In 2019–2020, 27.7% passed the exam overall, 75% passed the content assessment and 28% passed the performance assessment. White (82%) and Asian (91%) candidates are far more likely to pass the assessment than Black (67%) or Latine (69%) candidates (Taylor & Mendoza, 2021).

The CalAPA was developed in 2017 at the direction of the CTC with the assistance of a 15-member design team; the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson; consultants in the field of educational leadership and administration; and California administrator organizations. The CalAPA draws from and is informed by the state's experience with performance-based assessment models, including the original California Teaching Performance Assessment (CalTPA), the redeveloped CalTPA (CTC, 2016), the Education Specialist CalTPAs, the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT), and edTPA. It was designed to provide candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership ability to investigate current practice at a specific school site, plan improvements based on data and research, act on their plan, and then reflect on their learning regarding equitable leadership practice. The assessment consists of three leadership cycles: (1) Analyzing Data to Inform School Improvement and Promote Equity, (2) Facilitating Communities of Practice and (3) Supporting Teacher Growth. As part of Cycle 1, candidates are asked to identify an indicator (e.g., chronic absenteeism, suspension rate, English Learner progress, graduation rate, academic performance or college/career readiness), a student group and conduct an equity gap analysis using publicly available data for their site. For Cycle 2, they must co-facilitate a Professional Learning Community (PLC) focused on a problem of practice at their site. For Cycle 3, they must engage in a coaching cycle with a volunteer teacher at their site. Educational leadership preparation programs provide support to candidates in completing these cycles and submitting their materials to the state.

1.2. Background

Due to the changing demographics of U.S. schools, it is critical to study education leaders' experience in their educational leadership preparation programs with regard to the needs of multilingual learners. This study focused on Monterey and Santa Cruz counties in the Central Coast of California which comprise small to large cities and rural areas in which the EL population is larger (25–37%) than the state average (19.1%) and predominantly speakers of Spanish and indigenous Latin American languages. Furthermore, there is a mismatch between the race of students and teachers. Students are overwhelmingly Latine while teachers are majority White in the US as well as in the area of study. As seen in Table 1, 79% of students in Monterey County were Latine and 61% of teachers were White in 2018–2019 (Ed Data, 2024a). Similarly in Santa Cruz County, 56% of students were Latine and 79% of teachers were White (Ed Data, 2024b).

Table 1. Demographics of students and teachers in 2 counties, 2018–2019.

	Monterey		Santa Cruz	
	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers
Latine	79.4%	23.4%	55.7%	13.5%
White	12.6%	61%	35.7%	78.6%
Black	1.1%	1.5%	0.8%	0.6%
Asian	1.7%	2.2%	2%	1.8%
ELs	36.7%	*	25.8%	*

Source: Ed Data Education Data Partnership. <http://www.ed-data.org/county/> accessed on 15 January 2025 Note: *: Percentage of ELs not available for teachers.

1.3. Conceptual Framework

In their text focused on culturally and linguistically responsive leadership, Scanlan and Lopez (2015) outline three essential dimensions to effectively educate culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. These include promoting sociocultural integration, cultivating language proficiency and ensuring academic achievement. They go on to stress that school leadership most effectively creates the learning architecture for successfully educating CLD students through integrated service delivery. Thus, as seen in Figure 1, the learning architecture affects the processes and products that promote equitable educational opportunities, the location and arrangement of support services, the quality of teaching and learning, and the resource and policy mechanisms in the organization.

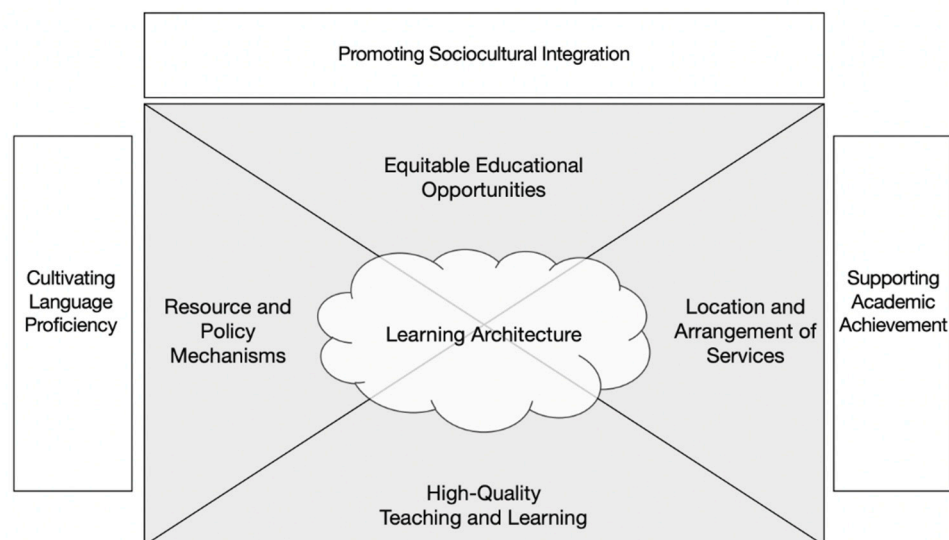


Figure 1. Leadership for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Schools Framework. Scanlan and Lopez (2015).

Similarly, Callahan et al. (2019) shared a leadership framework that infuses linguistic equity. It comprises four central components: (a) instructional expertise, (b) teacher/staff capacity building, (c) programs and services, and (d) school culture. In addition, they proposed that principals must not only recognize the linguistic civil rights of their students but also draw from a knowledge base that prepares them to lead for equity (Figure 2). This knowledge base is derived from the community, school and district context, students' cultural and linguistic assets and community cultural and linguistic assets. It is possible that the leading for equity knowledge base might also be developed within an educational

leadership preparation program. This study will be guided by both of these frameworks in order to explore school and district leaders' experiences in their educational leadership preparation programs and the level of focus on the needs of multilingual learners. The frameworks serve to build off of each other in order to elucidate how educational leaders can lead for equity while maintaining a culturally and linguistically responsive leadership approach.

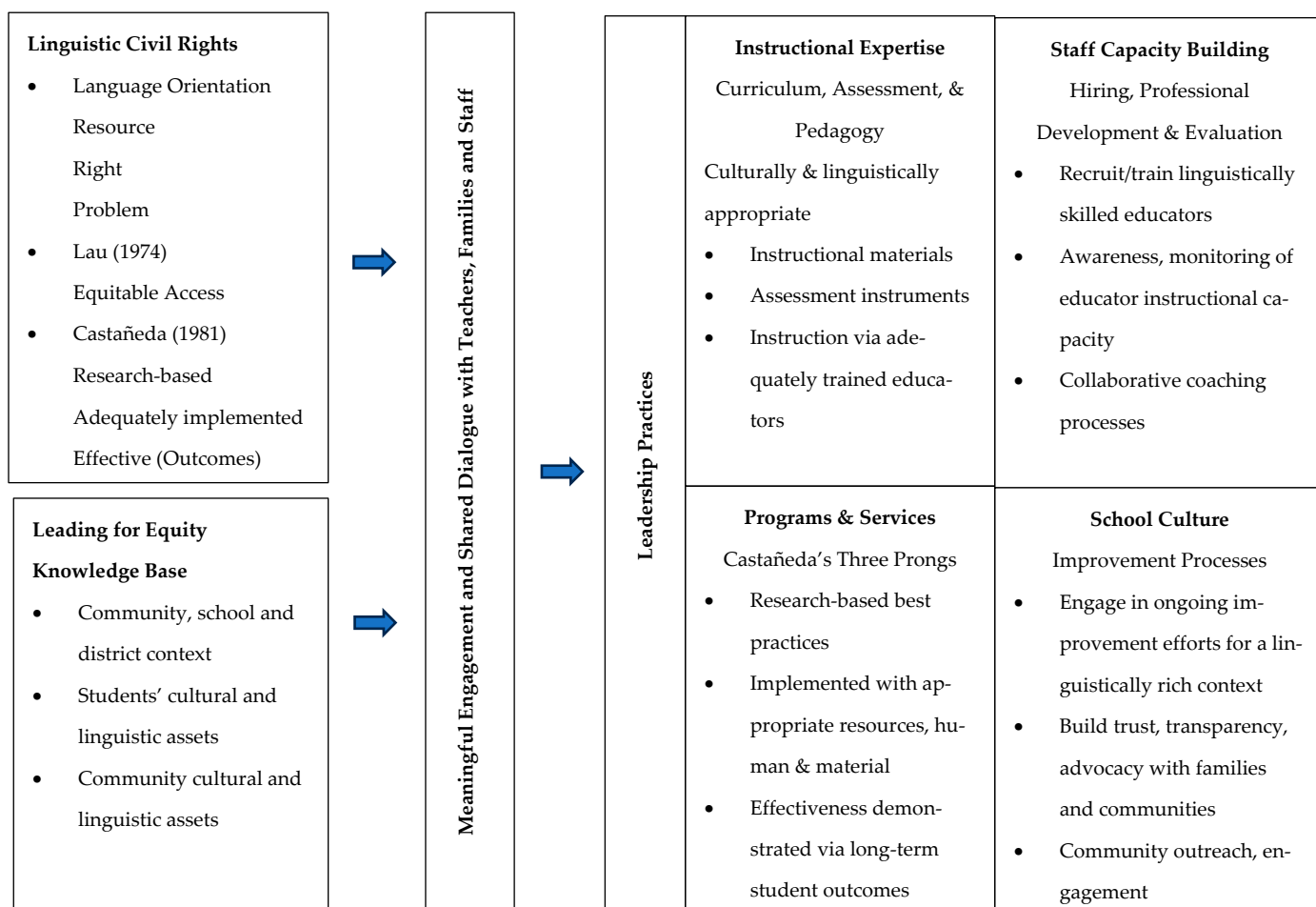


Figure 2. Infusing linguistic equity in a leadership framework. Callahan et al. (2019), Lau (1974), Castañeda (1981).

2. Materials and Methods

This article focuses on a qualitative study that explores the experiences of current educational leaders in the Central Coast of California in their educational leadership preparation programs as well as the level of focus on the needs of multilingual students in those programs. Questions focused on their motivations to enter educational leadership preparation programs, what they learned and what they would have liked to learn as well as the focus on the needs of multilingual learners.

This study includes semi structured interviews via Zoom with 25 school and district leaders at the elementary, middle and high school level in the Central Coast of California (Monterey and Santa Cruz counties). Respondents were recruited from a variety of school and district sites, including traditional public, charter, parochial and virtual schools. Interview subjects were identified via school and district websites. They were contacted via email and/or phone in line with University IRB requirements.

The 25 participants represent a variety of leadership roles (see Table 2). Twenty are leaders in Monterey and five in Santa Cruz County. Three are leaders at the district level and two at the county level. The remaining participants are leaders of school sites. Fourteen are leaders of elementary schools, 10 of middle schools, nine of high schools and two of adult schools. They have a range of 2–32 years of experience with an average of 19 years of experience. Nineteen are female and six are male. Nine participants were identified as ELs when they were in school, and sixteen consider themselves to be multilingual. Nine identify as Latine, three as mixed race and thirteen as White. All but five participated in an educational leadership preparation program; those who did not participate in such a program work in charter or parochial schools where it is not required. One participant has attempted to pass the CPACE exam but has not been successful thus far. A majority (16) attended a program through a university and all but three attended a CSU. Four attended programs offered by the county office of education (COE). The educational leadership preparation programs are primarily focused on educational leadership and/or administration, but some have concentrations in bilingual administration, emancipatory leadership and multicultural leadership.

Table 2. Study sample.

Role	County	Gender	Race	EL	Multilingual	Years Experience	Admin Credential	Type of Institution
Principal	Monterey	Female	White	No	Yes	25	Yes	Private
Former Vice Principal	Monterey	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	11	Yes	Public
Assistant Principal	Santa Cruz	Male	White	No	Yes	8	Yes	Public
Vice Principal	Monterey	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	11	Yes	Public
Assistant Principal	Monterey	Female	White	No	No	15	Yes	COE
Vice Principal	Monterey	Male	Latine	Yes	Yes	17	Yes	Public
Assistant Principal	Monterey	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	20	Yes	Public
Assistant Director	Monterey	Male	White	No	No	20	Yes	Public
Principal	Monterey	Male	White	No	No	21	Yes	COE
Department Chair	Santa Cruz	Female	White	No	No	19	Yes	Public
Induction Coach	Monterey	Female	White	No	No	20	No	
Assistant Principal	Monterey	Female	Mixed	No	Yes	29	Yes	Public
County Principal	Monterey	Female	White	No	No	17	Yes	Public
Principal	Monterey	Female	White	No	Yes	25	Yes	Public
Director	Monterey	Female	White	No	No	20	No	
ELD Coordinator	Monterey	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	32	No	
Principal	Monterey	Male	Mixed	No	Yes	24	Yes	Private

Director/ELD Co-ordinator	Santa Cruz	Female	White	No	No	20	No	
Bilingual Community Liaison	Santa Cruz	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	2	No	
Director-Curriculum and Instruction	Monterey	Female	White	No	Yes	30	Yes	Public
Principal	Monterey	Male	Mixed	No	No	17	Yes	Private
Assistant Director	Santa Cruz	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	11	Yes	Public
Program Co-ordinator	Monterey	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	8	Yes	Public
Assistant Director	Monterey	Female	White	No	Yes	29	Yes	COE
ELD TOSA	Monterey	Female	Latine	Yes	Yes	24	Yes	COE

Interviews lasted approximately 30 min and were recorded in Zoom. They were transcribed and coded using Dedoose software. Coding included a mix of deductive and inductive approaches (Saldana, 2021), creating an initial code list based on the interview topics and questions. The data analysis focused on broad codes such as “current role”, “experience with MLs”, “what made you enter an Ed Admin program”, “what you wanted to learn”, “what you wished you learned”, “focus on the needs of MLs”, etc., and then subcodes were added from the literature review and conceptual framework to capture nuance within the broad categories (Bingham, 2023).

In addition, document review was conducted of educational leadership preparation program websites including the course requirements, descriptions, testimonials and mission statements. Critical content analysis was used to identify when terms from the conceptual framework such as “promoting sociocultural integration, cultivating language proficiency, ensuring academic achievement, instructional expertise, teacher/staff capacity building, programs and services, school culture, linguistic civil rights, equity leadership” and “multilingual learners” were used. Critical content analysis is a qualitative research method that allows for an in-depth exploration of texts and visual content to uncover underlying ideologies, power structures, and cultural narratives (Hunting, 2021; Silva, 2022).

3. Results

3.1. Motivation to Enter an Educational Leadership Preparation Program

The leaders we spoke with entered educational leadership preparation programs for a variety of reasons including the influence of a direct supervisor or colleague, career advancement, wanting more of an opportunity to make change and to be part of a collaborative cohort (see Table 3). While many leaders in this study are non-White (48%), female (76%) and multilingual (76%), only a few spoke about their identities in relation to their motivations for entering an educational leadership preparation program.

Table 3. Key findings.

Main Findings	Themes	Examples
Motivation to enter an educational leadership preparation program	Mentorship	“My administrator here approached me a couple of years ago and told me, ‘You have it in you if you ever want to pursue something.’” “He said ‘Hey, there is an intern position for assistant principal, and I think you would be great at it.’” “I wouldn’t be here without [my administrative intern coach].” “I had been thinking about it, and I feel like people I worked with were planting that seed in me ... It was just a good feeling knowing that people I worked with saw me as a leader.”
	Career advancement	“When you’re in your eighth year of teaching, you’re like, ‘Okay, I think I’ve kind of got this, but I’m still learning, and I still can learn a lot more.’” “I have always been interested in school programs and being more a part of the things that are going on at a school besides being in the classroom...” “I was interested in changing and challenging myself.” “I enjoy teaching. I love teaching. I love doing this, but I always believe that I need to continue challenging myself and growing...”
	Opportunity to make change	“I knew if you want to see change, if you don’t agree with things, then you have to be in a different role...” “I just realized that the impact that I could have in terms of setting up systems that were more equitable and having more interactions with families on a more authentic level...”
	Collaborative cohort	“Once I started, I was with the same people for two years, which I loved. It was very hands-on, very collaborative.” “I heard great things about ... having a cohort and that many of the instructors were ... admins themselves.” “I did it because I wanted to learn how administrators think and work...”
	Identity	“When I was in high school, I was part of the Migrant Ed program and I experienced injustices....

		At some point, I wanted to get involved in this arena to create more policies that are fair and equitable for students.” • “I grew up in [this area]. I’m an EL myself and so I’ve been faced with challenges and barriers within the educational system... those struggles motivated me to pursue higher education and my career.” • [I] “thrived on bringing people together and connecting with families.”, [wanted] “more interactions with families on an equitable level”.
What they hoped to learn in their educational leadership preparation program	• Technical content and skills	• “I was interested in learning about leadership; the instructional leadership piece, how to structure programs.” • “Definitely school financing.” • “Budgets are a big deal... Just the ins and outs of the different kinds of money that come in and how it can be spent.” • “More about how the director roles play out at the district level.”
What they would have liked to learn in their educational leadership preparation program	• Equity focus	• “I was actually pleasantly surprised with the amount of stuff learned there that could apply to any leadership position in education... How do you coach someone? How do you look at data and find inequities? How do you understand the school system?” • “You take all those methods classes, but until you're teaching, it doesn't make sense to you... I think that my program gave me a really good foundation, knowing what questions to ask and when to ask them.” • “I loved the field experience. Being able to sit and talk with the principal was so beneficial and necessary to learn admin duties.” • “There's a lot of technical pieces rather than the adaptive that I think are needed because you do learn it along the way, but sometimes I wish I would've known that at the beginning of the year rather than the end of it.”
Course requirements of educational leadership preparation programs	• Mention of MLs	• Concentration in emancipatory leadership requiring courses such as Critical Studies of Education Policy and an Emancipatory Leadership as Praxis seminar. Overview calls for ways to “create organizational cultures to reflect the diversity of experience and knowledge within school communities through collaborative approaches to deconstruct power systems, challenge inequitable

practices and policies, and cultivate community cultural wealth". No explicit focus on multilingual learners in the course descriptions but mentions of "historically underserved students". A course in Epistemologies of Educational Leadership: Personal, Political, & Intellectual provides students with the opportunity to engage with research on practices in the field of educational leadership alongside an "autoethnographic exploration of how their experiences influence their approaches to leadership and identify areas of growth"

- Focuses on social justice leadership requiring courses such as Leading for Social Justice & Equity in Urban Schools and Transformation through Community Solidarity. Multilingual learners not explicitly mentioned in the mission of the program, course titles or course descriptions. Multiple testimonial videos in which students of color discuss how the social justice and equity focus drew them to the program.
- Does not explicitly mention multilingual learners, focuses on "serving diverse populations". Requires courses such as Multicultural Community Partnerships and Educational Policy & Advocacy for Students and Families in K-12. Courses use the term "multicultural communities" and "multicultural classrooms" in their course descriptions. No mention of centering identity as part of the coursework.

- Focus on the needs of multilingual learners

- "There was no focus on English learners... I can write a book on what we missed in leadership classes along the way."
- "10% was finance, 10% was special needs, then 10% might've been work-related incidents, and probably 10% was English language learners."
- "All of us had large numbers of ELs in our schools so ... it was always integrated in what we were working on."
- "There was a focus on equity and looking at data from that lens."
- "[ELs were] constantly a conversation. How are you including [them] in your vision/mission, working with teachers to meet [their] needs?"
- "I had to lead the conversations focused on how we are meeting the needs of students with disabilities, ELs and youth in transition... That was a positive for the program."

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- “I feel like I spent a lot of time on it, but that was my focus [in the CalAPA].”
 - “I feel like our program very much included ELs as well as students with disabilities in a lot of different case studies.”
 - “[As part of the Bilingual Authorization] I realized my own biases and that I have a deficit mindset which comes from my own experience.”
 - “For 25 years, we’ve sacrificed one language to learn another.”
-

Those who did speak about their identities in relation to their motivations for entering an educational leadership preparation program spoke of their deficit-oriented experiences as ELs in school. An assistant principal who moved to the US from Mexico in seventh grade shared his motivation to improve the experiences of students like him in his community:

When I was in high school, I was part of the Migrant Ed¹ program and I experienced injustices. I was sent to the wrong school. I wasn’t in the right classes. I was told I was not meeting the requirements even when I had straight As. My parents didn’t speak the language. At some point, I wanted to get involved in this arena to create more policies and decisions that are more fair and equitable for students.

Similarly, a county level leader who grew up as an EL spoke of her motivation to enter leadership based on her own experiences:

I grew up in [this area]. I’m an EL myself and so I’ve been faced with challenges and barriers within the educational system. I went into the classroom with teachers who were non-Spanish speaking. I struggled to get reclassified. My mom who raised me wasn’t really informed. She was a teen mom and wasn’t really engaged. My dad was incarcerated at a young age. She trusted in the school system. She relies on me now that I’m older, but those struggles motivated me to pursue higher education and my career.

A mixed-race principal did not grow up as an EL but taught in South America and then in the city of Oakland. As a teacher, he found that he “thrived on bringing people together and connecting with families.” During this time, he joined an equity task force and co-created a class called Student Leaders of Change. Due to those experiences, he sought out an educational leadership preparation program so that he could have “more interactions with families on an equitable level”.

Mentorship was also an important motivator for the decision to enter an educational leadership preparation program particularly for women of color. One county level female leader who grew up as an EL said, “My administrator here approached me a couple of years ago and told me, ‘You have it in you if you ever want to pursue something.’” A former assistant principal who also grew up as an EL spoke about the influence of her administrator on her future. “He said ‘Hey, there is an intern position for assistant principal, and I think you would be great at it.’” Another principal who does not consider himself to be multilingual also discussed the importance of his mentor: “I wouldn’t be here without [my administrative intern coach],” suggesting that mentorship can be important for many different aspiring leaders. An assistant principal who grew up as an EL stated that she almost didn’t apply for her educational leadership preparation program but

decided to when she saw the deadline had been extended and knew she had the support of her colleagues.

I had been thinking about it, and I feel like people I worked with were planting that seed in me, like, 'Oh, you're a good leader.' and so I went online [to apply]. It was just a good feeling knowing that people I worked with saw me as a leader.

It is important to mention that three out of these four leaders are Latine females who were identified as ELs growing up and are being tapped for leadership in their schools.

Leaders also entered their preparation programs because they wanted to advance in their careers and further develop themselves professionally. A principal shared that he had been teaching for some time and wanted to move to the next level. "When you're in your eighth year of teaching, you're like, 'Okay, I think I've kind of got this, but I'm still learning, and I still can learn a lot more.'" Similarly, an assistant principal wanted to get more involved in running programs at his school:

I have always been interested in school programs and being more a part of the things that are going on at a school besides being in the classroom. I always felt like I wanted to get out of the classroom and go help them with the implementation of their Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), or I wanted to be on these committees that were doing things or be a part of the student leadership stuff. I wanted to do more of that.

An assistant principal who grew up in Central America shared, "I was interested in changing and challenging myself." A Latine county level leader elaborated on the desire to challenge herself as part of taking the next step in her career. She is now beginning a doctoral program in Educational Leadership to further her studies.

I enjoy teaching. I love teaching. I love doing this, but I always believe that I need to continue challenging myself and growing. And I don't think if I'm in my comfort level, I'm not growing as a professional, as a person. This journey towards leadership is not just about the destination but the personal growth and development that comes with it. It's about pushing yourself out of your comfort zone, learning from your experiences, and becoming a better version of yourself.

Leaders also sought out educational leadership preparation programs so that they would have more of an opportunity to make a difference as this Latine district leader shared, "I knew if you want to see change, if you don't agree with things, then you have to be in a different role. And that's when I was like, being an administrator would be a great thing." A mixed race principal from a more privileged background shared that he felt that he could make more of an impact on a systemic level as a school leader instead of staying in the classroom:

I just realized that the impact that I could have in terms of setting up systems that were more equitable and having more interactions with families on a more authentic level [would be in leadership]. I love [my] community, and that's why I want to work in partnership with our families to create more opportunities. It shouldn't be where you're born or who you're born to that determines those opportunities that I was able to have, so we're trying to open as many doors as we can here.

They were also influenced by their colleagues who had entered similar programs and longed for a cohort with which to collaborate in the learning. A veteran principal shared: "I had watched some of my friends go through it. It was a two-year program. It was a cohort. Once I started, I was with the same people for two years, which I loved. It was very hands-on, very collaborative." A more novice principal also desired to become part of a cohort and learn from those with practical experience in the field, "I heard great things

about it in terms of having a cohort and that many of the instructors were folks who were admins themselves or had been retired admins.” They felt that what they learned actually helped them be more effective teachers as this ELD TOSA explained: “I didn’t do it because I wanted to be an administrator. I did it because I wanted to learn how administrators think and work, so when I have to argue a point, I know where they are coming from.”

What They Hoped to Learn in Their Educational Leadership Preparation Program

Participants’ expectations of their leadership preparation programs were almost entirely focused on the technical content and skills they thought they would need in a leadership role. For example, they were interested in learning more about the details of the principal and assistant principal roles, budgeting, how to run programs and relevant policies and laws. A former assistant principal shared, “When I entered, I was interested in learning about leadership in terms of what it entails to be a principal; the instructional leadership piece, how to structure programs. I was most intrigued by that.” School law and policy as well as budgeting were the most sought-after content as shared here by an assistant principal:

Definitely school financing. As a teacher, I was always asking for supplies; I needed this and that. I really didn’t care where the budget came from. I just needed it. But that was really eye-opening, why the system has to be budgeted and why there are procedures in place and how many budgets a principal or director or school has to take into account.

However, they also realized that budgeting may be best learned on the job once one is in a leadership role. A district leader shared:

I don’t know how any program can prepare you for that, quite frankly. Budgets are a big deal. Understanding this pot of money is called this, and it comes from the state like this, and this pot of money is called this, and it fluctuates from year to year based on this and this is federal money, and this is grant money. Just the ins and outs of the different kinds of money that come in and how it can be spent and how they’re connected and how they’re different.

Two participants were also interested in learning about different types of leadership roles such as those in district and county offices as an educational leadership student who took on a county level role shared here: “More about how the director roles play out at the district level. The flow of things from the state level to the county, from the county to the district.” Interestingly none of the 25 participants mentioned wanting to learn more about equity or serving multilingual learners in their educational leadership preparation program suggesting that it was not an expectation for them.

3.2. What They Would Have Liked to Learn in Their Educational Leadership Preparation Program

While participants were mostly interested in the technical content and skills they thought they would need in leadership roles, they were pleased that they learned additional content such as coaching, equity analysis and systems thinking in their leadership preparation program as shared here by a novice assistant principal:

I was actually pleasantly surprised with the amount of stuff learned there that could apply to any leadership position in education. I felt like I could take what I learned and be a better teacher, activities’ director, or anything in the school system. It helped me understand budgets and Ed Code a little bit which was great, but really a lot of what was needed was, how do you coach someone? How do you look at data and find inequities? How do you understand the school system?

A veteran director of a parochial school and former principal of a public school recognized that much of what is needed for a leadership role is learned through experience and that the cohort that she met through her educational leadership preparation program was the most valuable part of the experience:

It's like being in the classroom. You take all those methods classes, but until you're teaching, it doesn't make sense to you. I think that it's been really nice to have people that if I am faced with a problem and I don't know how to handle it, I can go back and talk to them about it. I think that my program gave me a really good foundation, and knowing what questions to ask and when to ask them.

Similarly, the applied nature of the field experience part of educational leadership preparation programs was also seen to be helpful as described here by a novice assistant principal: "Anytime people ask me about the program, I say, I loved the field experience. Being able to sit and talk with the principal was so beneficial and necessary to learn admin duties." However, a novice principal who did not have a positive experience in his educational leadership preparation program spoke of the need for a focus on practical skills and content like education law and budgeting as well because not everything can be learned through experience: "There's a lot of technical pieces rather than the adaptive that I think are needed because you do learn it along the way, but sometimes I wish I would've known that at the beginning of the school year rather than the end of it." He also did not have a cohort from his program to rely upon in these situations.

3.3. Course Requirements of Educational Leadership Preparation Programs

A majority (75%) of the research participants attended educational leadership preparation programs at one of three CSU campuses that are Hispanic Serving and Minority Serving Institutions (HSIs and MSIs) in Northern California and serve high proportions of first generation students. These programs have similar course requirements including education law and budgeting though there are some variations in their missions and the framing they bring to their coursework. For example, one of the programs offers a concentration in emancipatory leadership requiring courses such as Critical Studies of Education Policy and an Emancipatory Leadership as Praxis seminar. The overview calls for ways to "create organizational cultures to reflect the diversity of experience and knowledge within school communities through collaborative approaches to deconstruct power systems, challenge inequitable practices and policies, and cultivate community cultural wealth". There is no explicit focus on multilingual learners in the course descriptions but there are mentions of "historically underserved students". A course in Epistemologies of Educational Leadership: Personal, Political, & Intellectual provides students with the opportunity to engage with research on practices in the field of educational leadership alongside an "autoethnographic exploration of how their experiences influence their approaches to leadership and identify areas of growth" suggesting that the program is centering candidates' identities at least in this course.

Another CSU program focuses on social justice leadership requiring courses such as Leading for Social Justice & Equity in Urban Schools and Transformation through Community Solidarity. Multilingual learners are not explicitly mentioned in the mission of the program, course titles or course descriptions. However, there are multiple testimonial videos on the website in which students of color discuss how the social justice and equity focus drew them to the program. One graduate who worked as a Spanish teacher speaks specifically about how his intersectional identity as a gay Latine male is an important part of his approach to leadership. In choosing to highlight these voices on their website, the

program is communicating their values and their focus on centering candidates' identities within their coursework.

The third CSU program also does not explicitly mention multilingual learners but does focus on "serving diverse populations". The program requires courses such as Multicultural Community Partnerships and Educational Policy & Advocacy for Students and Families in K-12. Both courses use the term "multicultural communities" and "multicultural classrooms" in their course descriptions. However, there is no mention of centering identity as part of the coursework. Although it is possible that individual courses do include some of this content, it does not appear to be an integral part of the overall framing of the program. All programs offer support with the CalAPA and require field experience.

Focus on the Needs of Multilingual Learners

Participants' responses were mixed in their assessment of the level of focus on the needs of multilingual learners in their educational leadership preparation programs. Very few (3 people) felt that there was a great deal of attention paid to multilingual learners and it was infused throughout the course content. They all attended CSU and COE programs. The majority (15 or more) felt that there was some focus on multilingual learners and four felt that there was very little and more was needed. This was especially true for more experienced leaders who had undertaken their training 10–20 years or more ago. For example, a principal who now has her doctorate in educational leadership from a Jesuit university and completed her preparation program 25 years ago shared "No, there was no focus on English learners. There's so much now that I could kind of write the book on what we missed in leadership classes along the way." A veteran director of a parochial school who also completed her educational leadership preparation program a number of years ago at a CSU learned about multilingual learners, but it was not necessarily a priority of the program: "It had some. It was like everything else, 10% was finance, 10% was special needs, then 10% might've been work-related incidents, and probably 10% was English language learners. I don't think it was a huge emphasis. I think it probably was just equal to everything else." A district leader who did her preparation program more recently at a CSU described: "We had a small cohort, and all of us had large numbers of English Learners in the districts that we were working in so I can't remember if we had anything specific, but it was always mentioned and integrated in what we were working on." suggesting that educational leadership programs may have made attempts to add more of this focus in recent years. A more novice principal who attended a private institution for his educational leadership preparation program also felt there was a "very minimal" focus on the needs of multilingual learners suggesting that public programs in CSUs and COEs may be more effective in this area. Some expressed the need for an additional course or elective focused specifically on the topic while others thought it should be part of an equity framework applied to the entire program. An assistant principal shared that there was a general focus on equity in her leadership preparation program at a county office of education and the needs of multilingual learners fell within that: "There was a focus on equity and looking at data from that lens. So, I think there was a focus. I think it was something that came up in most of the classes I was in." A former assistant principal shared that the needs of multilingual learners were focused on in her CSU program particularly when discussing performance gaps:

There was definitely a lot of focus on that in terms of talking about them, making sure that they were at the forefront and how we are meeting their needs. Our schools have large populations of ELs and they're underperforming so how do we bridge the gap? That was constantly a conversation. How are you including that in your vision, in your mission? How are you working with your teachers to meet those needs?

She also mentioned her work with the CalAPA; specifically, the second cycle focused on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and the third cycle focused on instructional coaching suggesting that the equity focus of the assessment may have influenced what is taught in these programs.

When I did the observations and also worked with my PLC, I had to lead the conversations and they were focused on how we are meeting the needs of students with disabilities, ELs and youth in transition so there was a focus on that. That was a positive for the program.

For those who did experience it, it was most apparent in their work with data analysis especially as part of the first cycle of the CalAPA. This was particularly true if they had chosen ELs as their focal group for one or more of the cycles as this novice assistant principal who attended a CSU shared: "Well, I feel like I spent a lot of time on it, but that was my focus [in the CalAPA]. I don't know if that's just me but maybe not as much in the coursework itself." A Latine county level leader from a CSU program also spoke of the data piece when thinking about the needs of multilingual learners: "I feel like our program very much included ELs as well as students with disabilities in a lot of different case studies so that was very good to understand a lot of these other subgroups because they are all reported within the California Dashboard." She went on to recount a meeting she attended as part of her current role in which she mentioned the Dashboard data and other county office employees were impressed that she was able to speak so fluently about the data.

Interestingly, a former assistant principal who attended a CSU spoke of the Bilingual Authorization² that she completed after her educational leadership preparation program where she was first introduced to an equity-focused approach to leadership.

I realized my own biases and that I have a deficit mindset which comes from my own experience. Most of us in [the county] have that. [We say] 'You need to learn English to go to work to be successful.' We don't value the first language. Most leaders have that mindset.

She felt that all teachers and educational leaders in the state should receive this training. Further, the skills she learned in the Bilingual Authorization also helped her to work more effectively to support speakers of languages other than Spanish as well as trilingual learners who are increasingly enrolling in her district's schools.

Similarly, a leader in a rural school district with a high proportion of multilingual learners who attended a county office of education program emphasized the critical importance of leadership that uses an equity-focused approach and the severe consequences that can result when the native language is not supported.

For 25 years, we've sacrificed one language to learn another. I think it's a crime. As soon as they start school, they forget their Spanish. Kids cannot speak with their parents, so communication is lost. I can't believe schools are letting that happen. There is no support for the native language. There is a big violence problem in [my district]. This year four parents died. A few years ago, middle school students were executed. They were 12. One dad said, 'If my kid spoke Spanish he would be alive today.' That's so powerful and tragic at the same time. We stole the language from these kids. They're alone.

She has now started the first Spanish dual language program in the district in response to community demand.

4. Discussion

For the leaders in this study, identity was not always salient to their motivation to enter an educational leadership preparation program and for taking on a leadership role. A few leaders who had grown up as ELs mentioned explicitly that their deficit-oriented experiences as multilingual learners or as teachers of multilingual learners influenced their path to leadership. Others (who were a mix of those who grew up as ELs and those who did not) were motivated to become leaders so that they could make more of an impact on school systems and become true change agents suggesting a desire for equity focused leadership. This finding suggests that the experience of being multilingual and/or having been identified as an EL growing up can motivate teachers to become equity focused education leaders but that it is not always necessary and other kinds of experiences such as working with multilingual learners within the US and abroad can also contribute.

Mentors at their school sites often influenced their path as well. It is promising that even women of color in the sample reported on the influence of mentors since research has shown that they often have limited access to formal professional mentorship (Kim & Smith, 2024). They even suggested that they would not have followed this path without their support speaking to the power of mentors in encouraging more women of color to become education leaders. Mentorship is also built into educational leadership preparation programs through fieldwork and instructional coaching courses which was mentioned as being beneficial to participants.

The leaders did not necessarily feel that their identities were a central part of their preparation program coursework either. However, some of the programs they attended did make it a focus either in one course or in how they framed the program in terms of equity, social justice and/or emancipatory leadership. Two of the three CSU programs reviewed do include some mention of the importance of identity. One goes so far as to require a whole course focused on autoethnography. Another CSU program features testimonials on its website in which a graduate discusses his intersectional identity and how it influences his approach to leadership. Thus, it appears that educational leadership preparation programs particularly those at CSUs and COEs are beginning to incorporate this content, but more work can be undertaken around centering candidates' identities in the framing of their programs and in the coursework offered.

Some participants mentioned that there was an equity focus in their educational leadership preparation programs, as Grooms et al. (2023) recommended. There was also evidence of this through our review of program materials. However, it seemed to vary by years of experience such that veteran leaders were less likely to experience this. It was also less clear that frameworks that address the issue of race within a broader context of social justice as Gooden et al. (2023) suggested had been applied within them. In addition, it did not appear that the preparation programs were necessarily engaging in what DeMatthews and Izquierdo (2018) called foregrounding and engaging, planning and implementing, and evaluating and sustaining affirming educational options such as Dual Language in Latine immigrant communities. Despite this, a few participants did go on to work in and/or start Dual Language programs in their communities.

Similar to the work of Bonanno (2023) and Oliver (2023), participants' experiences were mixed in terms of how much the needs of multilingual learners were an explicit focus of their educational leadership preparation programs. Only three reported that it was a strong focus, the majority said there was some focus and four participants said that there was very little focus on the needs of multilingual learners. Those who reported little focus tended to be from private institutions or had attended their program a number of years in the past prior to the advent of the CalAPA. Importantly, the mission statements and course descriptions of the most attended programs did not explicitly mention multilingual learners. They favored more inclusive terms such as "underserved", "diverse" or

“multicultural” populations. One program referred to cultivating community cultural wealth in their program overview suggesting the work of Acevedo and Solorzano (2021) and others. However, it is unclear if multilingual learners are an integral part of that vision. In the interviews, it seemed that multilingual learners were more likely to be focused on when discussing performance gaps suggesting a deficit approach. Those who were satisfied with the attention paid to the needs of multilingual learners felt it was most apparent in the data analysis piece. This was particularly true if they chose ELs as their focal group for the CalAPA cycles.

In line with the research of Rodela and colleagues (Rodela et al., 2021), the educational leaders we spoke with appreciated the cohort model of their preparation programs and even maintained ties to their colleagues after leaving the program. Importantly, the leader who had a negative experience in his educational leadership preparation program at a private institution did not have a cohort to rely on and reported feeling alone in his first year as a principal. However, it was not clear that the preparation programs focused as much on how to navigate situations when leaders’ equity visions may be in conflict with that of the district. They were also not as focused on reframing their past experiences, responding to current injustices and re-envisioning educational leadership as that of the Lac and Diaz (2023) study. Thus, educational leadership preparation programs are beginning to incorporate equity frameworks and a focus on multilingual learners into their content but still can do more to truly prepare candidates to lead for social justice.

Overall, there was very little discussion by education leaders of equity focused leadership. Those who did mention it were identified as ELs growing up or consider themselves to be multilingual. One participant who grew up as an EL learned this approach in the Bilingual Authorization courses she completed after her educational leadership preparation program suggesting a missed opportunity for this kind of content and framing. A few leaders who grew up as ELs touched on equity focused leadership when they discussed their motivation for entering an educational leadership preparation program as wanting to be able to make change in partnership with their communities. One multilingual leader found that his approach to leadership focused on building relationships which is consistent with the work of Callahan et al. (2019). Leaders were reflective of their own experiences and how they influenced their approaches to leadership as well. They mentioned equity-focused approaches they take in their leadership such as creating dual language programs, holistic wellness services for newcomer students and rethinking how they evaluate ELs for reclassification. However, they did not make an explicit link from these practices to their educational leadership preparation programs. This is consistent with my previous work on educational leaders’ motivations for entering leadership (Kim, 2023; Kim & Smith, 2024). While they may subscribe to equity-focused approaches to leadership, they did not necessarily learn about them in their preparation programs. More so, they derived these approaches from their own personal and professional experiences in schools suggesting a missed opportunity to engage in content that is highly relevant to many candidates.

Scanlan and Lopez’s (2015) three essential dimensions to effectively educate multilingual learners include: promoting sociocultural integration, cultivating language proficiency and ensuring academic achievement. Participants largely focused on cultivating language proficiency and ensuring academic achievement but much less so on promoting sociocultural integration in their educational leadership preparation programs (Scanlan & Lopez, 2015) which may also reflect state and district priorities around reclassification of ELs. Leaders reported participating in a variety of training and professional learning opportunities over the course of their careers but very little was directly focused on the needs of multilingual learners. Coursework offered at the CSUs reviewed that was reflective of these priorities included Educational Leadership in PreK-12 Educational Organization,

Professional Learning and Growth Leadership and Effective Practices in Instructional Coaching. When they spoke of sociocultural integration, it came up through their discussion of the policies and practices they have enacted since becoming leaders such as starting a dual language program due to community demand and creating a Student Leaders of Change group. This dimension also was reflected in some of the participants' motivations for entering a leadership preparation program. This was particularly true for those who had been identified as ELs growing up and/or considered themselves to be multilingual learners, but it seemed that more could be done to integrate this dimension in educational leadership preparation coursework. The CSUs reviewed did offer some related coursework such as Multicultural Community Partnerships. However, one participant who started out as a counselor and had a great deal of experience interacting with the community mentioned that the course was mostly "common sense" and not as rigorous as other courses in the program.

Similarly, Callahan et al.'s (2019) framework comprises four central components: (a) instructional expertise, (b) teacher/staff capacity building, (c) programs and services, and (d) school culture. When asked what they hoped to learn in their preparation program, they were focused on the technical content and skills they thought they would need in a leadership role including these four central components. Callahan et al. (2019) also proposed that principals must not only recognize the linguistic civil rights of their students but also draw from a knowledge base that prepares them to lead for equity. This was much less apparent in candidates' experiences in their preparation programs. However, some participants spoke of this "knowledge base" when referring to their motivations for becoming leaders in their communities. For example, the assistant principal who grew up in Mexico stated "At some point, I wanted to get involved in this arena to create more policies and decisions that are more fair and equitable for students." after his own deficit oriented experiences as a newcomer student. This was also reflected in those leaders who were motivated to become change agents in their communities. None mentioned equity leadership or the needs of multilingual learners as an expectation for their preparation programs outright but, some commented that they were pleasantly surprised to learn about these approaches and apply them within their work such as the assistant principal who said, "It helped me understand budgets and Ed Code a little bit which was great, but really a lot of what was needed was, how do you coach someone? How do you look at data and find inequities? How do you understand the school system?" Some participants developed this base through their experiences as leaders but very few did so within their educational leadership preparation programs suggesting more can be done in this area. The CSUs reviewed did offer related coursework such as Leading for Social Justice and Equity in Urban Schools and Envisioning Emancipatory Leadership for Schools though it was unclear if multilingual learners are a focus of the content.

5. Conclusions

Taken together, these findings suggest that it is critical that we incorporate candidates' diverse identities and experiences, as well as the needs of multilingual learners, into our educational leadership preparation coursework and professional learning in order to create a more equitable and asset-based system for these students and families in California and beyond. Educational leadership preparation programs are in need of more of a focus on identity as well as the needs of multilingual learners.

A majority of the leaders in this study consider themselves to be multilingual. About half are Latine or mixed race and a majority are female. In California overall, 77% of students are people of color but only 39% of teachers are (Ed Trust, 2022). It is critical that we center their identities as underrepresented groups in their training so that they can use their experiences to inform their work with multilingual learners. This is critical in order

to tackle the representation gap in education leadership (Grissom et al., 2021). The leader who discussed the bilingual authorization as providing her with training in an asset-based approach to leadership suggests that educational leadership preparation programs might think of ways to collaborate with these programs in order to incorporate more of a focus on the needs of multilingual learners. However, teachers and education leaders who are not multilingual are unable to participate in them so there may need to be other approaches as well. Professional learning opportunities in schools and districts can also focus more deeply on equity focused leadership approaches. In addition, we must do more to recruit teachers of color to educational leadership preparation programs in order to address the representation gap. However, it is important to remember that even non-multilingual teachers and leaders can make a difference with ELs as seen in the data. We need to reimagine educational leadership content that reflects the lived experiences of our candidates and their students. Further, there are a number of hurdles for women and people of color to become leaders. More can be done to recruit underrepresented groups to educational leadership preparation programs and to redesign programs so that they are more reflective of their lived experiences.

There is evidence that these leaders are using asset-based approaches in their leadership roles but not necessarily as a result of their training. With further emphasis on these important topics in educational leadership preparation programs, leaders will be even more equipped to make an impact in their communities for the benefit of multilingual students and families. Educational leadership preparation programs must work to incorporate more asset-based approaches in their data work such as through using QuantCrit methodologies (Castillo & Gillborn, 2023) and equity audits (Theoharis, 2024). It is critical that educational leaders focus on a variety of leadership aspects within their preparation programs, including instructional expertise, staff capacity building, programs and services and school culture. They must work to cultivate language proficiency, ensure academic achievement, and promote not only sociocultural integration but also linguistic civil rights for multilingual learners. In doing so, future educational leaders will be far better prepared to serve increasingly diverse students and families.

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Notes

1. The goal of the Migrant Education Program is to ensure that all migrant students reach challenging academic standards and graduate with a high school diploma (or complete a HSED) that prepares them for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment (<https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-offices/oese/office-of-migrant-education>, accessed on 15 January 2025) (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).
2. Bilingual Authorizations authorize the credential holder to provide instruction for English Language Development (ELD), primary language development, Specially Designed Academic Instruction Delivered in English (SDAIE), and content instruction delivered in the primary language (CTC, 2024c).

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