




# “ESL Teachers Are Looked Down Upon”: Understanding the Lived Experience of a First-Year ESL Teacher With a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background

**Chiu-Yin (Cathy) Wong, PhD**

*Monmouth University, West Long Branch, New Jersey, United States*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9973-751X>

**Contact:** [cwong@monmouth.edu](mailto:cwong@monmouth.edu)

## Abstract

Research indicates many new English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers leave the profession within 5 years. However, limited research has focused on these teachers' experiences and far fewer studies examined those with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds to identify what contributes to the high attrition rate. This narrative study captured the experience of a first-year ESL teacher with CALD backgrounds. Data were collected using a three-step interview approach over the course of 1 year. The data show the protagonist's identity as an advocate for Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) began during his extended clinical practicum and was further driven by his CALD background, unsupportive colleagues, and the marginalized status of EBs and ESL teachers. Although he overcame numerous challenges, he ultimately left his ESL position due to his unsustainable low salary. The story confirmed current research regarding systematic barriers that may prevent CALD individuals from entering and staying in the ESL teaching field. Possible implications for teacher educators and policy makers are discussed.

**Keywords:** *ESL teachers, culturally and linguistically diverse educators, emergent bilinguals, first-year teachers' experience, systemic barriers, narrative study*

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## Introduction

According to National Center for Education Statistics (2021), over five million English learners or Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) are currently enrolled in pre-K through 12th grades in U.S. public schools. The presence of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) teachers offers many benefits for both EBs and monolingual speaking students, including better academic performance, lower dropout rates, higher chances to pursue advanced education, more opportunities to be exposed to new perspectives, and stronger sense of civic

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engagement (Motamedi & Stevens, 2018). Unfortunately, CALD teachers represent less than 20% of the entire teaching force (NCES, 2021), which does not match the growing number of EBs (Haddix, 2017).

A teacher's first few years are described as the most difficult years in their career (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Gan, 2018). Challenges, such as working with new colleagues and handling non-teaching responsibilities, often overwhelm new educators (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2016; Wong & Lubniewski, 2020; Wong et al., 2022). Although first-year teachers' experiences are well documented, few studies have highlighted new ESL teachers (Farrell, 2016) and far fewer examined new ESL teachers with CALD backgrounds.

Through narrative inquiry, the present study delved into the experience of a first-year ESL teacher with CALD backgrounds. I focused on the protagonist's voice when exploring his experience, and the following research question (RQ) guided the study: What are the lived experiences of a first-year ESL teacher with CALD backgrounds as he navigates his teaching journey?

## Literature Review

### New Teachers of English as a Second Language

It is reported that there is a serious shortage of well-trained ESL teachers (Sutcher, et al., 2019; Wong & Fitzgerald, 2022; Wong & Turkan, 2022; Wong, et al., 2022) in the United States. In fact, 24% of ESL teachers leave the profession after their first year and nearly 50% of them depart within 5 years (Farrell, 2016; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Yet, limited research studies have focused on new ESL teachers' experiences to help teacher educators identify exactly what contributes to this high rate of attrition (Farrell, 2016).

From the existing studies available, common themes emerged. These studies report a high number of novice ESL teachers experience difficulties meeting student learning needs, feeling isolated, and lacking support from colleagues and administration (DelliCarpini, 2009; Farrell, 2006; 2016; Gan, 2018; Wong, et al., 2022). For example, Farrell (2006) examined the transition of an ESL teacher from his teacher preparation program to his first year of teaching. This teacher described his difficulties in forming a positive relationship with his colleagues and mentor, not understanding his responsibilities as a teacher and the school culture, as well as feeling conflicted between his teaching beliefs and the school policies. Similarly, Baecher (2012) reported new ESL teachers have trouble collaborating with colleagues, instructing students with low literacy levels, supporting EBs with special needs, and implementing assessment procedures based on local, state, and federal mandates. These studies indicate a great need for current research to re-envision the problem.

### Collegial Support for ESL Teachers

Collegial support is vital for ESL teachers for their teacher identity is, in part, developed based on how they are perceived as ESL teachers by colleagues (Farrell, 2017; Wong & Fitzgerald, 2022; Wong & Turkan, 2022; Wong, et al., 2022). However, lacking collegial support appears to be one of the main challenges of novice ESL teachers. For instance, Wong et al. (2022) revealed that first-year ESL teachers' well-being was affected because of little support from school leaders and colleagues. The participants reported feeling invisible, and the issue intensified during COVID-19. This result aligns with the studies of Haneda and Alexander (2015) and Liggett (2010), which report the secondary status of ESL teachers mirroring EBs' marginalized status in U.S. schools. Indeed, collegial interaction and collaboration play a significant role in building a strong foundation for first-year teachers (Johnson et al., 2012; Toropova et al., 2021). A professional community with colleagues not only strengthens new teachers' teaching quality, but it also allows them to create a strong sense of ownership and dedication to their position and school, which increase teacher retention (Brezicha et al., 2019; Wong & Turkan, 2022).

## Practicum for ESL Teachers

Structured field practicum that includes frequent observations, interaction with EB, as well as collaborations between teacher candidates and mentors are also essential ingredients to the success for novice ESL teachers. These elements also help teacher candidates develop an understanding of EBs' needs and connect theory to practice (Wong et al., 2014). However, fieldwork alone is not sufficient.

Kourieos and Diakou (2019) surveyed and interviewed a group of first-year ESL teachers to understand their perceptions of their preparedness to teach English. The participants found their practicum to be ineffective, mainly due to no (or limited) observations and feedback from their cooperating teachers, who lacked experience teaching EBs. Although the amount of fieldwork required by each teacher preparation program varies, research (Henning et al., 2018; Villarreal & Henning, 2020) indicates that to provide teacher candidates adequate experience in the field, extended (e.g., a year-long) clinical practice can provide them opportunities to work with various stakeholders in authentic scenarios, which, in turn, prepares them for a fluid transition into their first year of teaching. Villarreal and Henning (2020) demonstrated that an extended clinical practicum program is especially helpful for CALD teacher candidates in an education system that maybe new to them.

## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Educators

As mentioned, there is a scarcity of CALD teachers to match the growing number of EBs (Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011; Haddix, 2017). Research (e.g., Gomez & Rodriguez, 2011; Gomez et al., 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2004) indicates that EBs taught by teachers with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds enhance students' academic, psychological, and social development. Not only do CALD teachers demonstrate a strong desire to connect with the students and their families (Gomez et al., 2008), but they also tend to focus on their role as "intellectuals in the schools working with children who have historically received an inequitable education" (Arce, 2004, p. 242). Irizarry and Donaldson (2012) compared a group of White teachers and Latinx teachers and found the latter group showed greater motivations to support Latinx students, held higher expectations of them, valued more of students' funds of knowledge, and were more aware of the socio-political contexts for their students.

Despite the value of having CALD teachers to support EBs, one of the main deterrents to CALD individuals entering the teaching profession is the systemic barriers, such as numerous certification tests and the associated costs, as well as lower salaries compared to other professions (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016). According to Haddix (2017), the current teacher education system fails to acknowledge the values of CALD teachers, requiring them to "excel in Whiteness-centered teacher education programs and in standardized teaching metrics (i.e., teacher certification examinations) to be identified as 'a teacher'" (Haddix, 2017, p. 145). CALD educators also tend to leave the profession within 5 years due to a very low salary and feeling undervalued (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Toropova et al., 2021).

Early research has long suggested that to understand how schools can better support the growing number of EBs, it is imperative for research to include voices of CALD teachers (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Without their voices, "it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities" (p. 58). The studies above show the longevity of the problem and that there is a great need for teacher educators and policy makers to focus on the issue. Hence, I saw a need for a study looking at the experience of a first-year CALD ESL teacher.

## Methods

Using a narrative approach, this study explored a CALD ESL teacher's first-year experience through the protagonist's voice. Narrative inquiry allows me to address "the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning" (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 1). This approach not only helped me identify how the protagonist's background and identity impacted his teaching, but more importantly, it allowed me to understand his perspectives as a new teacher in order to pinpoint the values of CALD teachers and how systemic barriers contribute to teacher attrition.

### Participant

Vollegna (a pseudonym chosen by the protagonist) was chosen to be the protagonist in this narrative because he was the only new ESL teacher with CALD background from a larger study on new ESL teachers. He was in his first year of teaching in an urban high school in the East Coast of the United States. Approximately 95% of the students at the school were Latinx, and 10% of the students were classified as EBs. Vollegna identified himself as a male Latino but preferred being called Hispanic. Speaking Spanish as his first language, Vollegna came to the United States from Peru at the age of 19 as an international student at a community college majoring in Spanish. When Vollegna came to the United States, he hardly spoke any English. Thus, he had to study English while taking collegiate coursework.

Vollegna began his journey as an ESL teacher in January 2020, right after he graduated with a master's degree in education and an endorsement in teaching ESL. In the same semester, Vollegna became a full-time teacher, and he also began his doctoral studies in Educational Leadership. At the time of the study, Vollegna was teaching three ESL English Language Arts (ELA) classes with students at various language proficiency levels. Each class had a mixture of 15 students from grades 10–12. There were nine freshmen in each class, with a total of seven seniors throughout these three classes. An ESL curriculum was absent from the district resources.

### Data Collection

Because my intention was to focus on Vollegna's voice, data were collected utilizing the three-step interview approach (Seidman, 1998) over the course of his first year of teaching (from January 2020 to May 2021). The first interview was conducted in January 2020, the second in October 2020, and the third interview in May 2021. Each interview lasted about 2 hours. Adopting question techniques by Mertova and Webster (2020) for narrative inquiry, I asked questions during the first interview centered around Vollegna's background, why he wanted to become an ESL teacher, and his views on supporting EBs. The second interview focused on his first-year's teaching experience and the school culture. The third interview emphasized his challenges as a new teacher, relationships with different stakeholders in the school, and, once again, what he thought was essential in regard to serving EBs.

### Data Analysis

Analyzing the data through narrative analysis (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995), I organized the lived experiences portrayed in the interview data into a coherent story. To achieve meaningful analysis, I approached the data by focusing on the elements recommended by Yoder-Wise and Kowalski (2003). They are: (a) actions that represent the protagonist's values, concerns, and interests; (b) cause and effect of choices; (c) what was learned that influenced their actions; (d) factors that contributed to their successes; and (e) vulnerability. To achieve trustworthiness for narrative inquiry, I constructed the story with verisimilitude accompanied by audit trails (Kim, 2016; Mertova & Webster, 2020) and adopted the technique of narrative smoothing to make the story coherent and engaging (Kim, 2016). Finally, I presented the findings in the following sequence: how he became an ESL teacher, how he supported EBs, and unsupportive colleagues. I

also included a reflection in which I recounted the ultimate reason why Vollegna left the field of ESL after just 1 year, despite his desire to serve EBs.

### **Researcher Positionality**

My positionality as a K–12 ESL teacher educator and researcher with CALD backgrounds contribute to my understanding of the value of CALD teachers. Over the years, my student teachers often expressed the challenges they faced, even years after they graduated from the program. As such, I have always had interest in the development of ESL professionals. In analyzing the data, I drew from my teaching experience, research, and personal experience as a former EB of Cantonese and English.

## **Findings**

### **How He Became an ESL Teacher**

Throughout all interviews, Vollegna displayed his teacher identity to advocate for his EBs. However, being an ESL teacher was not his original intention. Vollegna had always wished to become a physical education teacher due to his athletic background in Peru. Upon graduating with his bachelor's degree in Spanish, Vollegna remained in the United States and began his graduate studies in education. His interest to serve EBs began with his field observations, required by the teacher education program. He was placed in an urban high school with a high population of EBs.

Being unfamiliar with the United States K–12 education system, Vollegna wanted to prepare himself more. As such, he volunteered to participate in an additional clinical practicum offered by the education department at the university. The practicum program required 220 hours of fieldwork in the school, where teacher candidates fulfilled their original field observation requirement. This extended practicum program, according to Vollegna, influenced his teaching career immensely because it helped him develop teacher identity as an advocate for EBs. He expressed his gratitude toward such a valuable experience because not only did he gain ample authentic classroom practices, but he also had opportunities to work with many stakeholders at the school.

The principal observed Vollegna's teaching as a student teacher and offered him a substitute teaching position and, later, hired him as a full-time bilingual instructional assistant while Vollegna was still attending graduate school. Vollegna expressed, "it was terrifying and challenging for me in the beginning, but I'm very thankful for this long-term practice because I got to experience first-hand the struggles EBs face" (Interview 1). Seeing the inequitable treatment of EBs, specifically neglect by other teachers evoked Vollegna's previous own struggles as a former EB. He said, "I feel that my experience as a language learner in the United States helped me empathize with EBs as they adapt to the new culture" (Interview 1).

The extended clinical practice also created many teaching opportunities for Vollegna. He shared that he was offered various permanent full-time ESL and Spanish teaching positions, even before he began his student teaching. Vollegna chose to stay at the high school where he completed his clinical practice because he had developed strong connections with the EBs during the practicum. He said, "[my students] want to spend their lunch time with me. I know I am making a difference in the school" (Interview 1). He understood the school was unable to offer a high salary to him due to its Title 1 status<sup>1</sup>. He recalled, "I had just rejected two job offers that were going to pay me much more because I know these EBs need someone who understands their struggles" (Interview 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Title 1 schools receive resources and guidance to support students of low-income families (NCES, 2021).

During the first and second interviews, Vollegna demonstrated his eagerness to support EBs and was proud of the positive impact he had made for the students. He also disclosed it took him nine attempts to finally pass the teacher license examination, which was a burden for him in terms of time, energy, and cost. He gasped:

I wanted to make a difference in the students' lives. The test didn't show whether I'm a good teacher or not. My English isn't perfect; I got a perfect score in the Spanish test, so I know I'm a good writer. I'm glad I didn't give up but taking the same test nine times cost me \$900 dollars! There are many immigrants who are passionate in teaching and want to make a difference, but they can't because of the test. (Interview 1)

### **How He Supported EBs**

During the practicum, Vollegna realized that the lack of CALD educators in the field was a major obstacle for the success of EBs. When he began teaching in the school, Vollegna's students were unfamiliar with having a CALD teacher who resembled them because, in Vollegna's words, "most of the people that look and speak like them work as janitors or at the cafeteria" (Interview 2). From his interactions with the students, they soon realized having a teacher resembling them empowered their voices, which helped Vollegna further develop his teacher identity as an advocate for his EBs. It also helped him and his students to develop trust in one another.

Since the majority of Vollegna's students were immigrants of Hispanic or Brazilian descent, it was important to him to help his students understand they should not be ashamed of their immigration status and accent. Vollegna had noticed that his students often refused to speak in front of others because of their accent and English proficiency; thus, he hoped to share this message to all educators, "we should continue giving EBs ample opportunities and trust that they will succeed" (Interview 3).

Being a former EB, Vollegna understood clearly that he needed more than learning English to survive in the new country. He emphasized that by acknowledging what his EBs would encounter outside of school and approaching his lessons through the lens of his cultural knowledge, as well as his use of authentic materials that focused on current events. For example, Vollegna described, "unlike my colleagues who discussed tourism with EBs, we discussed the Women's Rights movement. I have a lot of female students, but the Latinx culture is very masculine, so I always strive to empower my female students to have their voices and have their own rights" (Interview 2).

Vollegna expressed that navigating his first year was challenging. For example, 2 months after he started teaching, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. So while Vollegna was still learning how to survive his first year, he had to also determine how to teach virtually. However, this obstacle did not stop his desire to serve his EBs. Vollegna constantly found ways to circumvent the obstacles through research, reaching his students, and participating in various school initiatives. Mirroring a strategy his professor used to help him with his writing, Vollegna asked his students to do homework live with him. He stated:

I dedicate 25 minutes per day for them to write about anything they want. When they get stuck, I ask them to use all of their language resources, English or their native language to draft and structure their writing. I have them write on a Google document, and I edit it with them there. (Interview 2)

What Vollegna referred to is translanguaging, which is a practice and process that allows students to use all of their language repertoires to construct meaning without adhering to the socially and politically defined named languages (García, 2009; Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015). Thus, translanguaging is a way to create a just learning environment for EBs (García, 2009; García et al., 2017). Vollegna reported the progress he saw from his students' writing and speaking as a result of implementing translanguaging. "I remember on the first week of my teaching, they could barely write one paragraph. Two weeks ago, we focused on using conjunctive adverbs in their writing. Guess what? They used those adverbs in their debate last week" (Interview 3). This

approach also helped Vollegna develop meaningful connections with his students. He used this writing activity as a way to understand his students and what they were going through, such as relationship or family problems.

Another example that illustrates Vollegna's strong desire to advocate for EB's success was through a peer mentorship program he developed specifically for EBs. This program provided leadership opportunities for the more experienced EBs to mentor newcomers. Vollegna found that EBs lack opportunities to be recognized, to be leaders, and to connect with other peers within schools. He said, "just because English isn't their first language doesn't mean they shouldn't be given opportunities to be leaders" (Interview 3). Vollegna recalled a powerful statement that his students shared with him: "I finally feel that I belong to the school."

### **Unsupportive Colleagues**

Vollegna's teacher identity and determination to advocate for EBs also stemmed from the unsupportive colleagues he encountered at the school. ESL teacher identity is developed based on how they are perceived as ESL teachers by colleagues, which plays an important role in their professional decision making (Farrell, 2017). I reported, in the finding, that Vollegna had a few supportive colleagues from the ESL team and an understanding principal, and it is apparent that the unsupportive colleagues motivated him to fight harder for his EBs.

Vollegna revealed the marginalized status of ESL teachers and EBs in the school. In his words, "ESL students or ESL teachers are looked down upon... we are not respected. I'm the only Hispanic male teacher in the whole school to support my students, so I need to make sure that I keep my job" (Interview 2). Vollegna's observation echoes the existing literature regarding the marginalized status of ESL teachers as a reflection of EBs' standing in U.S. public schools (Haneda & Alexander, 2015; Liggett, 2010). The secondary status of EBs and ESL teachers in Vollegna's school was provoked by his colleagues' lack of understanding of EBs. Through his time working in the school, Vollegna realized that many of his EBs were misunderstood by other teachers. They often viewed EBs as lazy and lacking motivation to learn. Vollegna's frustration with how EBs were looked down upon increased gradually from the second to the third interviews. He said:

We had a meeting last week and it was reported that about 70% of EBs were failing PE! Seriously, how do you fail PE when you are only supposed to run? Guess what? Because the instructions were never explained to them properly. Now these students have a bad reputation that they don't want to learn... that's also another reason why I'm going for my doctorate. To just let them know that an ESL student can go this far too (Interview 3).

Encouraging his colleagues to understand EBs' struggles during COVID-19 was an additional battle in Vollegna's first year. Due to the pandemic, Vollegna's students had to seek employment to financially support their families. However, based on the conversations he had with some of his colleagues, he felt that many of them had a different perspective on EBs and ESL teachers. In his words:

We, the ESL teachers, are often looked down upon by other teachers because they think that we water down content for the students and the students don't do anything. In fact, a few students reached out to me and said they were failing their classes and didn't know what to do. (Interview 3)

Vollegna believed it was unjust to penalize his students for supporting their families. With the strong connections between Vollegna and the students, they would also contact him when encountering problems. He recalled, "the students pinged me at 6 or 7 in the evening about their assignments while working at the top of the roof. They were 15 years old, working extensively in the middle of the pandemic supporting their families" (Interview 3). Rather than failing the students, Vollegna believed education goes beyond teaching

and that building student trust and confidence is crucial to their success, contrary to other teachers in the school.

By law, Vollegna was required to have a mentor during his first year. But since there was only one ESL supervisor in the entire district, new ESL teachers are often paired with mentors from other departments. Mentors play a significant role in new teacher development; thus, it is important for them to be knowledgeable in the mentees' content areas (Schwan et al., 2020) and be willing to learn about the mentees' practices (Wexler, 2018). Vollegna's mentor, Ella (pseudonym), was an experienced ELA teacher in the district for 17 years. However, Vollegna was disappointed in Ella's inadequate knowledge of EBs and her discouraging comments on his efforts in the classroom. Instead of providing support and guidance, Ella merely placed emphasis on the ELA standards rather than EBs well-being, especially during the pandemic. Reflecting on the disagreement he had with Ella, Vollegna stated:

I wish more teachers understood the needs of EBs. There's a constant battle between the ESL department and everybody else in the school. Many teachers believe that we need to hold EBs to the same standards as other students. When my students go to their elective classes, they often don't receive accommodations. I've even heard these colleagues say if EBs don't know something, they should just use the dictionary or Google Translate. (Interview 3)

New teachers are often hesitant to voice their opinions for fear of losing their jobs or offending colleagues (Watson, 2015). Contrarily, Vollegna described himself, during the first interview, as being confident when voicing his opinions. He believed new teachers should share their knowledge and thoughts in order to be part of the school community. However, in the second and third interviews, Vollegna expressed reluctance in sharing his opinions. What caused his mindset shift was the lack of colleagues who advocate for EBs. Therefore, he viewed that it was necessary for him to be careful so he could stay at the school for his EBs. He said, "there's so much stuff I can say, but because I'm the only [Hispanic male]—I'm gonna make sure I keep my job" (Interview 2).

Collegial collaboration plays an important role in new teacher development (Toropova et al., 2021), but ESL teachers often report feeling isolated when supporting EBs (Baecher, 2012). Vollegna's experience was no different. Without much collaborative effort from his colleagues, he had to take on extra responsibilities when administrators came to him for help. He said:

I've been asked to develop goals for ELA, Math, and Special Education for EBs. I have also been asked to write a curriculum for race, gender, and ethnicity for the School of Social Justice here because most of my colleagues don't know what to do. (Interview 3)

Although Vollegna expressed feeling exhausted and mentioned his low salary during the second interview, he emphasized teachers do not become teachers due to money. Instead, he did not let the challenges stop him from serving his students. He said, "it's difficult to say no sometimes, especially when you're new. I still don't know how to balance the family and everything else. But yeah, teachers don't become teachers because of salary. They become teachers to make a difference" (Interview 2). Imbalanced collegial support became an external force to drive Vollegna's commitment to create more opportunities for his students, yet, due to this imbalance, he was asked to take on more tasks because very few colleagues were willing to share the responsibilities, which created extra stress on his part.

## Reflection

Vollegna's determination to advocate for EBs did not lessen throughout the three interviews. At the start of his first year, Vollegna displayed his enthusiasm and willingness to be a great teacher. He loved his position and students so much that he would work at the district until he retired. In his words, "My experience, so far, has



made me fall in love with the profession even more. Trust me, I have considered retiring from this district” (interview 1). In the second interview, despite hardship from unsupportive colleagues and COVID-19, Vollegna continued to find different ways to overcome his obstacles. However, when describing the curricula for which he was responsible, Vollegna started to display his vulnerability and stated, “in all honesty, these responsibilities make my first year quite overwhelming. It’s difficult to say ‘no’, especially when you’re new and when you’re the only male Hispanic teacher here” (Interview 3). His statement of “when you’re the only male Hispanic teacher here” also reflects the issue of lacking CALD teachers to represent the EB population.

Vollegna spoke more about his low salary during the third interview. Besides his wish to support EBs, another reason he took on extra responsibilities at the school was also due to his low salary. Trying to find a balance between his professional obligations and his family life without much collegial support caused him to suffer from teacher burnout. He shared:

I love my students. I really want to advocate for them, but from a personal standpoint, the reason why I try to be involved in many projects was also because of my small salary. So, I want to get as many stipends as I can to support my family. I still don’t know how to find a balance between my family and everything else at work. This reality burns me out. (Interview 3)

Unfortunately, Vollegna unveiled towards the end of the third interview about his decision of leaving his ESL position for a Spanish teaching position. He emphasized it was not due to a diminished passion to serve EBs; rather, he was offered a much higher pay to teach Spanish to English speaking students. He felt exasperated:

My family is growing, and I really need to support them. As much as I want to stay here, I’ve just resigned from this position for a much higher paying job. It’s a huge difference. I’ll start working as a Spanish teacher. (Interview 3)

It is clear from Vollegna’s narrative that he is a strong advocate for EBs due to his shared cultural and linguistic background with the students, as well as his previous experience as an EB. His deep understanding of his students’ struggles, needs, and the inequitable treatments (as a result of their secondary status in the school) motivated him to fight for them. Vollegna’s commitment to advocate for the students also operated as a guide in his instructional decision-making process (e.g., selection of content topics, use of strategies to connect with students, and program creation). Nonetheless, regardless of his strong devotion to the students, Vollegna could not find a balance between family and work mainly due to his low salary.

## Discussion

Vollegna’s teacher identity and commitment to advocate for EBs reaffirms the studies (e.g., Arce, 2004; Gomez et al., 2008; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012) that show that CALD teachers, who share their students’ experiences, strive for equitable education for EBs, connect more with them, and serve as a model to the students (Haddix, 2017). Therefore, to create social justice for EBs, teacher educators need to remind themselves of the strengths that CALD teachers bring into the field, which requires them to “re-examine our programs and practices to account for diverse students’ prior experiences, knowledge, skills, and many ways of being” (Gomez et al., 2008, p. 280).

As shown in this study, a well-designed teacher preparation program alone is not sufficient to attract and retain CALD teachers. Vollegna’s story indicated systemic barriers that need to be addressed immediately. It took Vollegna nine times to pass one of the required teacher licensure examinations. Not only do these tests fail to examine the effectiveness of teachers, but the associated costs and time spent on the tests become a gatekeeper for many, especially those with CALD backgrounds to even have a chance to become teachers (Haddix, 2017; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Petchauer, 2018). Even after they enter the profession, the low

salary phenomenon for teachers certainly does not attract many CALD teachers, who bring valuable cultural and linguistic experiences to the classrooms (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016).

Previously, Vollegna had received two Spanish teaching job offers—with a much higher salary—but he rejected them because of his desire to serve EBs. Although he faced numerous workplace challenges, Vollegna continued to advocate for his students. Unfortunately, after combating all these obstacles, Vollegna found his low salary unsustainable, which was an ultimate reason for him to leave the ESL field and accept a Spanish teaching position within just 1 year. Thus, more efforts and actions need to be taken to recruit and retain CALD teachers by re-assessing the contents and values of these teacher licensure exams and reconfiguring the pay scale for CALD teachers. Hence, policy makers should re-envision the importance of having a more diverse teacher workforce. Only through understanding the strengths and values CALD teachers bring to schools can we create a solution that responds to their interests and attracts more of the potential individuals (Haddix, 2017).

An element that influenced Vollegna's navigation of his first year was the extended clinical experience he obtained at a local school. Vollegna's feelings of readiness and his ability to teach are supported by the research (Henning et al., 2018). Villarreal and Henning (2020) reported the benefits of having additional time for practical training in the same setting. Similarly, for Vollegna, he stated this practicum helped him gain a deep understanding of the needs of EBs, developed a positive relationship with them, and opened a door for more teaching opportunities. Based on Vollegna's narrative, the extended practicum contributed to a more effective transition for him as a teacher. Based on the data from this narrative study, ESL teacher education programs should consider partnerships with local school districts to provide teacher candidates extended period of practicum so that they are better prepared to serve EBs. Evidence (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014) states, a longer practicum experience helps CALD teacher candidates build an improved sense of the school community which may be an important factor contributing to new teachers' job satisfactory and retention.

## Conclusion

This narrative study illustrated the journey of a first-year ESL teacher, Vollegna, with CALD backgrounds. Vollegna's story supports previous literature (Haddix, 2017) regarding the value of CALD teachers in EB education. His story also indicated the urgency of revisiting the systemic barriers that serve as gatekeepers to recruiting and retaining a diverse teacher workforce. While we focus our conversations on equitable education for EBs, we only contradict ourselves if we neglect the needs of this valuable group of teachers by treating them unfairly, specifically offering them a lower salary compared to teaching other subjects to English speaking students. In addition, collegial collaborations play a crucial role in new teacher identity, as well as their transition and continued development. Collaborations between colleagues can create a positive school community at large and can make a difference in a new teacher's journey in the profession (Wong & Fitzgerald, 2022; Wong & Turkan, 2022; Wong et al., 2022). Finally, my goal in this study was to highlight the protagonist's experience through his voice; I suggest future studies to include classroom observations so as to provide a broader picture of new ESL teachers' experiences.

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