EMPIRICAL FEATURE ARTICLE

Teacher language practices that support multilingual learners: classroom-based approaches from multilingual early childhood teachers

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The language practices used by teachers in schools directly impact the language development and reading performance of multilingual children. Despite the important effect of teacher language choices on children's language learning, there is a considerable need to better understand what constitutes effective multilingual language practices for teachers. This study uses teacher inquiry to examine the language practices multilingual early childhood teachers develop, implement, and refine when supported to critically examine their teaching practice. Participants were five multilingual early childhood teachers with varying language histories, program settings, and professional experiences. Findings describe themes that capture the key practices and guiding ideas from the knowledge developed by these teachers. These themes provide guidance on practices that can leverage the language capacities of multilingual teachers and show ways that multilingual teachers can make language choices that support multilingual learners. This study centers multilingual teachers' voices and knowledge about language and culture, and highlights the critical role of teachers as producers of new knowledge and language practices.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Multilingual children's language development is influenced by the quantity, diversity, and sophistication of the language practices used by their teachers in school (Bowers & Vasilyeva, 2011; Castro, Páez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011). Language input is central to how children learn languages, and providing opportunities for children to be exposed to high-quality language that

is at and slightly above learners' ability plays a central role in effective language instruction for children (Dubiner, 2019; Krashen, 1985). The quality use of home languages to explain and discuss ideas is connected to increased vocabulary learning in the home language, with potential benefits to English language learning (Hindman & Wasik, 2015). The use of children's home languages likewise plays a role in literacy learning, with the increased use of these languages by the teacher linked to higher reading performance at the end of prekindergarten (Burchinal, Field, López, Howes, & Pianta, 2012).

Though teachers' language choices can play a key role in children's language development, little attention has been given to identifying effective multilingual language practices for teachers (Langeloo, Lara, Deunk, Klitzing, & Strijbos, 2019). The study reported in this article considered teachers' language practices in early childhood classrooms, focusing on how multilingual teachers make instructional choices and develop practices about when and how to draw on their own multilingualism to support children's learning.

2 | TEACHER LANGUAGE PRACTICES

Multilingual teachers make in-the-moment decisions about what languages to use in the classroom. These include decisions to use multilingual interactions to support communication, scaffold learning, and manage classroom activities (Durán & Palmer, 2014; Gort & Pontier, 2013; Gort & Sembiante, 2015). Recent work on multilingual pedagogies has framed these movements across languages as translanguaging (García & Kleifgen, 2019). Translanguaging describes the full range of multilingual persons' language practices, including the flexible movement between languages that reflects the real language practices of many multilinguals (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015).

Within a translanguaging approach, teachers make decisions about when to use multiple languages in the classroom and how to incorporate these practices into classroom instruction. Though teachers' language use during classroom interactions may not always represent conscious choices, teachers can and do make active decisions about when and how to draw on their multiple languages. These include decisions about language choice and language mode (Grosjean, 2010). Language choice refers to the selection of a primary language. Language mode is the decision to use only one language or more than one and includes whether, and in what ways, a multilingual person chooses to draw on languages other than the primary language. Both language choice and mode can change over the course of an interaction as a speaker makes active choices and adapts within the context of the interaction.

Research on teachers' language choice and mode in early childhood classrooms shows the diverse reasoning and complexity that underlie teachers' language practices (Durán & Palmer, 2014; Gort & Pontier, 2013; Manyak, 2004; Pontier & Gort, 2016). In one example of the complexity of these language decisions, Gort and Sembiante (2015) described how four pairs of preschool coteachers co-constructed flexible multilingual practices. These included translanguaging, translation, and parallel monolingual practices, where teachers coordinated their talk to engage in language brokering, bilingual recasting, and concurrent translation. These practices went beyond generalized language decisions and demonstrated teachers' attempts to differentiate language practices based on children's language preferences and individual needs.

However, not all teachers have the pedagogical knowledge or experience to make well-informed language choices, or they may make language choices for reasons that are not connected to student learning. Martínez-Roldán (2015) observed how multilingual teachers may make language choices that do not benefit children's learning, including choices that center their own language preferences over the learning needs of the children in their classroom. This represents a gap in teachers' pedagogical

knowledge about language choices and a need to provide clearer guidance on the role of language choices in supporting language learning.

To provide this direction to early childhood teachers, Palmer, Martínez, Mateus, and Henderson (2014) pointed to what may be effective translanguaging practices in classrooms. In a 2-year ethnographic study, they explored the language practices of one prekindergarten and one Grade 1 dual language "master" teacher. From the observed instruction of these expert teachers, Palmer et al. recommend translanguaging strategies that include (a) modeling multilingual and hybrid language practices; (b) positioning students as competent multilinguals through language brokering and translation, even if they are not yet proficient multilinguals; and (c) drawing positive attention to children's metalinguistic awareness and cross-language connections.

Though these suggestions provide some guidance for multilingual teachers, there remains a considerable need to better understand what constitutes effective practices when it comes to teachers' decisions around multilingual language practices in early childhood classrooms. Guidance from prior research remains limited in the number of recommendations available, relies on the experiences of a relatively small number of teachers, considers primarily classrooms in bilingual education programs, and does not consider practices for multilingual teachers in language-diverse classrooms. To further expand on the research on this topic, this study centered multilingual early childhood teachers to explore the language practices they develop, implement, and refine when supported to critically examine their teaching practice.

3 | DEVELOPING PEDAGOGY THROUGH INQUIRY

Teacher inquiry provides an epistemological stance for considering teachers as producers of knowledge about teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). Teacher inquiry brings together groups of teachers to participate in collaborative inquiry through iterative cycles of reflection, action, and evaluation to develop, implement, and refine pedagogical practices in a way that is systematic and intentional. Central to teacher inquiry is the idea that the knowledge to transform practice comes from the questions and theories generated by teachers in the inquiry process (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). In this way, teacher inquiry draws on the day-to-day work of teachers as a source of knowledge to inform instruction.

A strength of teacher inquiry is its suitability to center diverse voices that are often excluded from the development of knowledge on teaching, including the voices and perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse teachers (Haddix, 2017). When multilingual teachers are included in the work of teacher inquiry, it can change how we understand the practice of teaching by centering and elevating the heterogeneity and complexity of multilingual teachers' ways of knowing about language and culture (Sengupta-Irving, 2019). This represents a powerful tool for the development of instructional practices that can support multilingual teachers, particularly as they work with multilingual learners (Nevárez-LaTorre, 2010).

Given the suitability of teacher inquiry for including multilingual teachers in research and the efficacy of teacher inquiry as an epistemological stance and research approach (Baker, 2019; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Manfra, 2019), multilingual teachers can and should be tapped as essential contributors to the development of pedagogies to support multilingual learners. Their knowledge is likely key to creating more equitable and effective classroom practices that will support multilingual learners' success in schools. This study centered teachers as knowledge producers to explore the following research question:

What language practices do multilingual early childhood teachers perceive as effective for supporting the learning of multilingual learners in early childhood classrooms?

4 | METHODS

4.1 | Context

Teacher inquiry was used as a research method to center teachers as producers of knowledge about language practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009). This was implemented through an online teacher inquiry model (see Wagner, 2020) run by me. Participants met weekly through an online synchronous, videoconferencing platform. These meetings were structured to move teachers through cycles of question posing, reflection, action, and evaluation. A facilitator supported teachers' progression through the inquiry process by posing questions, suggesting alternate viewpoints, and promoting positive social interactions and group cohesion. I served as the facilitator for this program.

The sessions were supplemented by a teacher journal. These journals provided a space for individual inquiry that included observations of classroom events and student work, reflection on problems of practice, and in-depth examination of specific instructional events (Billman & Sherman, 2003; Hobson, 2001). Journals were meant to facilitate the thinking and processing of new ideas between meetings and prepare participants to share at the meetings.

The online teacher inquiry program reported on here explored how teachers use their multilingualism to support learning in early childhood classrooms. During each meeting, topics in this area of focus were selected by participants. These were based on problems of practice the participants identified from their own teaching and often had recorded or reflected on in their journals prior to the meeting. Topics varied across meetings based on the issues and interests identified by the participants and included topics such as conducting read-alouds in multiple languages, encouraging multilingual talk during play, and using song to cultivate multilingualism among all learners. The program ran for 10 sessions in January through April 2019.

4.2 | Participants

The participants were five teachers working in classrooms in a city in the northeastern United States. Participants were recruited through emails and postings targeting multilingual teachers. The first five multilingual teachers to register were accepted to the program. All agreed to participate in this study. Information about each participant and their classroom is presented in Table 1. One teacher (Teacher 2) worked in a dual-language program where two languages were officially used for instruction. The other teachers reported various amounts of non-English language use in their classrooms. Though official language policies varied across the teachers' schools, all of the teachers reported that they could make language choices in their classroom that included the use of multiple languages in instruction. These teachers formed a "'messy' network" (Butler & Schnellert, 2012, p. 1208) of teachers that spanned schools and had varying language histories, program settings, and professional experiences.

4.3 | Data sources

Data sources included video recordings of teacher inquiry meetings, teacher journals, and video recordings of a focus group and interviews with participants. The 10 program sessions had an average duration of 93 minutes. The teachers produced 103 journal entries during the program. At the

TABLE 1 Teacher information and classroom context

Teacher	Grade	Year(s) of experience	Language(s) spoken	Bilingual program	Total students	Multilingual students	Languages of students
1	PK	3	Russian	No	18	11	Spanish, Mandarin, Russian
2	2	1	Korean, Spanish	Yes	23	23	Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish
3	1	4	Korean, Spanish	No	21	7	Spanish, Mandarin
4	EPK	1	Spanish	No	14	6	Spanish, Mandarin
5	PK	2	Spanish	No	13	6	Spanish

Note: PK indicates prekindergarten for children age 4. EPK indicates early prekindergarten for children age 3. Languages spoken column only includes languages other than English.

conclusion of the program, participants were asked to reflect on the instructional practices they developed in the program. This was done through a focus group and individual interviews that included semistructured questions and a retrospective reflection on teachers' journal entries. The focus group was conducted after the last program session and lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were conducted with each participant following the focus group using a semistructured interview protocol. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

4.4 | Data analysis

A thematic analysis of the data was conducted to identify language practices that arose from the inquiry process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Open coding was conducted to label language practices teachers identified to support learning in the classroom. This is a "bottom up" or inductive approach to constructing meaning from the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Patterns and trends in language practices were identified through a repeated review of the codes and coded data excerpts, and related codes were grouped and explored as a prospective theme.

Themes were revised through repeated reexamination of the data extracts, and promising themes were tested for internal homogeneity, external heterogeneity, parsimoniousness, and coherence (Patton, 1990; Pfeffer, 1982). To support the validity of themes, themes were triangulated across data sources and participants, and member checks were conducted with two of the five participants, who agreed to review the findings. The feedback from member checks was used to refine aspects of the themes and ensure they represented the actual language practices developed by the teachers.

5 | FINDINGS

This section presents themes that represent the language practices that were developed, implemented, and refined by the participating teachers through the teacher inquiry process. Five themes are presented that capture the key practices and guiding ideas from the knowledge developed by these teachers.

5.1 | Model multilingual language practices

Nurturing multilingualism starts with creating spaces in which students are comfortable and empowered to use all of their languages. Doing this required making the use of multiple and non-English languages routine and using them in ways that had meaning and significance in the classroom. This is consistent with recommendations made by Palmer et al. (2014) and Gort and Sembiante (2015) that teachers model multilingual practices. Like these researchers, the teachers found that their own language practices set the tone for children's language practices and played a role in authorizing children to use multiple languages. As one teacher explained

> I feel that talking to children and explaining to them that it was okay for them to use their home language was not enough to encourage them to use their home language in the classroom. I realized that when I began to speak more Spanish and show my students that I speak a different language, they were able to gain confidence in using their language. (Teacher 1, Interview)

Another teacher explained how supporting languages goes beyond content learning and is about specifically addressing the learning environment of the classroom, including how language and culture are treated by teachers and students:

> I was able to think beyond what it means to teach to a curriculum, but to think about how I can create an environment that is conducive to learning because my students feel accepted and safe whether their peers are very much like themselves or not. (Teacher 2, Interview)

In acknowledging children's fears and concerns about being multilingual in the classroom, one teacher framed this as the need to "demonstrate that there are children in our classroom who speak different languages and are still accepted in the classroom" (Teacher 1, Interview). This attention to children's acceptance and feelings in the classroom extends Durán and Palmer's (2014) guidance that multilingual interactions can "value and validate students' identities as both language learners and language experts" and "construct the classroom as a multilingual environment" (p. 382).

Teachers identified using and modeling multilingual language practices as a first step toward encouraging children to feel accepted when translanguaging or using home languages in the classroom. Teachers often initially focused on using non-English languages during procedural talk or at opportune moments during instruction. These initial attempts to normalize multilingual language practices were not always planned or tied to specific instructional or language goals. One teacher explained:

> I developed a little more comfort speaking and using Russian throughout the day. Even when I was doing instructional things, if I was able to switch to Russian, I would take the chance and do so. During read-aloud, if I knew how to say it in Russian, I would do so. (Teacher 3, Interview)

Though they reported positive outcomes from these changes, teachers found that multilingualism needed to be incorporated in more than incidental parts of the school day. To move multilingualism beyond procedural talk and make it routine in spaces that have meaning in the classroom, teachers identified valued classroom practices that could be consistent spaces for non-English languages. One focus was

the use of multilingual books, including for read-alouds, which were a central part of the instructional routine. Teachers chose to read bilingual books or made decisions to read books in their own non-English language. One teacher drew on her students' home literacies to help read *Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats in English, Chinese, and Korean, describing it as an "incredible experience" that created excitement around multilingual books (Teacher 4, Interview).

Teachers found music, song, and drama to be other classroom activities that were both well suited to multilingual language practices and valued by children as fun and among their favorite learning activities. Song was a particular focus because, as one teacher noted, "in my classroom, we sing many songs throughout the day" (Teacher 1, Interview). Another teacher explained how she began introducing non-English languages through the morning song as a way to share languages:

> This week, we are singing the song in Spanish. Typically, we sing: "Hello everybody, so glad to see you." I play the djembe to create a beat and model the song for my students: "Hola … buenos dias! So glad to see you." (Teacher 2, Journal, Jan. 31)

This included opportunities to learn about these languages, such as "the 'h' is a silent letter" in the word *hola* in Spanish (Teacher 2, Journal, Jan. 31).

Teachers identified other informal and child-centered spaces to model translanguaging and non-English languages that were particularly meaningful to how children practice and learn language. These included centers, group activities, dramatic play, recess, and shared snacks and meals. Teachers reported language practices that included asking questions in non-English languages, initiating and encouraging home language talk during snack and lunch times, and inviting and participating in role or doll play in non-English languages. The teachers' specific attention to modeling multilingualism in these informal and child-centered spaces, in addition to the use of music, song, and drama, go beyond the focus on modeling multilingualism in primarily academic spaces recommended in prior research. Modeling multilingualism in these spaces supported not only academic and content learning, but also students' social-emotional development. One teacher explained how after modeling play in students' home languages, "I became more aware that if I used multilingualism and allowed my students to embrace it, their confidence, capability, and socials skills will improve" (Teacher 5, Interview).

Finding meaningful ways to incorporate multilingualism in the classroom was not limited to identifying instructional activities to incorporate more diverse language practices. Teachers found this was also influenced by *who* shared about language and multilingualism and could be done by sharing the meaningfulness of multilingualism in their own lives. One teacher who embraced this view shared, "I'm realizing how much it's important to really use my teacher presence to engage students … because you know your students are so in tune with how you feel and how you act" (Teacher 2, Focus Group). One teacher opened up to her students by selecting and sharing a bilingual book that connected to her own experience as an immigrant child learning English: "They really loved learning about who I was and through that they really learned some of the Korean words in that book" (Teacher 2, Focus Group).

Showing one's personal history and identity as a multilingual as positive helped teachers show students that they were proud of how they used their multilingualism in the classroom. Remembering how as children they "thought my teachers were superheroes" or were "this cool person who has everything" (Teacher 4, Session, Mar. 7), the teachers recognized the authority and power that came with their status as the teacher in the classroom and embraced their role as language role model. This, they hoped, would help "show my students to be proud of their home language and culture" (Teacher 2, Interview) and "open doors for students to comfortably express themselves" (Teacher 4, Interview). Multilingual teachers' willingness and ability to empathize with their multilingual learners and the

personal supports they needed encouraged learners to both embrace and share their own multilingual identities in the classroom.

5.2 | Inspire curiosity into new languages

Introducing new languages into the classroom inspired student curiosity into language and a self-motivated desire to inquire about, try, and learn new languages. Encountering new languages helped children "become aware that there are other languages out there and that children can speak more than one language" (Teacher 1, Focus Group). One teacher reported that exposure to multilingual books "truly helped my class to show more positive attitudes towards other cultures and appreciate different languages" (Teacher 4, Interview). Developing language awareness was important to creating a culture of acceptance of multilingualism that laid a foundation for authentic discovery and learning.

Children's increased awareness of languages beyond their own often led to a curiosity about languages and language learning. When one teacher shared her own Spanish language with her students, most of whom were not Spanish speakers, they "presented excitement. … They would either repeat what I said in Spanish and giggle or they would pretend they understood and giggle" (Teacher 1, Interview). These student responses then informed how teachers thought about their own language choices in the classroom. One teacher explained:

> I made decisions about my language practices based on what the students demonstrated they wanted. … When I noticed children were showing interest in the Spanish language, I used the language more in the class, and it was interesting to see the children picking up on the language. (Teacher 1, Interview)

Other teachers found ways to use children's home languages to support classroom literacy instruction. One teacher used students' last names to study word patterns. Students who had non-English-language names, such as Spanish surnames, were able to lead in the discovery of new sounds and language differences. The teacher explained that for one Spanish student,

> because she knows how to pronounce the name it's easy for her to pick up on sounds that are different in the English language and in Spanish. So even though she doesn't know how to read Spanish … she was starting to connect, "Oh the J is silent; it actually kinda sounds like an H." (Teacher 2, Session, Apr. 11)

This inquiry into their own names made children "really excited for it to be their turn and to explore their name and … [discover] different sounds and different names" (Teacher 2, Session, Apr. 11).

Another teacher read bilingual books with a Spanish-speaking student who asked to read together. Because the child spoke but was not literate in Spanish, the teacher read the Spanish words, and the student would then repeat the words and define them. She explained this shared approach by pointing out that the child "can explain various meanings of a cultural context or what the word means whereas I can offer how to pronounce that word when I read it on paper" (Teacher 2, Session, Apr. 4). These co-language practices during book readings show how "more than one person can contribute to the entirety of one language" (Teacher 2, Session, Apr. 4). This kind of cooperative language learning showed how scaffolding by the teacher continued to grow and support students' curiosity and interest in language learning.

Another teacher spurred children's interests in language by reading books in non-English languages to all of her students during classroom read-alouds. She chose books in Spanish, even though only a small portion of her students spoke Spanish. The children generally "demonstrated excitement as they were listening to the story" (Teacher 1, Journal, Mar. 22). One student was "so happy smiling he couldn't sit still and he was just looking at me every time he heard a Spanish word coming out of my mouth," and another "stated that although he could not understand what was being said, he felt good when he was listening to the story" (Teacher 1, Journal, Mar. 22).

When another teacher introduced Korean-English bilingual books, she found that the Korean words created a sense of mystery and interest for the non-Korean speakers. She described how when there was Korean text, "right away when I read that my non-Korean kids were like, 'Oh, Miss, what does that say? I want to know'" (Teacher 4, Session, Mar. 28). One teacher started to intentionally select books with only a few non-English words because they built on this curiosity and "gave students a chance to figure out what the meanings of these words are through context" (Teacher 2, Session, Mar. 28).

These led to conversations about languages that sometimes surprised the teachers. One teacher reported how her students became interested in comparing Korean, Spanish, and English. They noticed language features like "how in Korean when you are speaking to an adult your tone changes. You're in that formal, you conjugate everything formally just like how we do that in Spanish, like *usted* form versus the *tu* form" (Teacher 4, Session, Mar. 28). Comments like these presented teachers with opportunities to make connections between the languages and cultures that were shared in their classrooms.

For teachers, stoking language curiosity in children did not require being proficient in the languages their students spoke. Teachers often did this through simple praise and responses that showed they shared an interest in language. One teacher validated her students' exploration and learning in language by applauding their creative attempts to write basic words in Spanish, like *hola* and *ocho*, by using phonetic sounds in the Korean alphabet (Teacher 4, Session, Mar. 7).

For students whose curiosity extended further, teachers facilitated exploration by serving as a guide to help children find the language resources that would continue to extend and deepen their curiosity and interest in language. One teacher explained how, after showing a student how to find Spanish books, "now she is able to find similar books for herself. In fact, she recently found another book and read the book to me" (Teacher 2, Interview). In reflecting on this, the teacher expressed, "I never thought I would be able to assist a proficient Spanish speaker to read in Spanish" (Teacher 2, Interview). In many of these examples, supporting students' curiosity required both questioning and moving past teachers' own assumptions and preferences about how to use language, an obstacle that Martínez-Roldán (2015) has shown can limit teachers' use and encouragement of multilingualism in the classroom. A willingness to move beyond their own comfort zone was part of how these teachers were able to see, recognize, and encourage the language practices that excited and motivated their students.

5.3 | Invite children to make language choices

Once teachers started using non-English languages more, this raised questions about whether children chose to participate in ways that positioned them as multilinguals in the classroom and how teachers responded to children's language choices. If teachers were going to use flexible language practices that included translanguaging and instruction in non-English languages, then children also needed to learn and have space to make language choices. Durán and Palmer (2014) similarly advised that rigid

or narrow expectations for how students use languages or respond to teachers "can constrain students' language and literacy development" (p. 383). One teacher expressed the belief that children should have choice as foundational to children being multilinguals:

> I do believe that language is connected to who we are, and it is definitely difficult to separate ourselves from the language we use. Yes, structured instruction is needed in my classroom, but at times, being flexible and having students take ownership of their language choice is crucial in learning. (Teacher 4, Interview)

To support students' agency in making choices about how they use their languages and respond to teachers' multilingual practices, teachers first found it important to communicate to children that they can make choices about language use. One teacher acknowledged that "sometimes the children feel obligated to use one of their languages" (Teacher 3, Session, Feb. 7), and these feeling could be driven by real or perceived expectations about how the teacher expects children to use language. Another observed that children "may not know that they have this agency. … They might think that they're not good enough or that they have to kind of find a place where they fit in" (Teacher 2, Session, Mar. 21).

Teachers found that even informal and offhand suggestions could make immediate impacts on children's language choices. One teacher recalled, "I suggested, 'You can also write the themes in Korean too!' Of course, immediately after I said it, the fourth group came up to the front and began writing their five themes in Korean" (Teacher 4, Journal, Mar. 1). This extended to children's choices when writing, where teacher encouragement to make active choices led some children to produce multilingual texts. Across classrooms, teachers shared similar stories about how the "decision to allow students to choose their language preference … made learning more fun and comfortable for them" (Teacher 4, Interview) and made learning "more lively now and I'm getting a lot of kids to contribute to our class discussions" (Teacher 4, Session, Mar. 21).

Once children made choices about their language use, teachers identified the importance of communicating that they accepted children's choices. Though this was not intuitive for all of the teachers, one reported, "I became more open to this idea and if the students I was observing spoke in their native language I would embrace it rather then put a stop to it" (Teacher 5, Interview). Another teacher asked her class if anyone knew a different language, which led one student to identify another child, Anna, who spoke Chinese. When the teacher "asked Anna, 'Would you like to teach us how to say hello in Chinese?' She shook her head silently" (Teacher 2, Journal, Feb. 13). Even though the teacher described the child as "extroverted," she observed that "all of a sudden when the topic of Chinese came about she just clamped up and did not want to even talk about it" (Teacher 2, Session, Feb. 28). Accepting choices either to use or not use a language reinforces the idea that each child can decide when and how they are positioned in the classroom as a multilingual. This extends recommendations from Durán and Palmer (2014) and Gort and Sembiante (2015, p. 21) that teachers follow children's lead in making language choices and respond to "all styles and forms of communication."

Helping children have agency in choosing how to use language was not about giving them space to make arbitrary choices, but instead was about recognizing the meaning and value in children's language choices. One teacher observed how a Korean student switched from English to Korean when referring to his older brother. She explained that he "chose to say 'sister' and 'brother'" in Korean because it was more specific. In Korean, older brother, older sister, younger brother, and younger sister all have different names" (Teacher 4, Interview). The teachers acknowledged that "there are times where one language can describe something more meaningfully or effectively than

another language" (Teacher 4, Interview), and they chose to look for the purpose and meaning in their students' choices.

Though Palmer et al. (2014) recommended positioning children as multilinguals and drawing positive attention to children's metalinguistic awareness and cross-language connections as they made choices like the ones described here, for some young children this attention caused them to shut down. Feelings of shyness or social apprehension led to less multilingual use than if the children were allowed to have control over when and how they acted as multilinguals. Instead, giving children space, allowing them to practice in private or semipublic contexts such as small groups of peers, and, most importantly, allowing children to take the lead in making decisions in when and how to use languages, including whether this is public, were all more effective in supporting language practices and home language use.

5.4 | Differentiate language practices

Learning about children came to mean learning about children *through* language. This meant learning about their languages and language choices, and about how their home languages were part of their identity and how they engaged with the world around them. One teacher in a Korean-English dual-language program explained how using a Spanish text in the classroom

> really helped me to know how other students in my class, not just the Korean students but non-Korean students, how they think about their own identity, about their culture, about their family and it was a great time for them to open up. (Teacher 4, Interview)

Seeing the complexity of children's relationships with language and their language choices led teachers to acknowledge individual differences in children's language learning. From observing her students, one teacher explained how she

> noticed how different in pace they learned the language. Not all of them learn at the same time. Some may learn a little slower than others, which is okay. Some may be more intimidated to speak the language. Some may know the language but don't feel comfortable enough to even speak it. (Teacher 5, Focus Group)

This helped her see that she could not "just teach them as a whole," but needed to "help each one grow" (Teacher 5, Focus Group). This included a particular focus on the pace at which children learn language and become comfortable using a language, including when and with whom to use certain languages.

Once teachers acknowledged the individual differences in children's language learning, they saw the need to differentiate their language practices to meet these needs. This goes beyond adapting language practices "according to the needs of the context and the local situation," as recommended by Gort and Pontier (2013, p. 240). Rather than simply look at a programmatic and community level in making choices about language use in the classroom, teachers need to additionally consider the learning needs of individual children. This largely aligns with Gort and Sembiante's (2015) recommendation to move beyond generalized language decisions and to individualize language choices with students. To do this, one teacher expressed how "changing my language practices meant that I had to know my students better and to figure out how and when to incorporate different languages during instruction and activities" (Teacher 2, Interview). This often started with setting goals and expectations for language learning that included challenges at the appropriate level for each child. For some

children this meant "giving them time to feel comfortable" (Teacher 5, Session, Feb. 28) and setting slowly increasing expectations for nonverbal and later verbal responses in low-stakes settings.

For other children this meant setting expectations that pushed them to move beyond what was comfortable and take on challenges. A teacher described how Jonathan, a non-Korean student in her Korean dual-language classroom, needed to be pushed: "I wanted Jonathan to challenge himself to try new things, like finding text evidence of personification in the Korean poem. At first, Jonathan immediately raised his hand and said, 'Miss I need help!' without even trying to read the text" (Teacher 4, Interview). She pushed him to continue on his own and directed him to an anchor chart in Korean and English. Then, "Jonathan picked up the poem and began tracking each word. … Finally, he was able to highlight text evidence that exemplified the use of personification!" (Teacher 4, Interview). The intentional combination of higher expectations with appropriate instructional supports helped Jonathan do more in Korean independently and reflected intentional decision making about when, and when not, to provide certain language supports.

Differentiating language practices also required determining the contexts that supported children's use of home languages and translanguage practices. This presented challenges for teachers, including one who explained, "I stopped calling on kids who I know feel uncomfortable, but then that's my dilemma. If I don't do that then how can I support these kids to produce the language and not just listen and listen and listen" (Teacher 4, Session, Feb. 14). Teachers learned to first "step back a bit and let the child explore their language use" (Teacher 1, Interview) and let children grow into language use through repeated opportunities. This included learning to "pay attention to when is the right time to acknowledge the child speaking their home language" (Teacher 1, Interview).

In considering the experience of being publicly positioned as multilingual in the classroom, one teacher recounted her own history as a multilingual student:

> I can think in my own life what it looked like as a bilingual student and not only that but as a minority … and you know, it's not always easy to be as open to it because of the experiences that may have left wounds or may have left a feeling of trauma. … I think it's good, it's a start to be aware of things that might be there on a deeper level that may not be so visible on the outside. (Teacher 2, Session, Feb. 14)

The teachers advised that there is a need to think "more about my students and how they may feel than anything else when making decisions about my language practices in the classroom" (Teacher 5, Interview). This meant learning about and knowing each student to find "the boundaries between challenging them but not stressing them to the point where they break down" (Teacher 4, Session, Feb. 14).

5.5 | Discuss multilingualism with parents and families

As multilinguals themselves, the teachers were positioned to understand the dynamics of multilingualism inside and outside of the classroom. They drew on their professional knowledge of language development, experiences with multilingual families, and personal histories as multilingual learners to provide guidance to the families of their multilingual students. This started with engaging parents in conversations about language to learn about the range of parent attitudes toward multilingualism and the diversity of parent views toward language learning in school. One teacher described how "speaking to parents of different backgrounds … helped me gain a wider perspective of how many families approach language choices and what they see is best for their children" (Teacher 2, Interview).

Differing parent attitudes and views toward language led teachers to consider how they needed to engage with parents. When parents expressed concerns about multilingual practices in the classroom, teachers determined that they needed to listen and be responsive to parents. One teacher explained,

> You need to listen to what they're concerned about and also try to fulfill their individual needs too. … You have to be knowledgeable of what you're trying to say but also be able to relate to the parents so that they can feel that you're really listening to them. (Teacher 4, Session, Mar. 21)

This included having conversations in non-English languages with parents when possible. This "insider" or "in-group" positioning at times supported the teachers in developing trusting relationships with families.

These conversations helped to build and strengthen relationships between teachers and families that were grounded in a shared investment in and experiences of multilingualism. General conversations about language often led to more specific conversations about the family and child's home language practices. These emerged from sustained conversations on language that included active effort and planning from the teachers. One teacher described her evolution in how she approached interactions with families, and how they became more sustained, because "I felt more motivated to interact with the parents more and actually ask them about the language" (Teacher 1, Focus Group).

These conversations led to discussions that helped parents form family language policies, which are explicit plans about language use among family members (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008). This started with listening to and learning about parent language goals. One teacher explained

> If they were to talk about language use of their child, how they're concerned that she or he might lose the home language or concerned about the second language … I'm beginning to ask them questions about what their thoughts are about language and what they want their child to speak at home. (Teacher 4, Focus Group)

In response to these goals, teachers often provided professional guidance that included "reassurance of it being okay for the child to use their home language at home" (Teacher 1, Interview).

For parents who were concerned that their child may not learn English quickly enough, teachers often reminded parents that "when they come to school everything they're being exposed to is in the English language" (Teacher 1, Session, Mar. 14) and to instead consider how the home can provide language exposure that children are not receiving in school. One teacher summed this up as "encourage the parents to keep doing what they do at home" (Teacher 1, Session, Mar. 14). This included explaining about classroom curriculum and language instruction, and working to get parents on board with these plans.

These conversations included assistance identifying or considering specific language policies. One teacher advised a family considering a one-language one-person policy, and another teacher worked with a mother who was "genuinely struggling to decide on whether she should send her daughter to Chinese school during the weekends" (Teacher 4, Session, Mar. 21). In these conversations, teachers drew on their professional knowledge and personal histories as multilinguals to provide parents with information about possible outcomes of their language decisions and alternative family language policies that families may not have considered. These dialogues assisted families in developing informed language policies that accounted for the ways language development is affected by how languages are managed in the home (Kaveh, 2018).

6 | CONCLUSION

To support multilingual children's language development, teachers need to give attention to the quality and diversity of their language practices (Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Hindman & Wasik, 2015; Martínez-Roldán, 2015). But for multilingual learners, more is needed. Particular attention needs to be given to identifying and implementing effective practices that leverage the language capacities of multilingual teachers. The themes presented in this article show how multilingual teachers can work toward making language choices that use their multilingualism to provide high-quality language learning for multilingual children.

Many of these themes are interconnected and show that supports for multilingualism are interdependent in the classroom. For example, providing routine and meaningful spaces for multilingualism is necessary for children to enact agency about when and how they will use their multilingualism in the classroom. Though intentional planning helped teachers make language choices that supported their students, teachers acknowledged the reality that being multilingual in the classroom meant making in-the-moment language decisions that could not always be planned. Responding to student language changes and unexpected instructional moments required flexibility and real-time decision making.

In many respects, these themes are consistent with prior recommendations on teachers' language practices, including the importance of modeling multilingual language practices and adapting instructional practices to student needs (Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Palmer et al., 2014). Though Durán and Palmer (2014) and Gort and Sembiante (2015) have recommended that teachers be responsive to children's language practices, these recommendations have not named and centered children's agency as a consideration in pedagogical choices and have only begun to address the role of children's affect and identity in how they may choose to use and respond to languages in the classroom. Children's curiosity has similarly not been included in prior guidance, largely in favor of focusing on progress in academic learning. Together these areas point to a need to consider how children's motivation, affect, and identity play a role in classroom language practices. And though family language policies receive attention outside of school contexts, there has not yet been sufficient work to connect these to classroom language policies or to consider the role multilingual teachers may play in informing these policies.

These themes capture some, but not all, of the ways multilingual teachers may use multilingualism in the classroom to support multilingual learners. This study drew from the experiences of a relatively small sample of teachers whose experiences were informed by their specific classrooms, teaching experiences, and language histories. These teachers were not specifically trained or certified as bilingual teachers. Nonetheless, their experiences are similar to many multilingual teachers who informally experiment with ways to use their languages in their classroom. This study relies on teacher reports of their instructional practices, and the practices developed by these teachers were not assessed to determine if they were effective in improving children's language outcomes. Though this is common in studies of professional learning, it limits the ability to draw conclusions about the impacts of these practices on student learning.

There is a need to continue to leverage the language and cultural knowledge of multilingual teachers to develop instructional practices that support multilingual learners. At the same time, multilingual teachers do not intuitively know how to use their multilingualism to best support students (Martínez-Roldán, 2015). More research is needed to continue to identify multilingual language practices and to assess these practices to better understand how multilingual teachers can effectively use their multilingualism to support learning across a diversity of learning contexts. Multilingual teachers require support to implement multilingual language practices that are effective in classrooms. That the practices

in this article come from and were used by practicing multilingual teachers shows that such practices can be implemented in early childhood classrooms. Just as important, they illustrate the need for the field to center multilingual teachers and their ways of knowing and being about language as key sources of knowledge in developing pedagogies to support classroom language learning.

7 | THE AUTHOR

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