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## Meeting English Language Learners' Academic Needs through Teacher Training: A Multicultural Approach

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Meeting English Language Learners' Academic Needs through Teacher Training: A  
Multicultural Approach

Marjorie Ninoska Gomez Talavera

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Marjorie Ninoska Gomez Talavera

## **Abstract**

Research has revealed that educators are often ill-prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Research suggests that in order to meet the challenges of working with diverse learners, development of multicultural education must include the promotion of sensitivity towards different aspects of diversity. This study explores K-8 teachers' knowledge and understanding of their students' learning needs, specific to language and culture, and teachers' perception of preparedness to effectively deliver instruction to learners of diverse linguistic and cultural background. In this study, the researcher has hypothesized that teachers are ill-prepared to teach linguistically and culturally diverse learners. The study consists of a mixed-method study design. The method chosen to collect and analyze data is a web-based survey instrument. The data for this study were drawn from a population of 89 K-12 teachers in the state of Michigan. Cross-tabulations were performed using chi-square tests to investigate the relationship between teachers' preparedness and knowledge of their diverse learners' learning needs. Additionally, qualitative comments were examined, organized and summarized to illustrate key themes in each question under study. Findings revealed that teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students were correlated with whether the classrooms were culturally diverse or not. Results from the study shows that teachers are gradually becoming culturally responsive. Nonetheless, many educators still find the task of meeting students' academic needs to be overwhelming, specifically those needs related to language.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

Research reveals that often educators are not adequately prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students (Gay, 2002; Hutchinson & Hadjioannou, 2011; Verdugo & Flores, 2007). Studies show that English Language Learners (ELLs) continue to achieve outcomes below their peers whose native language is English (Luciak, 2006; Santoro, 2008). Experts in education find that teachers are not well prepared to teach students whose cultural values and beliefs are different from the mainstream's (Santoro, 2008). Hollins, King, and Hayman (1994) contend that teacher preparation is critically important in addressing culturally and linguistically diverse learners' academic needs. Teacher preparation is a key component to addressing the educational needs of culturally diverse student populations (Chang, Anagnostopoulos & Omae, 2011).

Today effective teaching requires teachers who are well-prepared and are receptive to diversity, and who recognize individual characteristics among students. Researchers such as Guo, Arthur, & Lund (2009) show that teachers still hold prejudice toward certain learners, particularly those who have an immigrant background. Teachers need to develop capacities and commitment to teach diverse student populations, and develop awareness of cultural biases. Moreover, teachers need to acknowledge their potential to make valuable contributions to the education of minorities students.



## **Importance of the Problem**

The attitudes, behavior, and the perceptions of classroom teachers have a significant influence on the social atmosphere of the school and the attitudes of students (Banks, 2005). Gay (2002) acknowledges that the practice of being sensitive to culture enables students to reach full humanity and to become better students. When the backgrounds of English Language Learners (ELLs) are appreciated, these students are more apt to succeed (Ndura, 2004). Johnson (2003), in a review of the development of U.S. multicultural education, explores the accessibility of public schools to diverse students and the degree to which diverse cultural knowledge and language are included in the K-12 curriculum. Her findings suggest that in order to meet the challenges of working with a diverse student body, development of multicultural education must include the promotion of sensitivity towards different aspects of diversity.

Aspects of diversity such as ethnicity and language into levels of K-12 are required as it is estimated that 10.5 million children of immigrants are in grades K-12 in the United States and 2.7 million are foreign-born enrolled in grades K-12 (Fix & Passel, 2003). Fix and Passel's data show that by the year 2000, one thousand immigrant children entered U.S. schools each day. Consequently, teachers must be trained or prepared to successfully serve multicultural populations to ensure high-quality educational opportunities to all students. Preparation is essential as teachers continue to have stereotypical assumptions about students, varying and depending on workplace, training and experiences with minorities (Karatzia-Stavlioti, Roussakis, & Spinthouraskis, 2009).

In 2011, a comparative study conducted by the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) showed that the number of ELLs registered in U.S. schools from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade increased 51% between 1999 and

2009. Despite this sharp rise in the English learning language population, educational services available to them are not increasing. The emphasis on high-stakes testing in the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which has resulted in educators “teaching to the test,” has created even more limitations to education for these students. ELLs typically do not perform well on standardized tests as they are more likely to receive instruction that centers on test preparation by way of rote memorization and drills (Menken, 2010). The results of national testing sessions conducted in 2005 show that nearly 46% of 4th grade students identified as ELLs scored below the basic score in mathematics. For middle school students, achievement was lower as well, with approximately 71% of 8th grade ELLs scoring below in both mathematics and reading than their English-speaking counterparts (Fry, 2007). Fry states that regardless of grades or subjects, ELLs consistently fall behind their English-speaking counterparts. In Michigan, on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), regarded as the Nation’s Report Card, 81% percent of 4th grade students identified as ELLs were assessed and 22% of these students scored below basic. Along with 16 other states, Michigan now mandates that teachers should be experienced with, familiar with, or competent in addressing the special needs of ELLs.

Currently, estimates of teachers who have participated in professional development in ELL education are difficult to calculate. Teachers who are assigned as instructors of linguistically and culturally diverse students have either no formal preparation, minimal formal preparation related to workshop training, or coursework and experience that can produce a state-issued credential. A national survey published by NCELA (2008) reveals that less than 1/6th of colleges offering pre-service teacher preparation include training on working with ELLs. In that same survey, 80% of teachers

surveyed stated that they had participated in staff development that related to their state or district curriculum, but only 26% had received staff development involving ELLs. Furthermore, approximately 57% of teachers believed they needed more training in order to provide effective instruction for ELLs. In general, ELLs are provided teachers who themselves admit they are not prepared for effective instruction of linguistically and culturally diverse students (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005).

In addition, mainstreams teachers' expectations are likely to affect how students such as ELLs achieve. Their assumptions about students' potential have a significant effect on students' performance, as low expectation students are given fewer opportunities to achieve (Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Students with low expectations become frustrated and give poor effort in school (Brophy, 2010). Moreover, students with low expectations lack confidence in their own ability to learn and be successful. Verdugo and Flores (2007) argue that ELLs are more likely to be at risk of performing poorly in school and dropping out than other students. The latter statement is currently a concern for a number of reasons. Dropouts suffer economic and social disadvantage throughout their lives. Dropouts have more difficulty in finding and holding jobs, a problem which is also reflected in the U.S. economy as a whole. The cost of the dropout problem is revealed in higher welfare expenditures, lost tax revenues, and increased crime rates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Catterall, 1987). Thus, teachers must be prepared to address the needs of diverse students so they can become contributing members of the domestic and global economy.

### **Background of the Problem**

The history of multicultural education can be traced back to the civil rights movements of various historically oppressed groups, namely African Americans and

other people of color who confronted biased practices in public institutions during the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s (Banks, 2005).

In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, the field of multicultural education emerged. In this movement the most commonly used term was 'diversity'. Teachers used this term to describe students who were culturally different from mainstream or white kids, typically English speakers of other languages (ESOL) or students with special needs or disabilities (Schoorman & Bogotch, 2010). In an attempt to address and encourage diversity in schools, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) (1973) certified the position of multicultural education by adopting the policy *No One Model American*, a statement to respond to issues of pluralism in school curriculums and educational practices (Gollnick, 1995; Nieto, 1999). Other professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) encouraged schools to integrate the curriculum with content and understanding about ethnic groups.

With the *No Child Left Behind Act*, in effect since 2002, pressure has been placed on schools to comply with the requirements which mandate that all students, including ELLs, meet state proficiency standards in subject areas such as mathematics and reading. However, NCLB has a limited scope as it disregards the obstacles that minority groups face; obstacles such as limited resources and lowered expectations (Kleyn, 2008). Therefore, NCLB should be oriented towards an educational multicultural framework that fosters critical thinking and social consciousness, while also meeting government standards. Teachers educating ELLs must be culturally responsive, while at the same time respecting state and federal standards (Bernhard, Diaz, & Allgood, 2005). Even with the

best prepared and experienced English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, the growing numbers of diverse students in the classroom make language and culture a priority for all future teachers and teacher educators (George, 2009). In this so called 'Era of Standards', it is imperative to have prepared teachers to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Undoubtedly, English language learners represent the fastest growing segment of the school age population. States that, until recently, have served a homogenous white population are experiencing the growth of ELLs. Many ELLs and their families have begun to move to regions that have not traditionally seen immigrant populations. In Michigan, between 1997 and 2008 ELLs grew by 103.3 percent (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2010). Furthermore, 11% of students live in homes where a language other than English is spoken half, all or most of the time (Michigan Department of Education, 2011). These immigration trends pose a challenge for schools and teachers in the state as a whole. As ELLs acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge, they require also additional time and appropriate instructional support. Moreover, instructional support ought to reflect both the school and students' home culture. As Verdugo and Flores (2007) claim, the use of students' culture and home language in the instructional process is an important part of the teaching and learning environment today.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose for this study is to investigate K-8 teachers' knowledge and understanding of their students' learning needs, specific to culture and language, and their perception of preparedness to effectively deliver instruction to learners with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Research findings show that teachers lack cultural

knowledge of their students who are linguistically and culturally different from their mainstream European-American peers (Sage, 2010). The training or lack thereof teachers have about diversity may have implications for the academic achievement of non-native speakers of English and other students who are culturally different. The present study raises the need to include more opportunities for teachers to understand and implement culturally sensitive materials in their everyday lessons. The results of the study can help incorporate diversity topics to accommodate diverse student groups and meet their learning needs, allowing classrooms to be culturally responsive.

### **Research Questions**

As stated previously, the purpose of this study is to explore teachers' knowledge of their students' needs and their preparedness to work with diverse learners, allowing them to be effective professionals. As part of this endeavor two major research questions have been formulated.

1. What is teachers' perception of their preparedness to effectively deliver instruction to learners with diverse cultural and linguistic background?
2. What kind of knowledge and understanding do teachers have about their students' learning needs, specific to culture and linguistic background?

### **Hypothesis**

It is hypothesized that most teachers in K-8 contexts are ill-prepared to teach heterogeneous classrooms, which is reflected in the integration or lack thereof of their students' cultural background in their classrooms.

### **Design, Data collection and Analysis**

This section briefly describes the research design for this study, the data collection and analysis procedures.

**Research design:**

The study consists of a mixed-method design; both quantitative and qualitative methods are combined to address the research questions formulated for this study. The specific method chosen to collect and analyze data was a web-based survey instrument. The survey was the method through which the mixed-method design would be operationalized. A survey questionnaire approach was chosen due to its convenience to collect information using both open and closed-ended questions. In addition, the survey was a convenient method for the drawing of data using various statistical and text analyses (e.g. tables, graphs, and discussion of results). The survey instrument was, then, the systematic method of measurement for both quantitative and qualitative data.

Teachers from different schools in Kent ISD were recruited online through a professional organization's e-mailing list. The participants included teachers from kindergarten to the eighth grade. The sampling technique for the recruitment of participants was snowballing sampling. Since the researcher did not have access to the population, participants were recruited using a mutual intermediary. This intermediary, therefore, contacted acquaintances who fitted the characteristics of this study through her e-mailing list. Once the web-based survey was distributed, subjects decided whether or not to take the survey questionnaire and be part of this study.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures:**

A Likert-scale survey with some open-ended questions was given to participants in this study. The survey was a 3-part survey questionnaire, consisting of both closed-form and open-ended questions plus some demographic information. The questionnaire consisted of questions dealing with teachers' perception of preparedness for multicultural classrooms, understanding of students' needs, learning about diversity and obstacles to

diversity in school (for detailed information about the survey, please refer to appendix A). Surveys were given through an online link. A deadline was given for completion of the survey. The online survey was open for completion for two weeks so teachers could respond to the survey questionnaire within their own time. Once the data was collected, the information from surveys was analyzed and synthesized into a coherent statistical description of what was discovered. Interpretation of results was explained to test if the results met the hypothesis formulated over the course of the study.

Before administering the survey, informed consent was sought to comply with the requirements of research. The consent letter explained the purpose, the objectives, the risks and the benefits of the study. Study protocol for protecting participant's privacy was explained. Based on the explanation, participants chose to participate or decline participation in the study. Participants were identified by number code rather than by name. All identifying data was deleted when direct quotes were used in the thesis.

Once the information was collected from the survey questionnaire, a descriptive statistical analysis of data was chosen. Descriptive statistics offered a framework to describe patterns and general trends in a data set. A statistical descriptive analysis would provide a portrait of the phenomenon under study, how teachers' experiences were related to each other in their teaching practice, highlighting responses and grouping those by categories. The summarizing tools were graphs and tables to describe, organize, examine, and present the raw data. In addition, qualitative comments were analyzed and synthesized to examine relationships between responses that emerged from the qualitative data. Responses were organized and summarized looking for categories, similarities or differences in the data to illustrate key themes in each question under study.



### **Plan or Timeline for the Study**

The study was conducted over the course of the winter semester of the school year 2012, beginning January 15, 2012 and ending May 1, 2012. Subjects for this study comprised teachers from kindergarten to eighth grade teaching during the school winter semester of 2012. The study site and subjects could provide evidence to support studies applicable to other settings with similar diverse groups drawn from the results presented in the study.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**NCLB:** The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is an educational law that became a directive for education reform when it was signed into law (#107-110) by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. It was created to close the achievement gap between minorities and mainstream students with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no children were denied the full realm of educational opportunities. The NCLB requires that English language learners be mainstreamed but be provided with sheltered instruction that is research based (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2008).

**Diversity:** The term comprises multiple social identities related to race and ethnicity, culture, home language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, and disability (Higbee, Siaka, & Bruch, 2007). However, for this study diversity is limited to ethnicity, culture, and home language.

**ELLs:** English language learners are students who are not yet proficient in English. These students may be bilingual, monolingual, trilingual or have little proficiency in their first language. They may be U.S. born, immigrants, refugees, or migrant students (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008).

**Multiculturalism:** Multiculturalism refers to various practices associated with educational equity, gender, ethnic groups, language minorities, low-income groups, and people with impairments (Brady, Colón-Muñiz, & Soohoo, 2010).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The thesis purports to deal with teacher cultural preparedness to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students. The study also deals with effective implementation of cultural elements in the curriculum. Readers should not expect to find in this study specific teaching strategies to teach diverse learners such as ELLs. However, the study includes recommendations and implications for integrating various cultures in daily classroom curricula.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to the small scale of the study, the data does not represent perspectives of all K-8 teachers and the findings are not generalized beyond the context where the study takes place. The study could also be limited by the race, social class, and gender of the interviewees. In the U.S. the majority of teachers are white, middle class, and female. Therefore, the values and opinions of these teachers do not represent perspectives of teachers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, subjects' decision to participate in the study may reflect some inherent bias. The instrument used for the study does not present a larger spectrum of beliefs and values of the study participants. Furthermore, the researchers' analysis and interpretation of the data derived from the study may evidence biases.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter One is an introduction to the specific problem of the research. The importance of the problem is established providing compelling reasons why the problem deserves to be studied and why a solution requires exploration so as to benefit the audience for the study. Research questions are presented, as well as the research design of the study. Additionally, delimitations and limitations of the study are discussed.

Chapter Two deals with the literature. In this chapter, the author describes the theoretical framework which is derived from the work done by scholars such as James A. Banks and Geneva Gay. Their work on multicultural education has been widely used by school districts to develop programs, courses and projects in multicultural education. Banks and Gay contend that in education teachers must incorporate aspects of their students' family and community culture, practicing responsive teaching and making learning more relevant for students.

Chapter Three relates to the methodology. The chapter starts with the research design, which is mixed-method, then is followed by the description of the research site, the population and sampling procedures, the instrumentation, and the data analysis procedures. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of the chapter.

Chapter Four focuses on the results from the study. In doing so the researcher describes the specific characteristics of the population, followed by the report of the findings related to the research questions. The chapter ends with a summary of the major findings.

Chapter Five summarizes the study, draws conclusions, and provides interpretation of the major findings. Finally, the recommendations that this study implies are expressed.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Multicultural education has become over the years the most popular term used to describe educational programs that are sensitive to, and knowledgeable of, the challenges faced by students who come from different ethnic, linguistic or cultural backgrounds. Today, multicultural education includes both the mainstream culture as well as other cultures. Multicultural education is not an educational model, but a theory and a philosophy whereby advocates uphold the ideals of freedom, justice, and equality to help develop the intellectual competencies of children from various social-cultural groups who have been historically marginalized (Sleeter, 2008). The goal of multicultural education is to reform education in order to support students who are members of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups and give them an equal chance to succeed academically in school (Banks & Banks, 2004). Furthermore, multicultural education is devoted to promoting equality and social justice, and committed to teaching critical analysis and self-reflection in all realms of learning (Nieto, 2002).

Multiculturalists agree that multicultural education demands that teachers regularly reflect on their approach to teaching and whether it is grounded in their values and beliefs. According to Mosquera and Mosquera (2005) education ought to foster transformation of stagnate attitudes and beliefs. Education must challenge social norms that perpetuate biases and inequalities towards individuals who are part of multiethnic and multicultural societies. If education is to be effective in changing instructional, curricular, and policy practices to help reverse the problems many ethnic and language minorities face in school, teachers in schools today must revise their own personal values and beliefs (Bennett, 1990). Moreover, teachers today need to develop multicultural competence,

which is the ability to challenge misconceptions that lead to discrimination based on cultural or linguistic differences (Nieto, 2002; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011). Multicultural competence can help teachers create a classroom environment sensitive to the cultural background and academic needs of all students, thereby strengthening the education for diverse students (Sleeter, 2008). Enhancing teaching styles with multiculturalism, as a philosophical perspective, may help ensure that the highest quality of educational opportunities is available to the full spectrum of students who populate the nation's schools.

When teachers are provided with appropriate training to help them meet the needs of diverse learners, they can positively affect the educational experience of these students. Consequently, not only do students improve academically, but they become more socially integrated. This chapter starts with the theoretical framework derived from Banks' (2004), Gay's, (2000), and Nieto's (2002) studies on multicultural education. In addition, this chapter explores the effectiveness of multicultural education as a way of teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students, followed by a synthesis of the literature research associated with this study, a summary of the findings in the literature, and a conclusion.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is multicultural education, as conceived by Banks (2004), Gay (2000), and Nieto (2002), who are experts in the field of multicultural education. While two contradictory positions on the subject of multicultural education are discussed; the author takes the position in support of multicultural education as developed by Banks, Gay, and Nieto. Accordingly, the theoretical framework "paves the road" for

reviewing literature that examines teachers' multicultural competence and preparedness required to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The works of Banks, Gay, and Nieto on multiculturalism has been widely used by educational organizations to develop programs, courses, and projects in multicultural education. Banks, Gay, and Nieto have been fervent advocates of an education that incorporates the ideals of democracy, social justice, pluralism, and equality. Banks and Banks (1997) believe that schools that are reformed to embrace ideologies of pluralism and equality have the potential to contribute to broader social reforms, empowering all individuals. Such reforms should not be biased but should reflect understanding and acceptance of all students, be considered within parameters of critical pedagogy, and be based on high expectations for all learners (Banks & Banks, 1997; Nieto, 2002). Since schools in the United States today are composed of teachers and students from a large variety of cultural backgrounds, the best way for the educational process to be most successful is for it to be multicultural (Gay, 2003).

Although the need for multicultural education to promote equity in education has been widely discussed by the scholars mentioned above, others like Milligan (1999) and Peariso (2010) argue that the concept of multiculturalism is itself controversial, leading to varied and sometimes opposing definitions and goals. For these scholars, multiculturalism has taken on a variety of forms over the years, from ideals of liberation to social justice. Others argue that although multiculturalism in education is a well-intended movement, it fails to go far enough (De Anda, 1997). Detractors of multicultural education argue that this educational reform does not have an established transformative political agenda and, therefore, is just another form of accommodation to the larger social order (McLaren, 1994).

Even though students might see representation of various groups in their texts and school curriculum, how these people are represented is still emphasized on differences and ethnic stereotypes. Multicultural education lies upon the categorization of individuals into groups; therefore, differences and ethnic stereotypes are overemphasized. Moreover, categorization of individuals is the same approach previously constructed to exclude certain ethnic or linguistic groups from the mainstream society (Milligan, 1999). Information about racially, ethnically, and linguistically subordinated people reflected in sections of the main texts or school curricula, still carries the dominant discourse and it is treated from a mainstream perspective. Some groups may feel they are underrepresented within the multicultural education curriculum (Milligan, 1999; Peariso, 2010). Besides, individual complexity and experiences make it difficult to develop a multicultural mission that speaks for diverse groups as a vehicle for school and social change. Therefore, the issue of multicultural education is a more difficult enterprise to organize and implement than previously envisioned, leaving everyone feeling overwhelmed (Werkmeister & Miller, 2009).

Although multicultural education may be seen as a divisive force by the aforementioned scholars, Banks (2004), Gay (2000), and Nieto (2002) argue that multicultural education plays an important role in preparing teachers meet the challenges in diverse classrooms. While they all support multicultural education, they all have different foci. Banks focuses on curriculum, Gay focuses on pedagogy, and Nieto focuses on education for social justice. For that that reason, their framework on multicultural education is suitable for this study. Teachers need greater understanding and more positive attitudes towards different groups to serve diverse learners effectively, and develop and model good teaching drawing upon students' cultural strengths (Hopkins &

Gillispie, 2009). Gay (2010) and Nieto (2000, 2002) have proven that culturally relevant and responsive practices hold great potential for shaping academic outcomes for at risk students, such as children of color and ELLs.

### **Synthesis of Research Literature**

The call for preparing educators who are culturally responsive to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students, namely ELLs, is an urgent one (Hutchinson & Hadjioannou, 2011). Akiba (2011) and Richards (2008) contend that this preparation can shape teachers' instructional practice to effectively and efficiently meet the learning needs of ELLs. The preparation of teachers to work with ELLs has been well-documented; however, most literature has focused on the preparation of specialists such as ESL or bilingual teachers (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Arias, Garcia, Harris-Murri, & Serna, 2010). Conversely, there is little research collected on the kind of preparation mainstream teachers have to work with ELLs, and the knowledge they have regarding the educational needs of this diverse student group (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Professionals of English as a Second Language or bilingual education are no longer the main educators that are in charge of meeting the needs of the increasingly diverse student body in the United States. Mainstream teachers are challenged today to meet ELLs' language and content area needs (Menken, 2010). Consequently, teacher preparation has important implications for the teaching-learning endeavor associated with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Garcia, 2005). Meeting the different needs of this diverse group is pivotal as ELLs continue to fall behind their English-speaking counterparts on high-stake tests (Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). Moreover, since schools cannot make Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP), as



outlined by NCLB, unless all student subgroups meet targeted progress benchmarks, helping ELLs succeed academically should concern everyone.

Research is conclusive on the fact that teachers who are multicultural competent are likely to be more successful at meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Teachers who are responsive to meet the needs of English language learners are especially important as the shift in school demographics is creating communication gaps between teachers, and the students and their families (Arias, Faltis, & Ramirez-Marin, 2010). Evidence from empirical studies is clear in that in order to be successful in a diverse instructional setting, teachers must perform the following tasks: develop culturally responsive teaching, understand diverse learners' background, adapt curriculum to these cultures and backgrounds, and have high expectations for all learners (Gay, 2000; Arias, Garcia, Harris-Murri, & Serna, 2010, Darling-Hammond, 2006).

### ***Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)***

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p.29). According to Arias, Garcia, Harris-Murri, and Serna (2010), culturally responsive teaching is an important aspect of teacher preparation. A culturally responsive teacher affirms students' identities by using their backgrounds as resources to teach and learn. Students have local funds of knowledge that can be utilized to validate students' identities as knowledgeable individuals and as a foundation for future learning (Gonzalez and Moll, 2002). Students' funds of knowledge (e.g. the knowledge students gain from their families and cultural backgrounds) are resources that can be connected to classroom teaching. Teachers who respect cultural differences are apt to believe that all students are

capable learners, even when students enter school with ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that contrast with the dominant cultural model (Gay, 2002; Villegas, & Lucas, 2002). Moreover, culturally responsive teachers see themselves as responsible and capable intermediaries to bring about educational changes that will make schools more responsive to all students.

Therefore, cultural responsive teaching (CRT) uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically and linguistically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It moves beyond tolerance toward acceptance, which helps students incorporate their linguistic, cultural and background resources into all aspects of schooling (Gay, 2002). Cultural responsive teaching (CRT) is an important parameter in all efforts aiming to improve the ability of future teachers to deal with the complex circumstances of contemporary schooling, which is increasingly impacted and influenced by ELLs (Karatzia-Stavlioti, Roussakis, & Spinthouraskis, 2009). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) establishes an ethical and humane value system for teachers whereby the goal is to equally prepare all students to be productive citizens. CRT urges teachers to change their methods to support the academic achievements of all students, especially ELLs, whose academic achievements and expectations are lower than their English-speaking counterparts. With CRT rigorous standards and high expectations are not just centered on one or two groups, but applied to the entire student population equally (Groulx & Silva, 2010).

Siwatu's study (2007) on the development of culturally responsive teaching competencies and the implications for teacher education, found that teachers with culturally responsive competence were effective in their ability to connect with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, and help them feel important members of the

classroom. Siwatu's study, drawn from a population of 275 pre-service teachers enrolled in two teacher education programs in the Midwest, shows that there is a correlation between culturally responsive competence and culturally responsive outcomes. In other words, teachers who are successful in executing culturally responsive teaching practices tend to believe in the positive outcomes associated with culturally responsive pedagogy. In the study, teachers who were successful in culturally responsive practices were able to identify appropriate teaching techniques to help their ELLs with their academic needs. Some of these techniques included task-modeling to enhance ELLs' understanding of content area material, usage of students' backgrounds to make learning meaningful, revision of instructional materials to have a varied representation of students' cultural group, and providing ELLs with visual aids to enhance their understanding of various assignments. Moreover, teachers acknowledged that helping students from diverse cultural backgrounds succeed in school would increase these students' confidence in their overall academic ability.

Developing competencies to work with ELLs is definitely important. Arias, Ramirez-Marin, and Faltis' study (2010), on the relevant competencies for secondary teachers of English learners, examined the kind of competencies secondary teachers needed to be successful with ELLs in academic subject areas. Some of their findings revealed that all teachers of ELLs needed to become advocates for ELLs and to promote high-quality instructions. Teachers needed to develop competencies such as building on students' background knowledge and community life. Teachers could use their students' home and community knowledge as funds of knowledge for meaningful classroom teaching. Teachers of ELLs needed to see their students as resources and work with them collaboratively so as to improve instruction and help them in their subject area classes.

The studies of Arias, Ramirez-Marin, Faltis (2010) and Siwatu (2007) prove that teachers today need to change their methods and make them culturally responsive to equally prepare all students. In the case of ELLs, teachers not only need to help ELLs have full access to academic language and subject-area content, but enable them to succeed socially and academically using a culturally responsive teaching that builds upon students' cultural background and life experience.

### ***Understanding Students' Background***

Many new teachers lack understanding of how diverse learners construct knowledge, how the lives of their students are connected to their success in school, and how to teach in a way that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar (Gay, 2002; Lucas & Villegas, 2002). Certainly, teachers ought to develop cultural awareness, foster positive attitudes, and enhance skills that promote diverse learners' academic achievement, language development, and socio-cultural competence (Gay, 2002, 2010). Affirming views of their students' backgrounds, teachers ensure effective teaching and the development of stronger communication skills between teacher and students. Moreover, research has proven that teachers can deliberately access students' cultural knowledge to link it with academic to help students with their educational outcomes (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

Gutstein, Lipman, Hernandez, & Reyes' study (1997) provides evidence that utilizing students' background and experiential knowledge are essential in the learning-teaching process. Their study was conducted in an elementary/middle school in a Mexican American community. They developed the study to examine how mathematics instruction was affected by the infusion of students' culture and informal knowledge in

the instruction. The authors found a correspondence between what they called “culturally relevant mathematics teaching” and students’ critical mathematical thinking. Using an instruction that built upon the backgrounds of their students, teachers helped develop not only students’ critical mathematical thinking, but also supported the development of critical thinking about knowledge in general. Furthermore, teachers in the study saw a close relationship between teaching mathematics and producing leaders among students from this marginalized group. Certainly, using students’ backgrounds as teaching tools has proven to be an effective technique to help learners in their academic process. Students today need well-prepared teachers who can engage them academically by building on what they know, who can relate to their language, families and communities, and who can envision them as participants in a multicultural democracy (Sleeter, 2008).

### ***Curriculum Adaptation***

The development of an effective learning environment requires the use of a curricula and instructional practices that influence students’ growth. Teachers must continuously adjust their teaching practices and curriculum to meet their students’ needs, which involves building on their cultural, linguistic, and cognitive strengths (Brown, 2003; Lucas & Villegas, 2002). Adjusting teaching practices and making them multicultural has benefits for all students, including native speakers of English, who often identify themselves as non-ethnic. In these practices, all students are valued for their unique abilities (e.g. language) and these unique abilities are accepted and embraced as strengths, rather than weaknesses, in the teaching-learning process (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). Re-designing teaching practices that build on what students bring from their

culture can help students learn even more effectively (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedom-Gonzalez, 2008).

Brown's (2003) study clearly emphasizes the importance of integrating culture into curriculum. His article describes several instructional strategies used by 13 teachers from seven cities throughout the U.S. to create cooperative and academically productive classrooms. In his study, which examines culturally responsive pedagogy when working with ELLs, he found that successful instructional strategies involve establishing an environment in which teachers address students' cultural and ethnic needs, as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive needs. The 13 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade urban teachers interviewed in the study used several culturally responsive strategies, including demonstrating care for students, treating their students like they are competent, providing instructional scaffolding, and using congruent communication patterns to establish a productive learning environment for their diverse students.

To best serve their diverse student body, it is important that teachers use the tools available to them to learn about their students' needs, and to engage them academically. Clearly, teachers need to develop knowledge and skills to succeed in teaching diverse children. Teachers ought to explore the knowledge, culture, and diversity of their students in order to develop culturally responsive teaching techniques (Dantas, 2007). Today, education needs teachers who acquire knowledge about their students' development, individual differences, academic abilities and language, and who integrate this knowledge into their pedagogy to effectively teach the growing range of diverse student groups within U.S classroom (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gay, 2002, 2003; Nieto, 2002). Furthermore, teachers need to respond to their students' cultural, social, emotional, and

cognitive characteristics by being assertive through the use of explicitly and sensibly stated expectations in order to provide all students with opportunities for academic success (Brown, 2003).

### ***Holding High Expectations for All Students***

Many professionals struggle to address the needs of ELLs, a considerable number of whom continue to achieve educational outcomes below their English-speaking peers (Santoro, 2007). Nationally, ELLs score an average of 20-50 points below their English-speaking counterparts on state assessments of several content areas (e.g. language arts and math) (Menken, 2010). Conversely, some studies support the assertion that teachers who have high expectations for their students can have a tangible effect on students' academic achievement (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Brophy, 1983; Guillet, Martinek, Sarrazin, & Trouilloud, 2002; Guskey, 2002).

High expectations for students play an important role in students' academic performance. Scholars such as Brophy (1983) and Guskey (2002) have studied and discussed the correlation between teachers' expectations and students' performance for years. Their findings support the belief that the expectations of a teacher for a particular student's performance increase the probability that the student's achievement level will move in the direction expected by the teacher. To put it in another way, they found that high expectations foster students' academic performance, low expectations lower students' academic performance. Although studies show that the enhancement or diminution of educational outcomes of students is not high, even a 5% difference in an educational outcome is an important difference (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Brophy, 1983).

In an effort to identify the reasons why Latino and African American students failed or succeeded in mathematics, Gutierrez (2000) conducted a mix method case study in eight urban high school mathematics departments and found that the success of Black and Latino students in mathematics was due to the fact that the schools and teachers had high expectations of their students. Furthermore, teachers were accessible to students and focused on positive rather than negative aspects. Gutierrez (2000) concluded that the mathematic departmental culture impacted students' learning and achievement and that when teachers set high expectations for all learners, academic success was likely to be high.

Similarly, in an exploratory study of six secondary schools in California and Arizona about the academic success (e.g. high test scores and low drop-out rates) of minority language students, Donato, Henze & Lucas (1990), found that one of the key features that promoted the academic achievement of language-minority students was holding high expectations for them. Not only were students engaged in the learning process when teachers had high expectations of them, but teachers challenged them and provided guidance to meet the challenges. Teachers with high expectations of their minority students were likely to recognize students for doing well and to award them with extracurricular activities by using the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their minority language students. As Banks and Banks (2004) state, students thrive when teachers believe in their capabilities and have high expectations for them. Additionally, teachers encourage success by using cultural scaffolding, by drawing from students' cultures and experiences to add dimension to their lessons (Gay, 2002).



## **Summary of Literature Review**

Multicultural research has challenged mainstream academia and its stereotypes and misconceptions. Research that examines multiculturalism has made it apparent that an extensive range of knowledge is needed to work with ethnically, linguistic, and culturally diverse groups. Empirical evidence supports the idea that in order to be successful with diverse students, teachers require multicultural competence. Literature highlights the value of teachers' competence in multicultural education so as to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. What mainstream teachers need to know to work with diverse learners is not entirely clear; however, there are teaching approaches that are commonly used throughout the United States that effectively support linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Some of these approaches incorporate aspects of culturally responsive teaching, a curriculum that reflects students' backgrounds and high expectations for all learners equally.

Teachers are important keys in meeting the needs of all students, and in preparing them for the 21st century (Arias et al. 2010). Teachers are agents of change who can make schools equitable for all students, especially in today's multicultural schools. Thus, teachers are required to be culturally responsive. A culturally responsive teacher validates and utilizes students' identities and knowledge as a foundation for teaching and learning. As a result, students feel important members of the classroom which increase their confidence in their academic ability to succeed in school (Siwatu, 2007). The creation of a classroom community that is supportive of learning for diverse students is central. A classroom community that hold high expectations for all learners and that incorporates culturally responsive teaching makes dynamics between all students and teachers more

equitable (Arias, Faltis & Ramirez-Marin, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Luciak, 2006; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

High expectations, which are an important trait of culturally responsive teaching, can also have tangible effects on students' academic achievement. Scholars like Alvidrez and Weinstein (1999), and Brophy (1983) have studied how high or low expectations can influence the learning of students. Their findings clearly indicate that when teachers believe in their students' capabilities and have high expectations for them, students' academic performance increases. The aforementioned statement correlates with Banks and Banks' work (2004) on multicultural education practices, which draw attention to the fact that high expectations for linguistically and culturally diverse learners can produce meaningful learning outcomes.

Undoubtedly, the lives of students are connected to their success in school. Affirming students' backgrounds, teachers ensure effective teaching and the development of stronger communication skills between teacher and student. The content of the school curriculum has to be accessible to all learners. Instructional adaptation for linguistically and culturally diverse students is one of the primary responsibilities of mainstream classrooms (Gay, 2010). Learners require full access to academic language and subject-area content in ways that enable them to succeed socially and academically. Students require a classroom curriculum that takes into account a wide variation of students' background knowledge, interests, abilities, and language. Instruction should seek to maximize each learner's growth by adjusting instructional tasks to address students' needs while building on their strengths. This will help teachers to become multiculturally competent and prepared for today's multicultural schools.

## **Conclusions**

With the challenge of an increasingly ELL population, the U.S. educational system ought to be cultural sensitive while at the same time respecting state and federal standards (Bernhard, Diaz, & Allgood, 2005). Teachers have to develop techniques to utilize the backgrounds of their students to move them from basic skills to more rigorous standards, and hold high expectations for students. Teachers should integrate students' backgrounds in their lessons and curricula. Aspects of diversity such as culture and language have to be integrated into the classroom to enhance the learning experience of not only diverse students, but students of mainstream English-speaking culture as well (Woods, Jordan, Loudoun, Troth, & Kerr, 2006). Students are more apt to succeed under the guidance of teachers who respect and understand their cultural backgrounds (Nieto, 2002).

Research shows that many teachers have little knowledge about how to work effectively with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Many teachers find the task of meeting students' academic and linguistic needs to be overwhelming. Teachers without proper training, after having confronted diversity in the classroom, experience feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and intimidation (Guo, Arthur, & Lund, 2009). Preparation and cultural responsiveness is required to work with children of a rapidly diversifying population in schools (Bernhard, Diaz, & Allgood, 2005). Educators need to learn about racial, cultural and linguistic diversity and become more aware of how these can influence learning (Nieto, 2002). If schools are to become places where teachers learn to become effective with students of all backgrounds, policies and practices need to be transformed (Banks & Banks, 2004; Bennet, 1990). Teachers need guidelines to help them observe and interpret behaviors and beliefs in order to prevent

negative assumptions associated with certain ethnic or linguistic groups. Multicultural education practices might not be the ultimate solution to all shortcomings in education, but it is an important step in the move towards an inclusive education that gives equitable and adequate education to all members of the school milieu.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

### **Introduction**

The research design is a single study using a mixed-method approach in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected. The study is comprised of a Likert-scale survey, as well as of two open-ended questions as a follow-up from the eight Likert-scale closed questions. While the survey data are intended to identify analogous responses that stand out as significant among survey participants, the open-ended questions are intended to give a more personal side of teachers' perceptions related to their role and experience in schools as general education teachers with multicultural students in the classroom.

The central purpose of this study is to investigate K-8 teachers' knowledge and understanding of their students' learning, and their preparedness to effectively deliver instruction to learners with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The investigation of teachers' knowledge of their students learning needs and preparedness was broken down into two major research questions.

1. What is teachers' perception of their preparedness to effectively deliver instruction to learners with diverse cultural and linguistic background?
2. What kind of knowledge and understanding do teachers have about their students' learning needs, specific to culture and linguistic background?

In order to answer each question, the study includes the use of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to describe the basic features of the data in the study. This chapter begins with the design of the study followed by the description of the research site, population description and sampling procedures, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis procedures. A short summary of the research design concludes the chapter.

## **Study design**

A mixed-method single study design was chosen for this study. Using a simple definition, mixed-methods research entails the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, either simultaneously or at different phases of the same study (Creswell, 2003). The use of mixed-methods may present an in-depth understanding of the problem being studied in this research.

Although mixed methods research has existed for several decades, it has just been within the last few decades that these methods have gained visibility (Gonzalo Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak, 2010). Mixed-methods allow researchers to use different tools of data collection rather than being limited to the kinds of data collection that have been frequently related to either qualitative or quantitative research. Researchers are free to use different methods to examine a research problem using both numbers and words; researchers combine inductive and deductive reasoning. Moreover, researchers can immerse in a topic and not only be interested in what has occurred in a study, but also in how and why it has occurred (Creswell, 2003).

Therefore, a mixed-method single study design was selected for this study. Such study design offered a good framework to address the research questions and hypothesis related to this study. Both qualitative and quantitative questions were posed, both forms of data collected and analyzed, and a quantitative and qualitative interpretation was made. Consequently, this research met the criteria for a mixed-method study based on the abovementioned characteristics of such approach. Additionally, collection of data was done through a web-based survey instrument and data analyses were done through a statistical analysis at the university Statistical Consulting Center to better examine certain

aspects of the study. In the web-based instrument, strategies in qualitative research such as open-ended questions were used as well as quantitative techniques such as multiple choice scales.

### **Description of the Research Site and Entry into the Research Site**

The research site selected for this study was the Kent Intermediate School District (ISD) of Kent County, Michigan. To expand the sample size, the internet was used as a tool to recruit teachers from other districts in Kent County as well.

### **Description of the Research Site**

Kent Intermediate School District (ISD) provides service to 20 local public districts and to all non-public schools within the district's boundaries. Kent ISD, directly or indirectly, serves almost 400 schools, more than 130,000 students, and 7,000 educators. Kent ISD offers a varied array of services to meet the needs of educators, families, and communities that the district serves (Kent Intermediate School District, 2011). Additionally, Kent ISD's 09-10 Annual Report states the commitment of the district to curricula and instructional programs that are culturally inclusive. Kent County purports to be comprised of school districts that understand, respect, and embrace cultural differences. One of the goals of Kent ISD is to help schools understand, instruct, and support the academic growth of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Kent Intermediate School District, 2011). In the case of ELLs, Kent ISD provides a wide range of resources (e.g. literacy programs for ELLs) for the more than 8,000 students who are learning English as a second or third language. Kent ISD claims to identify and promote effective practices for assessment, data collection, and analysis of ELLs learning.

## **Negotiating Entry into the Research Site**

Kent Intermediate School District (ISD) was chosen as a site due to its commitment to giving their students an education that embraces cultural and linguistic diversity, as evidenced by the programs and services provided by the district. As a result of this commitment, the researcher got in touch with a diversity coordinator and she found the people working in Kent ISD to be positively receptive to her study. The researcher believed that teachers would be more likely to complete a survey if requested by a reputable organization than they would to a mailed survey from an unknown researcher. To this end, the researcher got in contact with the coordinator of a Diverse Center Organization (DCO) for assistance, and requested her help to identify and distribute the survey among K-8 teachers in Kent ISD with a diverse student body.

### **Population Description and Sampling Procedures**

#### **Population Description**

The teacher population of Kent ISD is 7,000 according to Kent Intermediate School District (ISD) 2009-2010 Annual Report. Kent ISD offers an extensive number of courses to its professionals in education that further their understanding of many facets of learning. In the school year 2010-2011, 4,663 professionals were trained at Kent ISD in 305 courses (Kent Intermediate School District, 2011). The courses covered a wide range of topics from curriculum, instructional strategies and technology, to building student-teacher relationships and many more. Kent ISD has a strong commitment to bringing the latest professional development to its different school districts to make educators the best educators they can be. The courses listed are intended to assist all of those who teach or



support learning. Therefore, teachers in Kent ISD are encouraged to attend any professional development learning courses every year.

### **Population Sampling Procedures**

Snowballing sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling, was chosen by the researcher as means to identify appropriate respondents for this study. Since the researcher of this study was not affiliated to any school, it was deemed appropriate to contact a person from a reputable institution and ask her to refer the study to respondents who would be interested in being part of this study.

Following the two main steps for recruiting subjects in snowballing sampling, a key individual was identified as the first step. This individual was a coordinator of a diversity educational center in Kent Intermediate School District (ISD). As a second step, the researcher asked this coordinator to introduce the study and web-based questionnaire to people who she knew fitted the characteristics of the desired population for this study (e.g. K-8 grade teachers with a diverse student body). Consequently, the survey was distributed to different individuals and schools' principals within Kent ISD using the educational center's e-mailing list. These educators and school administrators, in turn, distributed the web-based questionnaire to their school personnel or acquaintances.

The targeted population in this study consisted of teachers from kindergarten to eighth grade from different urban, suburban and rural schools in Kent Intermediate School District (ISD) in Michigan. The population was mainly composed of teachers currently teaching in local public districts and non-public schools within Kent ISD's boundaries. Teachers ranged from English language art teachers to art and music

instructors, and were selected through a recruitment process involving a Diverse Center Organization (DCO) in Kent ISD.

### **Instrument**

The instrument of this study is comprised of a web-based survey (see Appendix A). The instrument is a 3-part survey questionnaire, consisting of some demographic information and of both closed-form and open-ended questions. The development of the survey was aimed to examine questions about teachers' multicultural preparation, knowledge, beliefs, and school conditions to support multiculturalism which may significantly impact the learning experiences of linguistically and culturally diverse students. A review of literature based on a multicultural framework was conducted to develop the 10 question instrument in order to address the study research questions. Important aspects assessed in the survey questionnaire included teachers' perceptions of preparedness for diverse classrooms, school's support for multicultural education practices, and teachers' practices and experiences in effectively meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Once the questions were developed, the draft survey was revised by an ESL coordinator working for a K-8 elementary school in Grand Rapids as well as by the researcher's thesis advisor. They were asked to examine the questions for appropriateness. Survey items were reworded based on comments and suggestions. To ensure reliability, items were written in a straight-forward manner using language familiar to teachers. In order to enhance validity, the survey was pilot tested with ten K-8 teachers from an elementary school in Grand Rapids who provided feedback about how well they

understood the questions. Some modifications to the instrument were made based on the feedback and comments of this pilot group of teachers.

Finally, the survey was created using a website that offered convenience to create, manage, collect, and analyze survey data securely. The development of the web-based survey was assisted by the University Statistical Consulting Center (SCC), which assembled the survey in a Likert-type scale format (multiple-choice style of questions). Furthermore, the SCC made comments for how the survey should be laid online and provided the link to complete the survey. In addition, the SCC requested to pilot test the survey one more time using the link provided. Using Cronbach's alpha internal consistency scale, the results of the pilot test showed a questionable inter-rater reliability on the questions expected to be answered similarly. The average measure of internal consistency was between .60-.70 which is somewhat moderate. This measure indicated that the test required other measures (e.g. more tests) so as to improve items that may be needed reconsideration. It should also be noted that while a high value for Cronbach's alpha indicates good internal consistency of the items in the scale, it does not mean that the scale is unidimensional (Ferketich, 1990). Therefore, the survey was judged suitable to be sent out and to begin collecting the data.

Once the final survey questionnaire was revised and developed online, the consent form for the study was added for all participants to read before completing the questionnaire. As a result, the final survey was composed of a consent form letter and a 3 part web-based questionnaire. Part 1 of the web-based survey instrument asked for descriptive information such as demographics about the participating teachers, including gender, racial and ethnic background, years of teaching experience, grade level, and

languages spoken. Part 2 consisted of eight closed-form questions designed to identify information pertaining to training in multiculturalism, experience teaching diverse students, desire for additional training to work effectively with diverse students, strategies employed with diverse learners in multicultural classrooms, among others. Part 3 offered two open-ended questions for teachers to give their opinion about multicultural education and about the needs of diverse students perceived in their schools.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Firstly, the researcher contacted the University Statistical Consulting Center (SCC) to set up a meeting to go over the draft survey instrument, as they provide consultation services for individuals working on projects or theses. After meeting with SCC, the researcher decided to use the SCC services to develop the web-based survey. The assistance provided by the SCC included revising the draft survey instrument, assembling the survey, making recommendations for the lay-out of the survey, setting up the survey online, providing the link to the researcher for distribution, and assisting the researcher with data analysis.

Prior to the administration of the questionnaire to the participants, permission from the Human Research Review Committee was obtained (see Appendix B). The live link for the survey, then, was distributed to the targeted sample population using an intermediary. Clear directions and an explanation of the purpose of the survey were presented. Agreement to participate was also presented in the consent form stating that there was no compensation for completing the questionnaire, that the survey was confidential and no identifying information would be used, that the participation was voluntary, that participants were free to withdraw at any time without penalty, and that

there were no risks associated with participation in the study. In addition, if participants agreed to participate in the study, the completion of the survey would be done on the participants' own time, and would not take longer than fifteen minutes. The online survey remained open for completion for two weeks.

Once the link was provided for distribution, the researcher got in touch with the coordinator from the Diverse Center Organization (DCO) who circulated the link to the web-based survey among the people from her organization's e-mailing list. Additionally, the coordinator endorsed the study by asking each e-mailed person to forward the link to teachers who might be willing to participate in the study. Although the targeted population was intended to be recruited within Kent ISD's boundaries, the distribution of the population went beyond Kent ISD, and included populations from other counties across Michigan (e.g. Wayne County, Ingham County) as they might add unknown variables with regard to training or preparation to teach. Due to variability in educational standards from state to state, the researcher elected to focus the analysis only on the information collected from counties in the state of Michigan.

### **Analysis of Data**

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used for the analysis of data in this study. Descriptive statistics analysis allowed presenting the data in a more meaningful way (e.g. the use of statistics to describe, summarize, and explain a set of data). Therefore, the group of data in this study was summarized using a combination of tabulated description (e.g. tables), graphical description (e.g. bar graphs) and statistical commentary (e.g. discussion of the results). Additionally, descriptive analysis in this study involved examining the characteristics of individual variables by constructing a frequency distribution (e.g. frequencies and percentages of data value), which helped

indicate appropriate internal consistency of the survey items. Identifying internal consistency of each item dealing with teachers' preparedness and knowledge to instruct diverse learners revealed the extent to which items on the questionnaire focused on the notion of preparedness and knowledge of students learning needs. Descriptive statistics also helped identify distribution or spread of the marks in teachers' responses.

Since the use of descriptive statistics was simply to describe what was going on in the output data and did not allow making conclusions related to the study's hypothesis, inferential statistics was used to make inferences about the population from observations and data analyses. Inferential statistics was a suitable method by which to examine relationships between variables in this study. Inferential statistics helped make judgments of the probability that an observed difference between variables was a dependable one, or the probability that the observed results could have occurred by chance when there was no relationship between the variables under study. Moreover, since this study involved examining the characteristics of individual variables using frequency distributions, chi-square tests of independence were the specific statistics to be used to examine relationships between variables in the data. Tests of independence, also known as tests of significance, allowed the researcher to estimate the likelihood that a relationship between variables in a sample actually occurred in the population.

Additionally, a narrative analysis of open-ended questions was given. Responses were synthesized and analyzed to describe variation and explain relationships between responses that emerged from the qualitative data. The narrative analysis provided information about intangible factors, such as school support, that were not apparent in the quantitative data of the study. A narrative analysis provided a human portrait of the phenomenon under study, how teachers' teaching experiences were related to each other

when working with diverse linguistically and culturally diverse students. The researcher analyzed the whole set of responses looking for common themes, categories, and relationships that were emerging across the data. Responses were organized and summarized looking for similarities and differences in the data to illustrate key themes in each question.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the methodology for the present study was presented. The study was completed utilizing a mixed-method approach. A web-based survey questionnaire was utilized for the collection and analysis of data. Participants of the present study were K-8 teachers from various public and private schools within Kent ISD, who had a diverse student body.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

This chapter presents the findings from the study. The context of the study, which includes the demographics and background of the participants, is discussed and is followed by the findings which are presented in two sections. A short summary concludes the chapter.

### **Context**

For this study, information was collected through a web-based questionnaire. With this questionnaire, 116 responses were collected in total. Of the 116, 89 responses were collected from the state of Michigan, 23 from four other states, and 4 responses were collected from three different countries. The researcher's initial intention was to restrict the study to Kent Intermediate School District (ISD). However, due to the snowballing sampling procedure, the survey reached national and international settings. After considering the number of respondents from various settings, the researcher decided post facto to focus on Michigan. The analysis was focuses solely on the information collected from Kent ISD and other counties in Michigan, as there may be more similarities among Michigan's schools than with other national or international schooling contexts. The demographic characteristics and the background of questionnaire participants are described below in two different sections.

### **Characteristics of the Participants of this Study**

Initially, the participants targeted for this study were teachers from Kent Intermediate School District (ISD). While student demographics may vary greatly from county to county, all public schools in Michigan have the same curriculum standards and are administered by the same department of education. Because of this continuity in



standards and administration, it was decided that utilizing all of the data collected from Michigan would help in answering the research questions.

The following table offers a breakdown of participants by county, from greatest number of participants to fewest number of participants.

Table 1  
*Breakdown of Questionnaire Participants by County and Number*

County	Number of Participants
Kent ISD	N = 42
Wayne County	N = 17
St. Joseph County	N = 6
Allegan County	N = 4
Berrien County	N = 3
Branch County	N = 3
Delta County	N = 3
Barry County	N = 2
Lenawee County	N = 2
Schoolcraft County	N = 1
Van Buren County	N = 1
Mecosta County	N = 1
Muskegon County	N = 1
Oakland County	N = 1
Ingham County	N = 1
Grand Traverse County	N = 1

### **Background of Participating Teachers**

The data for this study were drawn from a population of K-12 teachers in the state of Michigan. Of the total sample (N = 89), 76 were female and 13 were male.

Additionally, 2 of the participants reported to be administrators. Participants were asked to indicate their race/ethnicity: 84 indicated that they were White/Anglo, 4 indicated that

they were Black/African American, and 1 indicated that she was American Indian/Alaskan Native. The sample consisted of 42 teachers working in an urban district, 28 in a rural district, and 19 in a suburban district. Of the 89 participants who took part in this study, 53 teachers were working in elementary schools, 21 in middle schools, and 15 in high schools. Participants in this study were also asked to indicate languages spoken. Of the total number of respondents, 12 reported speaking Spanish and 4 indicated that they spoke another language (e.g. French, Russian, Vietnamese, and Ukrainian). Regarding the length of professional experience, 29 respondents indicated having between 1 and 5 years of experience, 24 had between 6 and 10 years of experience, 13 had between 11 and 15 years of experience, 11 had between 16 and 20 years of experience, and 12 had 20 or more years of teaching experience.

### **Findings**

This section includes the statistical analysis of results for each of the research questions, which is done through tests of independence using chi-square p-values. Findings from analyses of the data are included in this section as well.

### **Statistical Analysis Procedures**

The analysis of results is reported in the form of a Pearson chi-square test. The goal of this form of analysis is to ascertain whether observations on two or more variables, expressed in a cross-tabulation table, are independent of each other. Chi-square tests of independence are used as a means to determine whether or not a statistically significant relationship exists between two or more categorical variables. For this study, chi-square tests were used to compare obtained frequencies on specific variables with expected frequencies; therefore, providing an indication of probability that significant differences were actually found (p-value). The p-value was set at .05, which is the

standard significant level, to ascertain whether or not two or more variables were independent (no relationship). If the p-value was greater than the significant level, the researcher would fail to reject the null hypothesis; that is, the two variables were independent. The results were not statistically significant, any difference observed in the results may have been a coincidence or have occurred by chance. In addition, since chi-squares tests deal with frequencies, means and standard deviations would not be appropriate for the descriptive section of this report (Hinton, 2004).

Chi-square tests of independence are utilized to identify the relationship between variables in each of the two main research questions to determine whether or not variables correlate with the study hypothesis. The researcher has hypothesized that teachers in K-8 contexts are ill-prepared to teach in heterogeneous classrooms, which is reflected in the integration, or lack thereof, of their students' cultural background in their classroom. Both research questions are addressed through specific questions, in the web-based survey questionnaire, subdivided into researchable components.

*Research Question 1: What is teachers' perception of their preparedness to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students?*

- how prepared teachers are to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students;
- the degree to which they have participated in cultural or diversity awareness training;
- how learning about diversity has helped them in their professional setting; and
- what diversity training opportunities they would consider important to take advantage of if offered by their school district.

To best examine the information received from participants regarding preparedness to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students, responses from the web-based questionnaire were collapsed into small sample sizes.

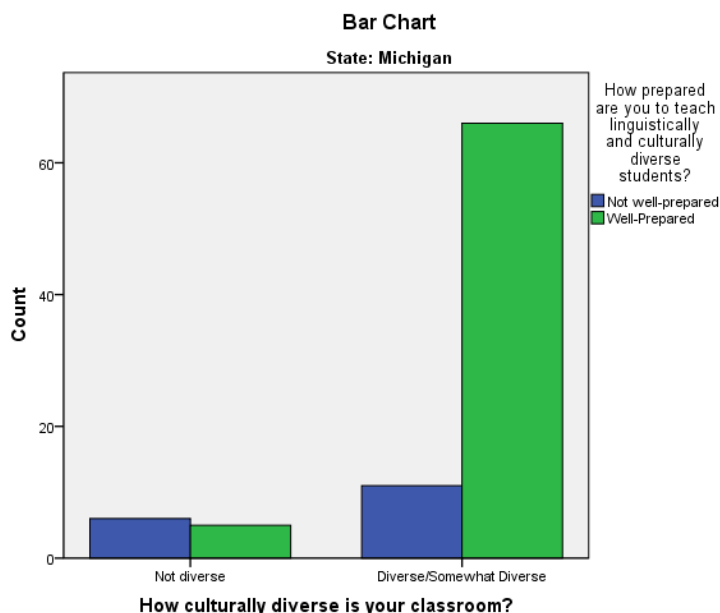
When participants were asked how prepared they felt they were to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students, the results revealed that having a diverse classroom and being prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds was closely related and that the two variables were dependent,  $p = .002$ . The results were statistically significant. The two variables were related. The null hypothesis was rejected. Teachers were most likely to respond that they felt well-prepared or very well-prepared to teach linguistically and culturally students when having a diverse classroom environment. The researcher had hypothesized that teachers were unprepared to teach diverse learners. However, based on the findings in this component, most teachers stated that they felt prepared to teach diverse learners. An explanation for this could be that large values may have been randomly obtained in this item, and these values were large enough to generate a p-value less than the standard significant level, causing the null hypothesis to be rejected (Hinton, 2004).

Table 2

*Cross-tabulation of Having Linguistically and Cultural Diverse Classrooms vs. Being Prepared to Teach Linguistically and Culturally diverse Students*

	How prepared are you to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students?		
	Not prepared/somewhat prepared	Well-prepared/very well-prepared	Total
Not diverse	6 (55%)	5 (45%)	11 (100%)
Diverse/Somewhat diverse	11 (14%)	66 (86%)	77 (100%)

*Note:  $p < .05$ . Figures in parenthesis refer to percentages and have been rounded up to whole numbers.*



The degree to which teachers have participated in cultural or diversity awareness training was further divided into a number of content areas: healing racism, inclusion in workplace, equity and social justice, and ESL and bilingual education. The chi-square test of independence revealed no significance between variables. Having a diverse or somewhat diverse classroom environment was not correlated with having participated in any of the abovementioned areas. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. The two variables had no relationship. They were independent from each other.

The same values were observed when participants were asked how much learning about diversity had helped them in their professional setting. The results were not significant. Some of the values were not large enough to be statistically significant. Teacher’s learning about diversity to help them in their professional setting was not associated with having a diverse or somewhat diverse classroom. Having or not any diversity learning to help them in their professional setting did not depend on how diverse or not diverse their classroom environment was.

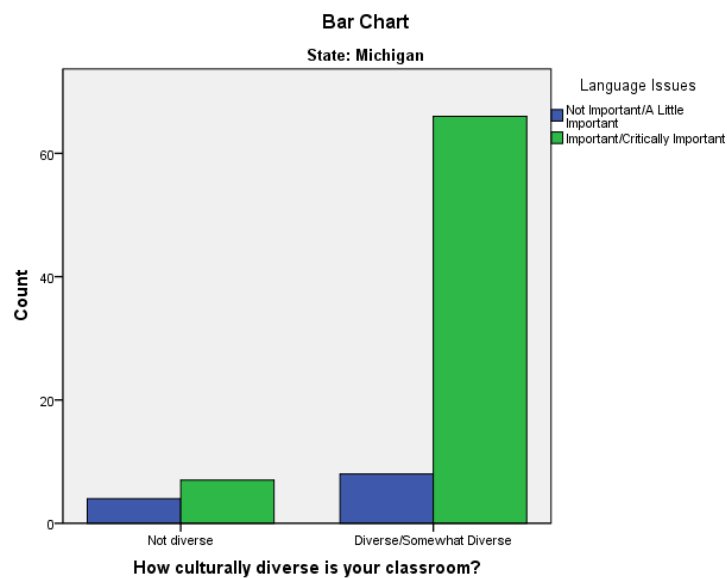
As for diversity training opportunities teachers would consider important to take advantage of if offered by the school district, the chi-squared test of independence showed significance only in language issues,  $p = .023$ . Teachers (89%) viewed as important or critically important to be trained in language issues if this course were offered by the school, mainly when these teachers had cultural and linguistic diversity in their classroom. The two variables were definitely related.

Table 3

*Cross-tabulation of Having Linguistically and Cultural Diverse Classrooms vs. Importance of Attending Diversity Training on Language Issues if Offered by School District*

If your school district wanted to offer you courses on diversity training, how important would you consider language issues to be?			
	Not important/a little important	Important/critically important	Total
Not diverse	4 (36%)	7 (64%)	11 (100%)
Diverse/Somewhat diverse	8 (11%)	66 (89%)	74 (100%)

*Note:  $p < .05$ . Figures in parenthesis refer to percentages and have been rounded up to whole numbers.*



*Research Question 2: What kind of knowledge and understanding do teachers have about their students' learning needs, specific to culture and linguistic background?*

As in Research Question 1, chi-square tests of independence were conducted to examine the relationship between having linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms and teachers' knowledge and understanding of their students' learning needs. Using the standard significance level of .05, assumptions of independence helped determine whether or not the sample results were significant enough to conclude that there was a relationship between the two variables. In order to identify the correlation between the two variables, the following aspects of teacher-student relationship were examined:

- the degree to which teachers have experienced cultural barriers when working with diverse students;
- the extent to which teachers currently incorporate cultural topics into everyday lessons;
- the degree to which activities are emphasized in schools that promote cultural awareness amongst staff members and students.

Cultural barriers were further divided into different aspects: language, traditions, attitudes and beliefs, education and poverty. Results showed that the specific cultural barrier experienced by teachers the most was language. The results revealed that most teachers (71%) who had a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom experienced language issues in a higher degree than those with no diversity in their classrooms (29%). The results revealed to be statistically significant,  $p = .045$ . Therefore, there was a relationship between the two variables. The results revealed that teachers were most

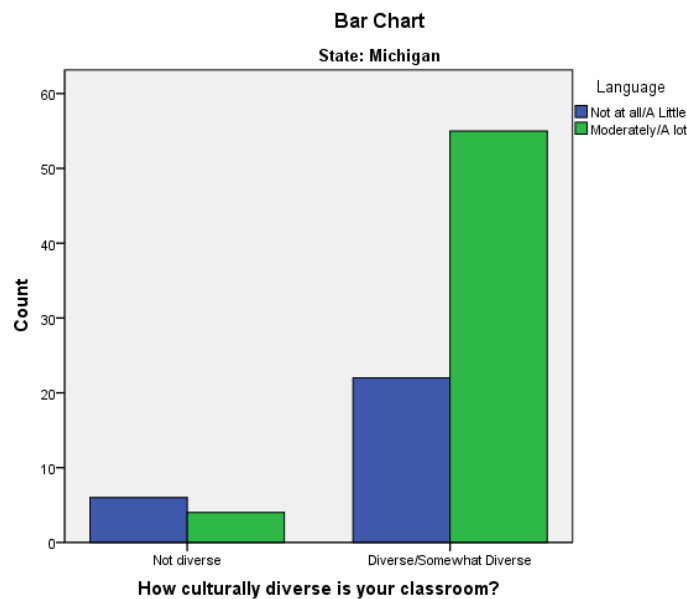
likely to experience barriers in language when working with linguistically and culturally diverse learners in the classroom.

Table 4

*Cross-tabulation of Having Linguistically and Cultural Diverse Classrooms vs. the Degree to which Teachers Experience Cultural Barriers in Language when working with Diverse Students*

	To what degree have you experienced language as a cultural barrier when working with diverse students?		
	Not at all/A little	Moderately/A lot	Total
Not diverse	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	11 (100%)
Diverse/Somewhat diverse	27 (29%)	66 (71%)	74 (100%)

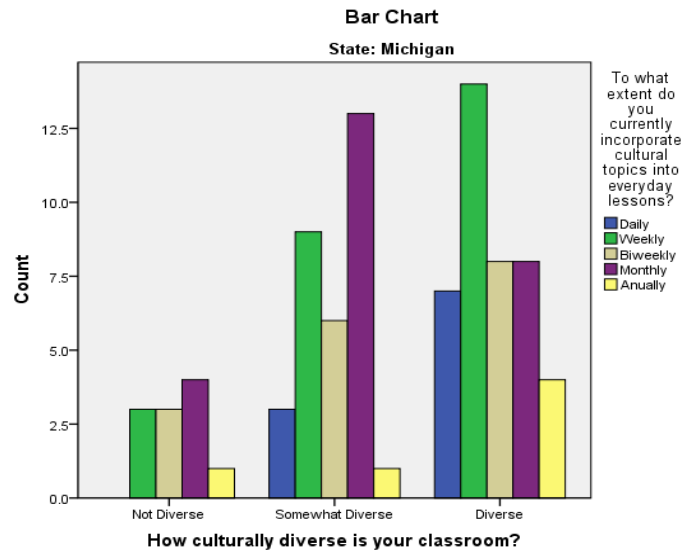
*Note:  $p < .05$ . Figures in parenthesis refer to percentages and have been rounded up to whole numbers.*



When participants were asked the extent to which they incorporated cultural topics into everyday lessons and the degree to which activities were emphasized in schools that promoted cultural awareness within the school, the chi-square tests of independence showed no statistical significance between the data set. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis; that is, the two variables had no direct relationship. Whether or not



teachers would incorporate cultural topics into everyday lessons, or whether or not schools would emphasize activities to promote cultural awareness, did not depend on whether or not a classroom was culturally and linguistically diverse.



As an example, the observed data within the graph shows no relationship between the two variables. The observed data are inconsistent. In this case, culturally diverse classrooms do not determine the extent to which teachers currently incorporate cultural topics into everyday lessons.

### Analysis of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed using the data that emerged from the statistical and qualitative data in participant responses. Observations from recurring themes or relationships between variables are discussed to illustrate key themes in each question under study. The findings are discussed in three sections. The first section presents the findings regarding teachers' perception of their preparedness to teach linguistically and culturally diverse learners, and their knowledge of students' learning needs, as they relate to language and culture. The second and third sections present two issues that the researcher considers important. The first issue relates to teachers'

perception of their own preparedness and the second issue relates to teachers' understanding of diversity issues when working with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Today is hard to determine the range of things teachers really need to know to be successful with all students, especially when faced with an ever-increasing influx of culturally diverse students. Teachers in this country's public school are required to meet the learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In order to understand how well prepared in-service teachers felt they were to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students, participants in this study were asked to respond to questions that delved into their professional preparedness and their work with regard to their students' learning needs, particularly the learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. What was discovered through this study was that teachers' perceptions of preparedness and their knowledge of their students' needs were strongly connected to having a diverse classroom environment. First, the more linguistically and culturally diverse their classroom was, the less prepared they felt they were to address language issues specifically. Second, the more linguistically and culturally diverse their classroom was, the more diversity awareness they felt they needed to meet the learning needs of their students. Through recurring themes observed from quantitative and qualitative data gathered from this study, two features emerged that the researcher believes to be the most important aspects in teachers' perception of their preparedness and their understanding of their work with linguistically and culturally diverse students. They are as follows:

#### *Language Needs*

The results reveal that learning English and language issues are the most important needs of culturally diverse students. Teachers in the study state that linguistically and

culturally diverse students require extensive support to learn and develop the English language. Due to these extensive learning needs and teachers' perception of unpreparedness, language is considered to be a cultural barrier in school that needs to be addressed.

Teachers expressed frustration regarding their own lack of training as well as that of their colleagues in the educational community. They believe this lack of training affects their ability to help English Language Learners (ELLs) in particular. Responses disclose that students need a great deal of support while learning English and this support is considered by many respondents as the key to a good education. Responses, additionally, reveal that the major language need for ELLs is developing good academic English. ELLs learn conversational language quickly, but formal English is more challenging. As one of the participants in this study stated,

Meeting the learning needs of ELLs is a big job. Students would greatly benefit from teachers who are trained to work with ELLs or are more experienced with ELL learners.

This statement reflects the sentiments of many of the participants in this study.

Undoubtedly, meeting the learning needs of ELLs is a big job for educators. ELLs are expected to master content in the English language before they have reached a certain level of English proficiency. This poses a great challenge for teachers to meet ELLs' language and content area needs as ELLs need to be tested equally on standardized tests.

A report from the National Education Association (2008) evidences the frustration of teachers for the fact that they receive little professional development or in-service training on how to teach ELLs.

### *Diversity awareness*

The second issue that was a priority to the participants in this study was the fitting of diversity awareness into standard educational foundations. Teachers in the study state that they do research of different cultures and their students' backgrounds, but they are unable to incorporate their knowledge into every lesson. Children need to be educated equally, regardless of their differences, but using their diversity as an asset to every lesson proves to be a challenge for teachers. The results reveal that teachers do consider the background, culture and beliefs of all students to be very important. As stated by one of the participants,

You cannot fully understand a learner until you are aware of where he came from, what he believes, and his cultural upbringing.

Teachers work on meeting the needs of each student by taking into account their specific needs, which include cultural, developmental, and educational levels of education. However, tailoring lessons to include education about other cultures shows to be an arduous task for teachers as it requires opening the door to a wide range of topics.

Multicultural education opens the door to a wide range of topics. Teachers need to use many different ways to reach the many different people in the classroom who have different traditions and beliefs, speak different languages, and come from different socio-economic statuses.

Educators in today's society are expected to use differentiated techniques in all subject areas to meet the various needs of diverse students including cultural awareness and language needs, making sure that everyone is educated to the best of their abilities.

Reaching all types of learners, despite background or family culture, is critical as they need to meet specific learning goals.

Undoubtedly, the creation of a classroom community that is supportive of learning for diverse students is of utmost importance (Gay, 2010). Teachers require the development

of a classroom community that is culturally responsive, and that incorporates aspects of culture and language into the classroom.

The study reveals that schools in Michigan are moving towards greater diversity awareness; however, educators are not fully prepared to work in heterogeneous classrooms. The findings reveal that teachers feel prepared to teach culturally diverse students, but not linguistically diverse ones. Teachers in various school districts are encouraged to attend courses related to different aspects of diversity (e.g. healing racism). However, these courses do not help prepare teachers to better assist students with their greatest challenge which is mastering the English language. Many teachers need immediate assistance in adapting content for ELLs, understanding the language learning process, and working with students from diverse backgrounds.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from the study. The aim of this chapter was to provide evidence on the preparedness of K-8 teachers to effectively deliver instruction to linguistically and culturally diverse students, and to provide evidence as to the knowledge and understanding teachers have of the learning needs of these diverse learners. Cross-tabulations were performed using chi-square tests to investigate the relationship between teachers' preparedness and knowledge of their learner's learning needs and having a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom environment. The findings were presented using tables and graphs, they were analyzed and discussed.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Summary of the Study**

Schools and communities throughout the United States, including those in Michigan, are seeing an increase in the number of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Every year, students who speak languages other than English and who come from communities with diverse backgrounds, traditions, world views, and educational experiences populate American classrooms (Michigan Department of Education, 2010). Due to this increasing influx of linguistically and culturally diverse students, the need for diversity training of teachers is recognized. However, it is not clear how many teachers are actually well-trained or prepared to work with these diverse student groups. According to Gay (2002), many educators are not adequately prepared to teach these ethnically diverse students.

The preparation of teachers for diverse school populations is a key issue facing educators today. These preparation requirements pose a number of challenges for professionals. One challenge is raising the English performance level of certain linguistically and culturally diverse students and ensuring the preservation of their heritage and culture (Bernhard, Diaz, & Allgood, 2005). Consequently, teacher-training programs have increasingly been promoted to prepare professionals for working with children of a rapidly diversifying population.

Undoubtedly, teachers are important keys in meeting the needs of all students and in preparing them for the 21st century (Arias et al. 2010). Sleeter (2001) argues that multicultural and culturally responsive teachers need to be brought into schools to meet the needs of diverse students, which is a very important issue to be addressed in education programs. The way teachers are prepared today to meet the needs of these diverse

learners varies across states and it is based on social policies and state mandates (Arias, Faltis, & Ramirez-Marin, 2010). Therefore, this study aimed to investigate teachers' perception of preparedness in Michigan to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students, and the kind of knowledge teachers have to meet the learning needs of these diverse learners. In order to investigate teachers' preparation and knowledge of students, the study was broken down into two research questions.

### *Research questions*

1. What is teachers' perception of their preparedness to effectively deliver instruction to learners with diverse cultural and linguistic background?
2. What kind of knowledge and understanding do teachers have about their students' learning needs, specific to culture and linguistic background?

In order to answer these questions, a mixed-method single study design was selected for this study. The study included a web-based survey instrument in which open-ended questions were used as well as quantitative techniques such as multiple choice scales. The output data from the web-based questionnaire instrument allowed the examination of individual variables using frequency distributions. Cross-tabulation, descriptive, and frequency analyses were conducted on the questionnaire responses and later compared to the open-ended output from teachers' responses. Analyses helped examined whether or not relationships between variables in a sample were likely to occur in the population.

Findings from this study revealed that teachers' perception of preparedness to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students was correlated with whether teachers' classroom was culturally diverse or not. Equally, teachers knowledge about these diverse learners' academic needs were related to the diversity within the classroom environment. The more diverse linguistically and culturally the classroom was, the more diversity

awareness teachers felt they required to teach these linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate K-8 teachers' knowledge and understanding of their students' learning needs, and their perception of preparedness to effectively deliver instruction to learners with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Results to the research questions were obtained through the analysis of questionnaire responses.

With regard to the first research question, findings revealed that teachers recognized that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity was essential to meeting the educational needs of an ethnically and linguistically diverse student body. Teachers to some extent felt prepared to teach in culturally diverse classroom environments. However, the aspect they did not feel prepared for was language. Teachers perceived lack of preparation in language issues as a pedagogical shortcoming. Findings revealed that teachers felt they required effective training or knowledge on concepts of the development of academic language proficiency. Many felt that they required strategies for developing and supporting English-language skills if they wanted to educate ELLs successfully. Moreover, there was a consensual agreement that professional development courses devoted to ELLs' issues were important and needed for all educators.

As for the second research question, findings showed that teachers have explored ways in which their educational practices might enhance understanding and appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity; therefore, helping their students in their learning process. What teachers found challenging, conversely, was the integration of different aspects of diversity (e.g. language, background) into everyday lesson in different subjects.



Teachers were unable to incorporate their knowledge into every lesson; using their diversity as an asset to every lesson proved to be a challenge for teachers. The results revealed that teachers did consider the background, culture and beliefs of all students to be very important. However, tailoring lessons to include education about other cultures showed to be an arduous task for teachers.

The researcher hypothesized that most teachers working with grades kindergarten through eighth were ill-prepared to teach heterogeneous classrooms. The results revealed that teacher development programs did not help teachers assist students with the most challenging aspect of learning, which was mastering the English language. Moreover, teachers needed urgent assistance in adapting their curriculum for ELLs. The findings revealed that teachers felt prepared to teach culturally diverse students, but not linguistically diverse ones. Professional development teachers have received over the years in multiculturalism, anti-racism, and other practices have proven beneficial. Now, schools need to focus the training on important aspects of English language teaching.

## **Discussion**

Results from this study reflect culturally responsive pedagogy, an important aspect of multicultural education, as perceived by Banks (2004), Gay (2000), and Nieto (2002). In order to meet the challenges related to cultural diversity, a crucial aspect in teaching and learning, it is imperative the teachers provide equal opportunities and equitable conditions for all of their students.

Results from the study show that teachers are gradually becoming culturally responsive. Teachers actively seek knowledge about other cultures and ethnic groups through means available to them (e.g. books, videos, community resources). Additionally, teachers are learning how to create equitable learning conditions for students who are

from diverse ethnic backgrounds (e.g. be aware of culturally specific learning styles, values, behaviors). They also report that they examine beliefs, values, and behaviors within the school environment that might have positive or negative effects upon culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Nonetheless, many educators find the task of meeting students' diverse needs to be overwhelming.

This study provides support to the available research indicating that many mainstream teachers have little preparation to work effectively with learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Webster & Valeo, 2011; Arnot-Hopffer, Evans, & Jurich, 2005; Freedson-Gonzalez, Lucas, & Villegas, 2008; Dantas, 2007). Previous research investigated the competence necessary or preparation for providing effective assistance for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. This previous research also investigated the role of language and culture in teaching and learning.

This study was solely intended to examine the perception of preparedness of Michigan K-8 teachers to work effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse students and their knowledge of their students' academic needs. Educators have explored ways in which professional development programs might enhance understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, specifically language and culture. Educators currently acknowledge that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is essential to meeting the educational needs of an ethnically and linguistically diverse student body. Moreover, teachers have to develop techniques to utilize the backgrounds of their students in the classroom to help them in their learning and to make learning meaningful. Teachers recognize that with the challenge of an increasingly diverse population, the U.S.

educational system ought to be culturally sensitive to the needs of diverse learners in order to develop and model good teaching and educate students equally.

### **Implications**

Results from this study have important implications for classroom instruction. Today's mainstream classrooms are linguistically and culturally diverse, and all teachers must value the role of language and culture in the development of strategies that scaffold the learning of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Teachers must be prepared to work with diverse student populations and to incorporate practices that are consistent with the principles of multicultural education; practices such as the creation of a classroom community that models culturally responsive teaching and promotes understanding about how students learn. Teachers can use what they know about their students to give them access to effective learning. This ability to put to pedagogical use their understanding of how students learn and their knowledge of particular students in their classes is a crucial step towards developing a curriculum proposal that sustains professional development focused on culturally responsive practices. Administrators and educators can act as agents of change by learning about students, and by creating equitable services for linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

### **Recommendations**

As the number of linguistically and culturally diverse learners included in mainstream classroom increases, the responsibilities of educators and administrators increase as well. The growing emphasis on content standards to meet Michigan's learning expectations increases the responsibilities of educators furthermore. Therefore, administrators and educators have to learn new skills and new roles to meet the needs of a continuous changing school population. Prospective teachers and in-service teachers need

exposure to tools and strategies that scaffold the learning of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Schools must engage their personnel in dialogues to develop a cooperative approach to teaching and learning in a culturally diverse society. Educational curricula need to be revised to include the exploration of cultural issues such as language and backgrounds when working with a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Given the lack of experience with the education of linguistically and culturally diverse learners by most teacher educators, courses specific to language and culture should be given in schools to address the essential language-related or culture-related understanding for teaching linguistically and culturally diverse learners. The knowledge gained from these courses can lead to pedagogical practices that can incorporate diversity into different lesson topics. These courses can be taught by an employee in the school district who has the required expertise or by someone recruited for that purpose.

Undoubtedly, teacher preparation and professional development programs require further research to understand specific linguistic training or cultural training that teachers require to design lessons and instructional units that scaffold the learning of linguistically and culturally diverse learners. The present study presents some valuable data about the kind of preparation teachers perceived they have when working with linguistically and culturally diverse learners. The study also provides valuable insight with regard to knowledge of students' learning needs in teachers' pedagogical practices. However, this study only utilized snowballing sampling, which relied heavily on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects. The sampling technique slightly reduced the likelihood that the sample would represent a good cross section from the population under study. Snowballing sampling may have attracted teachers who were especially interested

in cultural and linguistic diversity. In the survey, participants were not asked if they were ESL/bilingual educators or general education teachers, which may have skewed the study data. Future studies should definitely include probabilistic or random sampling methods that help represent the population in a more accurate or rigorous way.

Another limitation of this study was the instrument used which consisted of a Likert-scale questionnaire with two open-ended questions. Future studies should employ interviews with the intention of discussing the perception and interpretations with regard to a given situation in order to prevent any confusion, and to observe quality of responses. In this study, teachers stated that they felt prepared to teach culturally diverse students, which poses the question whether or not there is a difference between teachers' perceptions and the reality of the teaching context. Teachers may feel more prepared than they are in reality. Future research should compare teachers' perception of preparedness to their actual academic achievement of their students. Any additional research regarding this study will lead to a more in-depth understanding of professional development for teacher educators with regard to knowledge and skills specific to the education of linguistically and culturally diverse learners, as well as a more thorough understanding of the implications of such knowledge for changes in the curriculum and in teachers' pedagogy.

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Appendix A  
Survey Questionnaire

## Survey Questionnaire

### Demographic Characteristics

What is your gender	What is your ethnicity?	Check all that apply:
<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female	<input type="radio"/> White/Anglo <input type="radio"/> Black/African-American <input type="radio"/> Hispanic <input type="radio"/> Asian/Pacific Islander <input type="radio"/> American Indian/Alaska Native <input type="radio"/> Other Specify _____	<input type="radio"/> I speak English <input type="radio"/> I speak Spanish <input type="radio"/> I speak another language. Specify _____
<b>Type of District</b>		
<input type="radio"/> Urban <input type="radio"/> Suburban <input type="radio"/> Rural		
<b>City:</b> _____ <b>State:</b> _____		
<b>Years of teaching experience</b>		<b>Grade Level you teach</b>
<input type="radio"/> 1-5 <input type="radio"/> 6-10 <input type="radio"/> 11-15 <input type="radio"/> 16-20 <input type="radio"/> Over 20		<input type="radio"/> Elementary <input type="radio"/> Middle <input type="radio"/> High School <input type="radio"/> Administrator

Please answer the following questions. Check all that apply.

**1. How culturally and linguistically diverse is your classroom?**

- Not Diverse
- Somewhat Diverse
- Diverse

**2. To what degree have you participated in cultural or diversity awareness training in the following areas?**

	Not participated	Somewhat participated	Participated	N/A
Healing Racism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inclusion in Workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Equity and Social Justice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ESL and Bilingual	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education				
Other (please specify)				



**3. How prepared are you to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students?**

- Not well-prepared
- Somewhat well-prepared
- Well-prepared
- Very well-prepared

**4. To what degree have you experience each of the following cultural barriers when working with diverse students?**

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	A lot	N/A
Language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traditions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attitudes and beliefs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education and poverty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**5. How much did learning about diversity help you in your professional setting in each of the following areas?**

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	A lot	N/A
Better understanding of students' background	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Changing perception and interpretation of student actions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Altering teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building cooperating relationships among students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Selecting better words or language used in the classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**6. If your school district wanted to offer you courses on diversity training, how important would you consider each of the following topics to be?**

	Not important at all	A little important	Important	Critically Important	N/A
Developing cultural awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural values and attitudes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Examining diverse viewpoints	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating an environment that respects diversity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>				

**7. To what extent do you currently incorporate cultural topics into everyday lessons?**

- Daily
- Weekly
- Biweekly
- Monthly
- Annually

**8. How much does your school emphasize each of the following activities in order to promote cultural awareness within the school, staff, and students?**

	Not at all	A little	Moderately	A lot	N/A
Cross-cultural awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holiday displays/celebrations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bully free classrooms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tolerance and respect programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recruiting of teachers and volunteers from diverse backgrounds	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Please answer the following questions**

1. What do you think are the main needs of diverse students in your school?

2. How would you define diversity or multicultural education?

## Appendix B

### HRCC Approved Protocol Letter



DATE: March 19, 2012

TO: Marjorie Gomez  
FROM: Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee  
STUDY TITLE: [302860-1] Meeting Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students' Needs through Teacher Training: A Multicultural Approach  
REFERENCE #: 12-152-H  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED  
EFFECTIVE DATE: March 19, 2012  
REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of materials for this research study. The Human Research Review Committee has reviewed your submission and approved your research plan application under Exempt review, category 1-2. This approval is based on no greater than minimal risk to research participants. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

**Please note that exempt studies such as this one do not require consent documents or information forms. You may use them or not at your own discretion. The required information pertaining to voluntariness and confidentiality may be placed in the survey itself prior to the first question.**

**Note also there are missing response bubbles, and differences in font and appearance of some survey questions. You may wish to review these for quality control.**

**Please insert the following sentence into your information/consent documents as appropriate. All project materials produced for participants or the public must contain this information.**

***This EXEMPT research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at Grand Valley State University. File No. 12-152-H.***

Exempt protocols do not require formal renewal. However, we do confirm on an annual basis that the research continues to meet the criteria for exemption and that there have been no significant changes in activity or key personnel. By March 19, 2013, please complete the brief **Continuing Review Application Form**, available in your IRBNet Project Designer, or from our website, [www.gvsu.edu/hrrc](http://www.gvsu.edu/hrrc), and submit this form via IRBNet.

Once study enrollment and data analysis have been concluded, please complete the **Closed Protocol Reporting Form** on our website, and upload a saved copy to IRBNet.

This project remains subject to the research ethics standards of HRRC policies and procedures pertaining to exempt studies.

Please note the following in order to comply with federal regulations and HRRC policy:

1. Any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the *Change in Protocol* forms for this procedure. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in key personnel, study location, participant selection process, etc.
2. All UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS and SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS to participants or other parties affected by the research must be reported to this office within two days of the event occurrence. Please use the UP/SAE Report form.
3. All instances of non-compliance or complaints regarding this study must be reported to this office in a timely manner. There are no specific forms for this report type.

If you have any questions, please contact the HRRC Office, Monday through Thursday, at (616) 331-3197 or [hrrc@gvsu.edu](mailto:hrrc@gvsu.edu). The office observes all university holidays, and does not process applications during exam week or between academic terms. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

cc:

**Grand Valley State University  
ED 695 Data Form**

**Name:** Marjorie Gomez

**Major:** (Chose only 1)

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Adult &amp; Higher Ed</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Ed Differentiation</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Library Media</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Content Spec        | <input type="checkbox"/> Ed Leadership             | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Level Ed   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive Impairment         | <input type="checkbox"/> Ed Technology             | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CSAL                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary Ed             | <input type="checkbox"/> School Counseling   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood<br>Ed        | <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Impairment      | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Level<br>Ed   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ECDD                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Disabilities     | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Ed Admin<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TESOL |

**TITLE:** Meeting English Language Learners' Academic Needs Through Teacher Training: A Multicultural Approach

PAPER TYPE: Thesis      SEM/YR COMPLETED: Summer/2012

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL \_\_\_\_\_

Using key word or phrases, choose several ERIC descriptors (5-7 minimum) to describe the contents of your project. ERIC descriptors can be found online at [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=Thesaurus&\\_nfls=false](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=Thesaurus&_nfls=false)

- |                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Diversity               | 6. Cultural Awareness |
| 2. Equal Education         | 7. Inclusion          |
| 3. Teacher Education       | 8.                    |
| 4. Multicultural Education | 9. .                  |
| 5. Non English Speaking    |                       |