

Exploring Community Asset Mapping as Co-learning: A Multifaceted Participant Perspective

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This study examines the transformative potential of a podcast-based Community Asset Mapping (CAM) project within TESOL education, centering co-learning and equity-oriented pedagogy. Developed through collaboration among a TESOL educator, a high school ESL teacher, teacher candidates, and multilingual learners (MLLs), the project uses CAM to identify and amplify students' linguistic, cultural, and community-rooted assets. Through the co-production of podcasts, participants engaged in a series of asset-based activities that challenged traditional power dynamics, fostered reciprocal learning, and supported diverse, multilingual, and multimodal literacy practices. Utilizing collaborative autoethnography and thematic analysis, this research captures nuanced participant reflections, illustrating how CAM disrupts deficit-based ideologies and aligns with the principles of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Pedagogy (CR-SP). The findings underscore CAM's potential to cultivate inclusive, justice-oriented learning environments and offer practical guidance for teacher education programs seeking to prepare culturally responsive educators. As a key takeaway, this study highlights how podcast-based CAM can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool for advancing educational equity through authentic community engagement and sustained reflective practices.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Sustaining Pedagogy, Community Asset Mapping, Co-learning, cultural humility, Multilingual Learners, Podcast

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In the U.S. context, cultural assimilationist ideologies are often operationalized through linguistic assimilation, typically enforced—explicitly or implicitly—by dominant standard English language ideologies (Bowskill et al., 2007; Brantmeier, 2007). Within this framework, the burden of acculturation is disproportionately placed on non-native English-speaking students, who are expected to conform by acquiring and using standard English (Bowskill et al., 2007; Brantmeier, 2007; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Neoliberal policies have further intensified these dynamics by closely linking academic and economic success to English language acquisition (Paris & Alim, 2014; Smolcic & Martin, 2019; Warriner, 2016). These policies marginalize the multilingual realities of students and perpetuate deficit-oriented perspectives by framing the literacy practices of minoritized learners as lacking, rather than recognizing and building upon their existing linguistic and cultural assets (Brantmeier, 2007; Cushing, 2024).

This assimilationist mindset is further reflected in the literacy frameworks embedded in today's school systems (Sleeter, 2019). These frameworks often prioritize standardized testing, grammatical correctness, vocabulary acquisition, and academic writing in standardized English, reinforcing deficit-based views of students whose linguistic repertoires do not align with dominant norms (Cushing, 2024; Yandell et al., 2020). Such models privilege a narrow and reductive notion of "basic" literacy that aligns with dominant cultural and linguistic standards, disproportionately benefiting students who speak standard English (Yandell et al., 2020). As Yandell et al. (2020) argues, these assessments rest on the assumption that standard English is a neutral medium of communication. In practice, however, it systematically advantages learners from dominant linguistic backgrounds, while marginalizing those whose voices and literacies fall outside these norms.

Against the backdrop of an educational culture shaped by neoliberal, assimilationist, and monolingual ideologies, this study employs Community Asset Mapping (CAM) as an equity-based framework for co-learning—one that actively challenges deficit-based perspectives toward multilingual learners in preparing future teachers. By equity-based education, we refer not merely to the provision of access to existing resources, discourses, and curricula, but rather to an approach that acknowledges the historical and systemic inequities embedded within the school system (Bassey, 2016; Byskov, 2021). This perspective seeks to disrupt entrenched power dynamics by centering marginalized voices and reimagining educational spaces as sites of transformation rather than assimilation (Lin & Uysal, 2025; Paris, 2019).

CAM is conceptualized in this study as a teacher education framework that seeks to "foster and activate teachers' stance in their willingness to unlearn, co-learn, and relearn," and to "uncover, amplify, and reimagine the diverse sociocultural assets latent and present within students, their families, communities, and socio-cultural backgrounds" (Lin & Uysal, 2025, p. 9). Through this lens, teachers are not positioned as authoritative figures transmitting dominant knowledge, but as co-learners engaged in relational partnerships with students and their communities.

In this paper, we examine TESOL teacher candidates' collaboration with multilingual learners (MLLs) in co-producing a podcast—an initiative designed to amplify the full linguistic repertoires of MLLs—as a field site for exploring how CAM can be implemented to challenge English-dominant curricula, often shaped by a culture of standardized testing (Menken, 2008; Yandell et al., 2020). This podcast-based CAM project illustrates how CAM can meaningfully engage and expand the sociolinguistic assets that MLLs bring to literacy instruction. Through an immersive process, teacher candidates are encouraged to rethink the role of teachers in English-dominant educational environments by actively amplifying

the voices and perspectives of those long excluded from mainstream narratives (Borrero & Sanchez, 2017).

The study adopts a collaborative autoethnographic approach (Chang et al., 2013; Yazan et al., 2023), involving six participants in distinct roles: the course instructor (first author), a pre-service teacher (third author), the cooperating high school teacher (second author), and three multilingual students from the high school classroom (fourth, fifth, and sixth authors).

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the podcast-based CAM project influence power dynamics between teacher candidates and students?
2. In what ways does the project cultivate a co-learning mindset among participants?
3. How can the podcast-based CAM project be leveraged to engage and support the diverse, multilingual, and multimodal literacy practices of multilingual learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW: CAM AS AN EQUITY BASED INTERVENTION

CAM as Part of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

We position CAM within the broader framework of CR-SP, a pedagogical movement that emerged in response to the persistent disconnect between the largely monolingual, monocultural backgrounds of U.S. educators, and the richly diverse literacy practices of their students (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2019). Rooted in a sociocultural perspective of education, CR-SP challenges assimilationist ideologies and deficit-based models by foregrounding the cultural, linguistic, and experiential assets that marginalized communities bring into educational spaces (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2019). For instance, rather than interpreting a multilingual learner's use of their home language(s) as a barrier to academic achievement, a CR-SP approach recognizes these languages as valuable components of the student's full linguistic repertoire. It encourages the strategic use of students' diverse language resources across academic tasks, positioning multilingualism as a strength that fosters deeper learning, cultural affirmation, and identity development (Flores, 2020; Smith, 2023).

Situating CAM within CR-SP allows for a deeper exploration of the complex sociocultural and linguistic realities that shape minoritized learners' educational experiences. Despite increasing student diversity, U.S. schools remain dominated by a disproportionately White teaching workforce and curriculum frameworks that continue to reflect assimilationist agendas (Paris, 2019). These systemic imbalances contribute to enduring disparities in educational access, opportunity, and success for racially and linguistically marginalized students (Bowskill et al., 2007; Brantmeier, 2007; Griner & Stewart, 2013; La Salle et al., 2020).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) emphasized that culturally relevant and sustaining teaching requires intentional and sustained linkages between teacher identity, student achievement, identity development, and community engagement. She argued that these elements are not discrete but fundamentally interdependent. While numerous theoretical frameworks have offered valuable insights into the importance of educators engaging meaningfully with the communities they serve (Greene et al., 2008; Maruyama et al.,

2023), research continues to highlight the persistent challenges in actualizing these connections within practice (Hardy & Grootenboer, 2016; Maruyama et al., 2023). These challenges are shaped by several interrelated factors, including institutional constraints such as rigid curriculum mandates, high-stakes testing pressures, and limited instructional time—all of which leave little room for meaningful community engagement (Chang & Viesca, 2022). Moreover, educators' underlying ideologies—often shaped by dominant cultural norms—along with the lack of sustained, contextually relevant training in culturally responsive and community-based pedagogies, further impede efforts to incorporate community knowledge and resources into teaching practices (Edmiston, 2016; Chang & Viesca, 2022).

Challenging Deficit Thinking Through CAM

CAM addresses the longstanding disjuncture between schools and communities by intentionally integrating the sociocultural wealth of MLLs and other marginalized students into the curriculum. Originally developed in the fields of social work and public health (McKnight, 2010; Lightfoot et al., 2014), CAM has long been used to promote self-determination and community resilience by identifying and mobilizing local assets. While it has since been adapted for educational contexts, CAM remains undertheorized in the field of teacher education (Hollingsworth et al., 2024; Mosavel et al., 2018).

To fully realize the transformative potential of CAM in education, it must be situated within a critical pedagogical framework—particularly that of CR-SP. When CAM is disconnected from the critical foundations of CR-SP, it risks becoming a superficial or procedural activity—what Ladson-Billings (1995) describes as a “tourist approach”—that tokenizes community knowledge without interrogating the systemic inequities embedded in schooling. Rooted in a sociopolitical understanding of education, CR-SP challenges deficit-based ideologies by affirming the cultural, linguistic, and experiential assets of historically marginalized communities (Paris, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995). When implemented through this lens, CAM reclaims its power as an equity-oriented practice (Hollingsworth et al., 2024).

Framing CAM through the lens of CR-SP prompts a more critical examination of both the affordances and limitations of asset-based pedagogies in contemporary schooling. First, it exposes the structural inequities that continue to obstruct transformative changes in curriculum, instruction, and educational policy (Bassey, 2016). Second, it highlights the necessity of reconfiguring classroom power dynamics in ways that center and sustain the identities, languages, and voices of minoritized students (Flores, 2020; Paris, 2019; Smith, 2023). As Smith (2023) emphasizes, recognizing students' assets is not enough; educators must also actively dismantle institutional ideologies of standardization and monolingualism that perpetuate marginalization. In doing so, they can help build inclusive and justice-oriented learning environments (Paris & Alim, 2014; Smolcic & Martin, 2019).

Community Asset Mapping as a Tool for Co-Learning

As educators and scholars continue to confront deficit-based orientations in schools, there is increasing recognition that asset-based teaching requires more than the adoption of new tools or strategies—it necessitates a fundamental shift in pedagogical stance and worldview (Bowskill, et al., 2007; Brantmeier, 2007). This shift begins with critically interrogating the deficit perspectives that are deeply embedded in systemic structures and reinforced by dominant sociocultural norms. Moving toward more asset-based understandings of students and their communities involves more than acknowledgment—it calls for the intentional cultivation of cultural humility and a commitment to co-learning (Denzongpa et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2025; Shepard-Carey, 2024; Li, 2024). These

dispositions are essential to disrupting hierarchies of knowledge and fostering equitable and reciprocal relationships between educators and students.

Cultural humility involves a continuous process of self-reflection and openness to learning from others, particularly those whose lived experiences diverge from one's own (Denzongpa et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2025; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Co-learning builds upon this disposition by emphasizing a willingness to acknowledge one's limitations, embrace multiple ways of knowing, and honor the plurality of values, epistemologies, and linguistic practices that students bring into educational spaces (Shepard-Carey, 2024; Li, 2024).

At its core, CAM requires educators to move beyond the role of knowledge transmitters and instead embrace their position as reflective co-learners—acknowledging that students and communities are essential contributors to the educational process (Lin & Uysal, 2025; Shepard-Carey, 2024; Li, 2024). This shift is especially important in disrupting traditional classroom hierarchies and challenging dominant paradigms that privilege standardized knowledge and monocultural norms (Battilani, 2022; Hansen-Thomas et al., 2021; Sharmeen et al., 2023).

Deepening the Transformative Potential of Community Asset Mapping

Within teacher education, various tools—such as reflective journals (Farrell, 2016), community walks (Downey, 2021), and school-based observations (Lund, 2020)—have been introduced to promote teachers' critical awareness and culturally sustaining pedagogies. While these approaches hold promise, they often lack deep, reciprocal engagement with communities and may fall short of producing transformative, actionable insights. CAM aims to offer a more participatory and relational model. Through storytelling, mapping, and community-based inquiry, CAM centers students' lived experiences and community knowledge as valuable sources of curricular design and pedagogical practice (Garcia, 2020; Lazarus et al., 2017; Lin & Huseyin, 2025).

To truly unlock the transformative potential of CAM, educators must be intentional about how co-learning is structured. This involves moving beyond surface-level activities and engaging deeply with the underlying pedagogical commitments that guide this work. Below, we outline five key components that are central to implementing CAM as a culturally responsive-sustaining practice.

Recognizing and Centering Student Strengths

CAM is fundamentally grounded in the belief that every student enters the classroom with a wealth of strengths—multilingual skills, cultural practices, lived experiences, and community-rooted knowledge. These assets may not align with conventional academic indicators such as standardized test scores or reading levels, yet they are deeply meaningful, powerful, and foundational to student learning and identity formation (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2014; Sleeter, 2019). CAM shifts the pedagogical focus from remediation to recognition—and ultimately, to empowerment—by honoring and building upon what students already know and can do.

Providing Access Without Erasure

Educators often view their role as providing students with access—particularly to dominant literacies such as academic English, critical thinking, and digital skills (Lamb, Maire & Doecke, 2017; McWilliams & Allan, 2014). While these are important tools for navigating societal systems, access should never require assimilation. Too often, access is

framed as a one-way path: students must shed their home languages, cultural identities, or community knowledge in order to “succeed” (Bowskill et al., 2007; Brantmeier, 2007; Warriner, 2016). CAM challenges this false binary by advocating a both/and approach—students should gain access to dominant discourses *and* maintain their cultural and linguistic identities (Flores, 2020; Smith, 2023). Access must be reciprocal: not only should students gain entry to mainstream forms of knowledge, but schools must also open themselves to the knowledge of families and communities.

Challenging Knowledge Hierarchies and Epistemic Injustice

One of the most persistent barriers to equity in education is the entrenched hierarchy of knowledge that privileges Western, Eurocentric epistemologies as universally valid. This is evident in many ESL and mainstream classrooms, where Standard English is prioritized over students’ home languages (Davila, 2016; Wiley & Lukes, 1996), Western literary texts dominate the curriculum (Williams, 2021), and subjects like science and history are often taught devoid of cultural or local context (Cobern, 2012). These practices are not coincidental; they are rooted in a legacy of linguistic imperialism and cultural chauvinism (Alatis & Straehle, 2006).

When we teach only one way of knowing, one version of history, and one dominant language as the norm, we contribute to what scholars identify as epistemic injustice—the systemic denial of entire communities’ right to be knowers (Byskov, 2021; Kerfoot & Bello-Nonjengele, 2023). CAM offers a pathway to disrupt these hierarchies by inviting students to share the stories, practices, and values embedded in their families and communities (Canagarajah, 2020; Jiang, 2025; Torrez, 2018). It centers minoritized perspectives, including those often dismissed as “non-academic” (Flores, 2020; Smith, 2023), and makes space for multiple truths and lived experiences, thereby reshaping the classroom into a more inclusive and epistemically just space.

Partnering with Families and Communities

Equity cannot be realized without the active and sustained inclusion of families and communities as co-educators. CAM challenges educators to reflect critically on how curriculum can better reflect the wisdom held by families, how learning can emerge organically from the lived experiences and stories of local communities, and how families can be welcomed into classrooms not as guests or spectators, but as valued contributors and producers of knowledge.

When students see their families and neighbors acknowledged as legitimate sources of knowledge, they are more likely to recognize and take pride in the richness of their own cultural heritage (Lin & Uysal, 2025; Reeves, 2019). This fosters a more holistic and affirming educational experience—one that meaningfully connects classroom learning to local histories, realities, and aspirations.

Building Sustainable Systems Through Voice Amplification

If we are committed to educational equity and justice, we must actively amplify voices that have been historically marginalized or silenced. Amplification is not merely about symbolic inclusion—it requires a structural commitment to disrupt power, transforming curricula, and reimagining what knowledge is valued and whose knowledge matters. An equitable and sustainable education system must be rooted in and reflective of the communities it serves. Realizing the full potential of CAM demands that educators move beyond hierarchical models of teaching. This involves adopting a critical and reflective stance—recognizing themselves not as sole knowledge-holders—but as co-learners engaged

in shared inquiry alongside students, families, and communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shepard-Carey, 2024; Li, 2024). In doing so, CAM transforms the classroom into a collaborative, dialogic, and culturally sustaining space—one that disrupts deficit-based ideologies and affirms the diverse literacy practices and identities of multilingual learners.

Podcasting as a Multimodal and Community Asset Mapping Tool

Research has demonstrated that podcasting provides students with access to diverse, real-world communicative contexts in which they can practice and refine their language skills (Forbes, 2011; Phillips, 2017; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010). As a multimodal platform, podcasting naturally integrates a range of meaning-making resources—including spoken narration, music, sound effects, and, in some cases, visual elements—encouraging learners to engage with language in dynamic, creative, and contextually rich ways.

Using podcasts in collaborative settings further amplifies their educational value. Collaborative podcasting encourages learners to co-construct knowledge by working toward shared communicative goals. It fosters teamwork and mutual responsibility while also requiring critical awareness of audience, purpose, tone, and sociocultural context. The public-facing nature of podcasting compels students to reflect on their positionalities, linguistic choices, and representational ethics (Lin et al., 2024).

Podcasting also promotes storytelling, performativity, and the development of critical digital literacies (Lin et al., 2024; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010). Its flexible structure allows learners to navigate fluidly between informal conversations, collaborative scriptwriting, and the more performative aspects of audio production. In our study, we adopted a podcasting framework that included both synchronous and asynchronous interactions, enabling students to share personal experiences, insights, and cultural knowledge across temporal and geographic boundaries.

When viewed through the lens of CAM, podcasting highlights how language functions not simply as a communication tool, but as a resource that is continually reshaped as it moves across digital, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. This process reveals both the creative agency of MLLs and the broader social dynamics that shape their engagement with English and other languages in digitally mediated, intercultural spaces.

METHODOLOGY

Contexts

The study is situated in the first author's semester-long course, *Foundations of Multicultural and Bilingual Education*, which introduces teacher candidates to the philosophical, sociological, and historical foundations of bilingual and multicultural education. Designed for pre-service teachers working with multilingual learners (MLLs) in diverse K–12 settings, the course emphasizes the development of culturally responsive and sustaining instructional practices and assessments.

As part of the course's fieldwork component, podcast-based CAM was implemented to foster teacher candidates' asset-based perspectives and to cultivate culturally responsive mindsets and practices. Through this immersive project, teacher candidates engaged deeply with MLLs' individual and sociocultural strengths, prompting them to reconsider the role of teachers and education in advancing equity. The culminating assignment involved co-producing a podcast episode that highlights the rich literacy skills and dynamic cultural practices of the multilingual students.

To facilitate this collaboration, the course instructor (first author) partnered with an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor (second author) at a New York City public high school. The collaborative team included six teacher candidates from the first author's course, and sixteen multilingual learners from the second author's ESL class, all of whom were either freshmen or sophomores. The MLLs were selected based on their availability to participate in both synchronous (via Zoom) and asynchronous (via WhatsApp) interactions with the teacher candidates. These platforms enabled pre-service teachers to introduce background concepts, build relationships, and draw upon students' prior knowledge to co-develop podcast topics.

Due to scheduling challenges, the teacher candidates were divided into two groups, each paired with half of the MLLs. The structured project guided teacher candidates to engage MLLs' full linguistic repertoires and sociocultural assets through an iterative, inquiry-based process. This process included conducting asset analyses and translating their findings into a collaboratively produced podcast, serving as both a pedagogical artifact and a platform to amplify the voices and knowledge of multilingual students.

Within this context, the collaborative podcast project provided a meaningful opportunity to disrupt these constraints by legitimizing and celebrating the voices of multilingual learners. It allowed students to position themselves as cultural ambassadors, drawing upon their full literacy repertoires—including their home languages and emerging English skills—to reflect on and share their cultural identities. Simultaneously, the project offered teacher candidates an authentic space to explore both the possibilities and challenges of implementing asset-based approaches in real-world school settings. It challenged them to navigate institutional barriers while remaining committed to equity-oriented practices grounded in cultural responsiveness.

The CAM Project is organized into three interconnected phases, each intentionally designed to build upon the previous and deepen participants' understanding of the diverse community assets that MLLs bring to the classroom.

Part 1: Teacher Candidates Investigating Their Own Community Assets

Self-Reflection. Enacting CR-SP through CAM requires teachers to embrace vulnerability and move toward a co-learning stance. A critical starting point in this process is self-reflection. Teacher candidates begin by examining their own individual, familial, community, and sociocultural assets. This reflective practice encourages them to recognize the diverse experiences, knowledge, and resources they bring to their work as educators—laying the groundwork for more authentic, reciprocal engagement with multilingual learners and their communities.

Interviews with Community Members. To gain a deeper understanding of their community's assets, candidates conduct interviews with their own family or community members. This step helps teachers to uncover and appreciate the cultural, historical, and social resources within their communities, helping candidates consider how their own experiences can be used to engage multilingual learners.

Creation of Digital Content. Candidates document their community asset-mapping process through a collaborative video project, reflecting on how recorded interviews introduce new dynamics compared to unrecorded conversations. They examine the multimodal literacy skills involved and consider the power of podcasting as both a storytelling and advocacy tool, highlighting sociocultural assets, engaging interviewees, and connecting with potential audiences. This exercise not only familiarizes them with

podcasting platforms but also lays a foundation for understanding the potential of digital literacy in language education and broader social contexts.

Sociocultural Reflection. Finally, candidates reflect on the sociocultural dimensions of their community assets, considering how these elements may influence their teaching philosophy and their interactions with students.

Part 2: Community Asset Mapping through Collaborative Podcasting

Building Trust and Familiarity. Before the initial meeting, teacher candidates and MLLs exchange short introductory videos. This digital exchange allows participants to become familiar with one another's backgrounds, interests, and communication styles, helping to build rapport and set the stage for meaningful collaboration.

Exploring, Affirming, and Analyzing MLLs' Sociocultural Assets. In their first live meeting, candidates engage MLLs in dialogue using open-ended questions (see Appendix). These conversations are designed to surface the rich sociocultural resources MLLs bring to the table—including their languages, lived experiences, family traditions, and community knowledge.

Mapping, Synthesizing, and Co-Constructing a Podcast Vision. Following this initial dialogue, candidates and MLLs work collaboratively to identify a topic of shared interest that reflects the learners' assets and perspectives. Together, they co-design a plan for their podcast episode, and actively shaping its narrative. The scriptwriting process is collaborative, with both candidates and MLLs contributing ideas, language, and stories to ensure the final product is authentic and co-authored. Each podcast episode is approximately 45 minutes long and is published on Spotify for a broader audience.

Highlighting and Amplifying MLLs' Voices. As a culminating activity, each pair or group records a podcast episode that showcases the unique voices and stories of the MLLs. This final product serves not only as a celebration of their linguistic and cultural strengths, but also as a platform for advocacy, amplifying perspectives that are often marginalized in traditional classroom settings. Podcast episodes are published on Spotify, allowing participants to share their work with a broader audience.

Part 3: Reflection on Culturally Responsive Pedagogies

Candidates complete a written reflection on the application of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies in their work with MLLs. This reflection includes an evaluation of how the project supported inclusive learning environments and enhanced their understanding of students' cultures and sociocultural assets.

Collaborative Autoethnography as Inquiry

To explore the broader implications of implementing a CAM project in classroom settings, we employed a collaborative autoethnographic approach to capture the nuanced perspectives and complexities of real-world practice (Chang, et al., 2013).

Autoethnography is a qualitative research approach in which individuals critically examine their personal experiences and analyze them within broader cultural, social, and educational contexts. It embodies the fusion of self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing or narration (graphy; Chang et al., 2013). Through narrative accounts, researchers position themselves as teacher-researchers, drawing on their lived experiences as a rich source of data to explore how sociocultural contexts shape their perspectives, research practices, and pedagogical decisions (Chang et al., 2013; Yazan et al., 2023).

The six co-authors engaged in a collaborative autoethnographic inquiry, a methodology that centers lived experiences as both the subject and source of knowledge. This approach facilitated the collection and analysis of rich, multifaceted data. The collaborative nature of the study brings together diverse perspectives—including those of a teacher educator, a teacher candidate, an ESL classroom teacher, and three multilingual learners—offering a nuanced, multidimensional understanding of the affordances and challenges involved in implementing CAM across varied educational contexts.

The data utilized in this study are drawn from the following sources:

Individual Autoethnographic Explorations

Each co-author engages in an individual autoethnographic exploration guided by the central research questions introduced earlier in the study. Through these autoethnographies, each author reflects on their unique role in the project—offering introspective accounts of their learning, challenges, and personal growth. These narratives reveal how participants negotiated language, identity, and power in real-time, and how the collaborative nature of the project reshaped their perceptions of teaching and learning.

Reflections from Teacher Candidates and MLL Students

In addition to the autoethnographies, teacher candidates and MLLs contributed written and oral reflections capturing their experiences throughout the CAM process. These reflections highlight the project's direct impact on shaping teacher candidates' understanding of culturally responsive practices. Teacher candidates discuss how the experience transformed their approach to teaching, particularly in valuing student voice, co-construction of knowledge, and multilingual literacies. MLL students, in turn, share how the project empowered them to take ownership of their narratives, build confidence in using English, and recognize the value of their cultural and linguistic knowledge in academic settings.

Data Analysis

Using thematic analysis to interpret both shared and divergent narratives, this collaborative autoethnography examines how the podcast-based CAM project shaped participants' understandings of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies. We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of thematic analysis, engaging in a recursive process of identifying, refining, and organizing themes grounded in the data. The primary analysis was conducted by the first and second authors, beginning with a collective reading of the full dataset.

During this initial phase, we annotated the data, noting emerging patterns, preliminary themes, and connections to the research questions, particularly those aligned with key components of the culturally responsive pedagogy framework.

This systematic yet flexible process allowed for rigorous and nuanced coding. We individually color-coded the data according to emerging themes and collaboratively identified subthemes through iterative analysis. To ensure interpretive rigor and mutual accountability, we held a series of virtual meetings to compare notes, refine coding decisions, and interrogate our interpretations. Through these discussions, we deepened our collective understanding of the semantic layers within the data, fostering both analytical clarity and reflexivity.

Table 1*Sample Coding Aligned with Research Questions*

	Themes	Subthemes	Evidence
RQ1	Disrupting Traditional Hierarchies	Shift from Teacher-Centered to Co-Learning	"The teacher candidates initially designed a vocabulary lesson focused on "American food." However, after discussing whether this approach aligned with culturally responsive teaching, they decided to shift toward an open-ended question that positioned students' cultural traditions as valuable sources of knowledge, allowing them to learn with and from their students." (First Author)
		Cultural Novice Positioning	"I began to think about whether it is appropriate to teach students about Halloween, which originated in the United States and Canada, and how to teach them for what purpose. I wondered how the Western culture created by post-colonization could be accepted, and how it could be integrated without clashing with the culture of the students. It wasn't important to blindly accept every new culture, but it didn't have to be a one-sided rejection." (Third author)
		Cultural Pride and Agency	"This project has made my desire to learn a new language improve every day, not only because I want to give my own definition in another language about my culture, but I want to express it so that people who only speak English are interested and learn." (Fifth author)
RQ2	Fostering Mutual Vulnerability	Sharing Personal Narratives	"When I taught Spanish as a Heritage Language, I learned so much about my own situation. I realized how I was dealing with my own emotions for wanting to learn and improve my Spanish, but I was surprised how much healing I am going through." (Jacinto).
		Embracing Cultural Humility	"Being an educator, I believe this is the best thing you can do for students is to make them feel good about their culture, connection and their background. The essence of being heard, understood and valued helps improve their urge to perform better and also improves their learning abilities." (Third author)
		Empowering Student Voice	"Instead of my students feeling like they had to leave their home countries behind and learn English, they were placed in an environment where their cultures were celebrated—a setting where their input mattered, where they felt like they had control." (Second Author)
RQ3	Engaging Multilingual and Multimodal Literacies	Translanguaging as Empowerment	<i>"Nos permitió aprender de la cultura de cada uno valorando como esos orígenes hoy en día no se han sido olvidados y que forma parte de nosotros, permitiendo compartir y aprender al mismo tiempo."</i> (Sixth Author)
		Multimodal Expression	"This project has made my desire to learn a new language improve every day, not only because I want to give my own definition in another language about my culture, but I want to express it so that people who only speak English are interested and learn." (Fifth author)

FINDINGS

In the following sections, we present our findings, highlighting the rich, diverse reflections that emerged from our experiences. The themes discussed illuminate how this collaborative, podcast-based CAM project fostered critical insights into identity, language, and power.

RQ1. How can a podcast-based CAM project influence power dynamics between teacher candidates and students?

Findings reveal that CAM has the potential to disrupt traditional classroom hierarchies and power dynamics. In this study, the CAM framework serves as a reminder to teacher candidates that the goal is not to “teach” in the conventional sense, but rather to engage students’ literacy development through a process of co-learning. This involves positioning themselves as cultural novices, leveraging their curiosity to learn from MLLs, and drawing out their cultural knowledge. The process encourages candidates to engage students’ full linguistic repertoire and multimodal skills.

However, this approach can be challenging. For example, teacher candidates initially planned a vocabulary lesson focused on American food. However, through peer feedback and class discussion, teacher candidates realized that a teacher-centered approach was still influencing their mindset, limiting our imagination of approaches to students’ literacy development. During the discussion, teacher candidates examined how focusing solely on English vocabulary positioned them as authorities over the students and could reinforce a deficit mindset, focusing on a so-called “vocabulary gap” (Cushing, 2024) and promoting a narrow literacy goal. To address this, teacher candidates adapted their lessons to be more inclusive, aiming to honor MLLs’ diverse linguistic backgrounds and encourage a broader, asset-based approach to literacy development.

Rather than following a typical teacher-centered approach, the focus here was on genuinely getting to know students’ cultures and building trust. This was achieved through a visible curiosity and respect for students’ backgrounds, which was reflected in the activities designed. In these activities, students and teachers took turns sharing stories about their cultures, favorite foods, and traditions. This intentional exchange created a space where students felt seen and valued, opening the door for them to express themselves more freely. As the second author observed:

We were able to notice something different through working with the graduate class at Adelphi University. Instead of my students feeling like they had to leave their home countries behind and learn English, they were placed in an environment where their cultures were celebrated—a setting where their input mattered, where they felt like they had control. My students didn’t have to feel nervous about making mistakes while practicing the language, because they were amongst a group of people who made them feel safe. The power dynamics were shifted. It did not feel punitive if they didn’t match stereotypical American norms.

This shift in dynamics not only empowered students to engage more confidently in the classroom but also fostered a sense of pride in their cultural identities. Students began to realize that their backgrounds were assets, and that they each had something unique to contribute.

This recognition grew over time, creating a strong, positive momentum in their self-perception. The fourth author expressed the impact of this experience:

My way of understanding learning has advanced a lot because I am seeing new things that can help me in the future, being part of this project has made my goals stronger and more defined, which has helped me continue to be outstanding and privileged to be part of this project or others.

This evolving power shift was nurtured by the trust built through reciprocal learning and a shared respect for each other's humanity. Through this experience, both students and teacher candidates found new ways to learn from and support one.

RQ2. In what ways does CAM promote a co-learning mindset among participants?

Teachers often find it challenging to grasp the full scope of co-learning because they typically see themselves in the role of "Teacher," which can reinforce traditional expectations about their role and create barriers to meaningful student engagement. When MLL students appear shy or disengaged, teachers might wonder if they should simply continue speaking. The challenge of implementing co-learning is heightened in online interactions with MLL students, which often make student engagement more challenging.

To address this, teacher candidates decided to create a WhatsApp group to facilitate asynchronous and flexible engagement. For instance, the third author actively used emojis and Spanish translations to connect with MLL students, despite not understanding Spanish herself. However, due to the school's media ban, WhatsApp could not be fully utilized as a literacy tool during the school time.

Through this experience, candidates discovered that co-learning demands active engagement, openness, and creativity. True co-learning often requires embracing vulnerability and sharing personal stories, which helps to build genuine connections. Jacinto, one of the teacher candidates, illustrated this by opening up about his Hispanic heritage, explaining that he had not learned Spanish until later in life. His story encouraged students to embrace and take pride in their heritage, emphasizing that language learning is a journey shaped by individual experiences.

Similarly, the third author, who is both a multilingual learner and a mother of two daughters currently studying English in the U.S., shared her perspective on the challenges faced by bilingual families in an English-dominant environment:

I am a bilingual parent, and my children and their friends are also bilingual children. Families who immigrate for educational purposes want to learn English effectively in an immersion environment, but parents often view bilingualism as an obstacle rather than an asset and are not interested in native language education. Without parents' active efforts, children have fewer opportunities to access native language education from the moment they come to the United States. For example, when I went to a bookstore that sold books in my native language, they were filled with books that were published 20 years ago, and I couldn't even find books for children. Even in very large libraries, I could occasionally find native language books for adults, but there was a serious lack of books for children.

Her openness in sharing her experience highlights that co-learning is fundamentally rooted in shared humanity and mutual understanding. At its core, teaching transcends the simple transmission of language skills. It is a deeply human act that acknowledges the interconnected challenges and shared journeys we all navigate. Co-learning embodies this spirit by fostering a space where diverse experiences are valued and where everyone contributes to a collective understanding shaped by empathy and shared resilience.

The sixth author, who actively engages in translanguaging—a practice that highlights multilingual learners’ ability to navigate language situations fluidly by drawing on their full linguistic repertoire (Flores, 2020)—chose to express her sentiment in Spanish on her experience, given its deep personal resonance to her:

Nos permitió aprender de la cultura de cada uno valorando como esos orígenes hoy en día no se han sido olvidados y que forma parte de nosotros, permitiendo compartir y aprender al mismo tiempo. Lo que me hizo darme cuenta de cómo ellos querían conocer tanto nuestro interés como nuestra cultura para hacernos sentirnos cómodos durante el aprendizaje y plática de nuestro inglés, lo que me hizo entender que sin duda serán grandes maestros

(It allowed us to learn from each other’s cultures, appreciating how those origins have not been forgotten and remain a part of us today, enabling us to share and learn at the same time. It made me realize how much they wanted to understand not only our interests but also our culture to make us feel comfortable while practicing and discussing English, which helped me see that they will undoubtedly become great teachers) (Second author’s translation).

The sixth author’s reflection underscores how a co-learning environment honors each person’s cultural roots, fostering a space where they feel truly seen and supported.

The second author observed how this approach motivated her MLL students to engage more deeply:

This co-learning mindset, especially for my ENL students, was a powerful catalyst for the intrinsic motivation to practice English and learn more about the different cultures represented in The United States.

This approach to co-learning, aiming to build bridges across languages and cultures, encouraging both students and teacher candidates to view learning as a reciprocal, human-centered act. Through shared stories and personal insights, a collaborative and inclusive classroom environment emerges, reinforcing the importance of every individual’s voice in the learning process.

RQ3. How can CAM be utilized to engage and support the diverse, multilingual, and multimodal literacy practices of multilingual learners?

The CAM Project aims to offer students a rich and immersive language experience, including everything from the introductory video and preparation for online meetings to the complex process of podcast production. This involved tapping into students’ diverse linguistic repertoires and resources.

For example, the third author used WhatsApp to share her experiences and engage with students using translated Spanish. In doing so, it facilitated deeper communication and interaction. This approach not only supports MLL students’ understanding but also validates their multilingual skills as integral to the learning process.

By incorporating multimodal practices—such as storytelling, text messaging, and podcast planning—teacher candidates encouraged students to express their literacy practices in various modalities. This multimodal engagement enables MLLs to showcase their diverse literacy skills and knowledge in ways that go beyond traditional speaking or written texts. It also provides opportunities for students to use their preferred modes of communication, whether through visual, auditory, or textual means. As the second author

remarked, observing the students' transformation in embracing their cultures and languages highlighted the powerful role of such multimodal strategies in fostering self-expression and cultural pride:

CAM is best utilized as a motivational tool for multilingual learners. It lowers their affective filter (Krashen, 1985) by encouraging more confidence to take risks while practicing the new language. My students loved talking about their own countries. This propelled them to learn new vocabulary associated with their cultures, and to orally practice sharing something with the Adelphi students on the podcast.

By promoting interactive and participatory learning, CAM encourages students to actively contribute to the co-construction of learning contents. Sharing their stories, experiences, and cultural assets helps create a collaborative learning atmosphere where students feel more invested in the process.

This collaborative approach enables them to use their full linguistic repertoire to engage with both their peers and teacher candidates, enriching their literacy experiences in meaningful ways. As the fifth author shared:

This project has made my desire to learn a new language improve every day, not only because I want to give my own definition in another language about my culture, but I want to express it so that people who only speak English are interested and learn.

The Fourth author also echoed this sentiment, explaining how working with the teacher candidates deepened her own appreciation for her culture. By actively participating in this project, she recognized the importance of sharing her linguistic and cultural assets, gaining a renewed sense of pride and connection to her heritage.

While the project was overall a positive experience for both students and teacher candidates, it also presented challenges for teacher candidates, who had to navigate the complexities of literacy instruction in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Through participating in the project, teacher candidates developed a more nuanced understanding of how to engage with students' multifaceted literacy practices. Rather than focusing exclusively on traditional language instruction, the project encouraged them to go beyond basic vocabulary and grammar teaching and draw on students' bilingual literacy, embracing a more inclusive, holistic approach.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this podcast-based CAM project underscore its transformative potential in reshaping power dynamics, fostering a co-learning mindset, and engaging the diverse, multilingual, and multimodal literacy practices of MLLs (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2019; Lin & Huseyin, 2025). Below, we discuss how the findings address our research questions and connect to the broader literature, highlighting key implications for teacher education and equity-driven practices.

Shifting Power Dynamics in the Classroom

Our study reveals that CAM holds significant potential to disrupt traditional classroom hierarchies by repositioning teacher candidates as co-learners rather than merely knowledge transmitters, reinforcing the principles of CR-SP that challenge assimilationist and deficit-based educational models (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2019). The shift from a

teacher-centered, language focused lesson to a more holistic, asset-based approach illustrates how CAM encourages educators to critically reflect on their assumptions and practices, a process aligned with cultural humility and critical consciousness (Denzongpa et al., 2020; Shepard-Carey, 2024). This finding resonates with Jackson and Bryson (2018), who demonstrated that community-engaged pedagogies enable teachers to uncover the magic, wonder, and strengths in students' lives, fostering reciprocal relationships that challenge traditional power structures.

The second author's observation that MLLs felt safe to express themselves without fear of conforming to the standard English ideologies highlights how CAM fosters a space where students' cultural identities are celebrated rather than erased. This aligns with Flores (2020) and Smith (2023), who argue that asset-based pedagogies must prioritize students' full linguistic repertoires to counteract monolingual ideologies. By centering MLLs' voices, the podcast project disrupted the epistemic injustice described by Byskov (2021), where minoritized communities' knowledge is systematically marginalized. Instead, CAM positioned MLLs as co-constructors of knowledge, validating their cultural and linguistic assets as integral to the learning process.

Fostering a Co-Learning Mindset

The development of a co-learning mindset among participants, as evidenced by the third author's use of emojis and Spanish translations to build rapport, underscores CAM's role in fostering mutual vulnerability and shared humanity. This illustrates Lin and Uysal's (2025) conceptualization of CAM as a framework that encourages educators to unlearn, co-learn, and relearn alongside students. The collaborative nature of the podcast project, particularly through asynchronous tools like WhatsApp, facilitated reciprocal and multimodal engagement, echoing Li's (2023) emphasis on co-learning as a process rooted in cultural humility and openness to multiple epistemologies and ways of languaging.

The reflections from the third author, who shared personal stories of their linguistic and cultural journeys, illustrate how co-learning transcends traditional teaching roles. These narratives resonate with Chang and Viesca's (2022) argument that meaningful community engagement requires educators to move beyond technical skills and embrace relational, reflective practices. The sixth author's reflection in Spanish further highlights how CAM creates a space for translanguaging, allowing MLLs to express their identities authentically, as supported by Canagarajah (2020) and Jiang (2025). This co-learning environment not only empowered MLLs to take pride in their heritage but also inspired them to engage more deeply with English—not as a tool of assimilation, but as an empowering means of communication that expands their sense of agency and connection to the world, as noted by the second author.

Engaging Diverse, Multilingual, and Multimodal Literacy Practices

The podcast-based CAM project effectively engaged MLLs' diverse literacy practices by integrating multimodal tools and a process-based approach such as storytelling, discussion, text messaging, scriptwriting and audio production. This approach echoes the findings of Lin et al. (2024) on podcasting as a platform for critical digital literacies, enabling students to navigate complex communicative contexts. By allowing MLLs to use their full linguistic repertoires, including home languages and emerging English skills, the project countered the monolingual biases critiqued by Flores (2020) and Yandell et al. (2020). The fifth author's desire to share their culture with English-speaking audiences reflects how CAM fosters agency and cultural pride, supporting Paris and Alim's (2014) call for pedagogies that sustain students' identities while providing access to dominant literacies.

The multimodal nature of the project, as evidenced by the third author's translanguaging practices and the second author's observation of increased student confidence, underscores CAM's potential to foster supportive inclusivity in language learning, consistent with Krashen's (1985) theories on affective filter. This finding extends Forbes (2011) and Phillips' (2017) research on podcasting as a tool for dynamic, contextually rich language practice. Through collaborative scriptwriting and podcast production, the project not only created meaningful opportunities for language use but also responded to the call for culturally relevant pedagogy rooted in students' full linguistic repertoires and diverse literacy practices (Osborne et al., 2021).

Limitations and Recommendations

While we are proud of the valuable insights generated by this study, we acknowledge several important limitations. First, the research was constrained by the timeframe of a single academic semester, which limited our ability to fully examine the institutional challenges and systemic barriers that teacher candidates encounter. A more in-depth study of how candidates navigate these complexities—particularly those related to school policies, administrative structures, and broader sociopolitical forces—requires sustained, longitudinal research across diverse educational contexts. Such ongoing inquiry would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the persistent tensions and transformative possibilities involved in implementing asset-based approaches like CAM.

Second, while we situated CAM within a CR-SP framework, we did not engage in a comparative analysis with other pedagogical approaches that share similar goals or offer distinct advantages. Future research should examine how CAM aligns with or differs from other asset-based and justice-oriented frameworks in teacher education, in order to deepen our understanding of its unique contributions and potential synergies.

Finally, to more fully integrate CAM into formal educational settings, we recognize the need to address institutional and structural barriers that can hinder its implementation. Future work should explore strategies such as advocating for policy reforms that center culturally sustaining pedagogies, ensuring adequate institutional support and resources, and developing ongoing, collaborative professional learning opportunities for educators.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the transformative potential of podcast-based CAM as a tool for advancing educational equity. Grounded in CR-SP, the project challenges deficit-based ideologies and reimagines classrooms as community-rooted, justice-driven spaces. Specifically, we call on teachers to:

- **Leverage community knowledge** by inviting students to document and share local stories and resources.
- **Foster student agency** through collaborative podcast projects that highlight diverse voices and lived experiences.
- **Shift classroom dynamics** by positioning students as researchers, storytellers, and knowledge producers.
- **Sustain equity-focused practice** by embedding CAM into ongoing curriculum design and professional reflection.

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APPENDIX

Here are a few sample questions to ask a family member about favorite or holiday recipes:

- Can you tell me about a family recipe that holds special meaning to you? Why is it so special?
- What is your first memory of this recipe being made in our family? Who usually made it?
- Is there a particular holiday or event where this recipe is always made? Why do you think it became part of that tradition?
- Could you describe the process of making this recipe? Are there any special techniques or secrets passed down?
- Has the recipe changed or evolved over time? If so, how and why?
- What do you think this dish says about our family's culture or values?
- Are there any ingredients in the recipe that you need to change because of moving to a new environment? Are there any that are difficult to find or unique to your family's version? What does this change mean to you?
- Do you have a favorite memory of everyone coming together to make or eat this dish?
- How do you feel when you make or eat this recipe now? Does it still hold the same significance?

