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# The Look Act (2017) in Massachusetts: implications to society and teacher education

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## Abstract

This article presents some implications of the Look Act to education in Massachusetts, by first discussing the latest USA educational laws, as they set the scene for the Look Act, which will then be examined in correlation with teacher education and the educational tensions generated by its implementation. Some of its implications to society, resulting from the recent changes in English Language Learners (ELL) teaching in Massachusetts, will be addressed, since teacher education, educators, families, students, and other education-related stakeholders are closely interwoven as they seek to prepare individuals to live in society. Of qualitative approach, this research seeks to construct new knowledge, without necessarily generating solutions to specific problems. For schools equipped with skilled ELL teachers, priority should be given to assigning them leader roles so that they can advocate successfully for ELL and its future. Administrators, however, seem to forget that changes should be implemented according to teachers, who are usually ignored. Besides, ELLs bring strengths from their cultures, and must be valued for their language competence.

## Keywords

The Look Act – Professional development – ELLs – Massachusetts – Education.

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## ***The Look Act (2017) em Massachusetts: implicações para a sociedade e a formação de professores***

### **Resumo**

*Este artigo objetiva apresentar algumas implicações para a educação em Massachusetts, tendo como foco a legislação denominada The Look Act. Para isto, algumas das mais recentes leis educacionais dos EUA serão apresentadas, pois elas definem o cenário para a Lei Look, que terá alguns de seus itens expostos e discutidos em conexão com o processo de formação de professores e as tensões educacionais relacionadas à implantação dessa lei. Algumas implicações para a sociedade também serão apresentadas como resultado das recentes mudanças nos direitos de ensino de English Language Learners (ELL) em Massachusetts a partir do pressuposto de que a formação de professores, famílias, alunos e demais agentes relacionados com a educação estão intimamente ligados, à medida que buscam a preparação de indivíduos para viver em sociedade. De abordagem qualitativa, esta pesquisa é de natureza básica, pois permite a construção de novos conhecimentos, sem necessariamente gerar soluções para problemas específicos. Observou-se que nas escolas onde já existem professores qualificados para atender ELLs, a prioridade deve ser dar-lhes papéis de liderança, de maneira que possam defender, com sucesso, os ELLs e seu futuro. No entanto, identificou-se que gestores, por vezes, esquecem que as mudanças devem ser efetuadas de acordo com os professores, que costumam ser postos de lado. Além disso, os ELLs trazem pontos fortes de suas culturas, assim, devendo ser valorizados por sua competência.*

### **Palavras-chave**

*The Look Act – Formação profissional – ELLs – Massachusetts – Educação.*

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### **Introduction**

Since my early years as a researcher, a resounding question has plagued my thoughts every time I see any major institutional act directed at education and teacher classroom practices: Has anyone considered the teacher, the one who will be responsible for putting all those new guidelines into practice in their classes?

This question inevitably leads to others, accrued from issues that often cross the minds of Educators involved and committed to teacher education, such as: what does it take to prepare teachers who are already in service? What would be the most significant changes in their teaching practices? How long would it take to prepare them? Is there any theoretical basis for such changes? Why are they necessary?

Naturally, the debates around an educational Bill are filled with tense moments from start to finish, when it finally affects teacher practice. All this tension seamlessly weaves the aspects that will directly interfere with the fabric of students' lives, as they, supposedly, are the main concern when discussing anything that imply changes and consequences to their educational paths and may lead them towards a different direction.

Tension, here, is understood as the action-reaction movement among the subjects involved in the educational process when faced with situations that impel them to react, taking direct, but not always explicit, action against the inciting cause. These tensions contribute to establish boundaries between what is or is not acceptable and feasible, which define the subjects' behaviors in professional settings.

According to Tardif (2014), teachers are constantly under pressure, especially when they try to mediate knowledge acquisition meaningfully to enable learning. However, they are often unable to adequately deploy the expected practices due to the lack of guidelines, and that is what in service teacher training tackles. Hence, public administration needs to set the foundation for developing laws, acts, regulations, and guidelines to define a common basis for education. In this process, people with different backgrounds, profiles, expertise, ideas and values weave together the fabric of education in a conspicuous attempt to provide students with the necessary skills and abilities to achieve their goals.

This chain of actions configures a network of distinct functions that together contribute to operating, controlling, and maintaining the pedagogical hallmark designed for teaching practice, establishing the tensions inherent to Education. In turn, teachers resort to the available tools to stand and advocate for their rights.

Meanwhile, English Language Learners (ELL), the object of educational concerns in Massachusetts, struggle to fit into an educational system that often offers only hard paths to traverse. Beyond the school walls, an uncertain future, imbued with inequality and prejudice, awaits these immigrant children who still have a long way to go to enter the job market in a society that should be theirs. As pieces of the puzzle of life, everyday experiences and interactions slowly fill the gaps and give a glimpse of what their future might be like. In any society,

[...] a large number of individuals form with each other something that is more and other than a collection of separate individuals – how they form a 'society', and how it comes about that this society can change in specific ways, that it has a history which takes a course which has not been intended or planned by any of the individuals making it up. (ELIAS, 2001, p. 7).

Given this context, this paper presents some implications of the Language Opportunity for Our Kids (Look) Act (2017)<sup>2</sup> to education in Massachusetts. For this purpose, we will first discuss some of the latest USA educational laws, as they set the scene for the Look Act, which will then be examined in relation to teacher education. Some of its implications to society will be addressed, resulting from the recent changes in the English Language Learners teaching rights in Massachusetts. The article brings some

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**2-** These aspects will be investigated by an educator and researcher who, in the 2017-2018 academic year, was developing her post-Doctoral research and acting as a visiting scholar at UMass Boston.

observations made during my 2017–2018 stay in Boston. Of qualitative approach, this research seeks to construct new knowledge, without necessarily generating solutions to specific problems (SILVEIRA; CÓRDOVA, 2009).

## **Where did it come from? An overview of recent major changes in USA Education**

Providing Education with clear and straightforward legislation, regulations, guidelines, and any other policies can be seen as an insurmountable challenge, especially considering the limited role the US federal government plays in education. Per the tenth amendment, most education policies are voted at the state and local levels. Nevertheless, the development of ancillary activities plays an important role in supporting Education policy.

Organization of public education is based on the legal scope. When commenting on the legal basis that normalizes the creation of guidelines or other policies, Faria Filho (1998, p. 94) states that “[...] all have their origin in some legal act.” From this perspective, they are the expression of legal imperatives, i.e., the law. Administrative activities pertain, therefore, to legal imperatives that are supposed to guide decisions and actions, as in No Child Left Behind (2020):

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, was enacted in 2002 during Obama’s Administration. It represented a significant step forward for our nation’s children in many respects, particularly as it shined a light on where students were making progress and where they needed additional support, regardless of race, income, zip code, disability, home language, or background. (THE USA, 2020, n/p.).

According to Yell (2006), the goals set by the NCLB Act posed important challenges to be overcome by both the states and school districts. From then on, they were to show demonstrable improvements and provide schools with the means to achieve higher quality standards, as Congress increased federal support in education. Moreover, it provided states with flexible use of the federal funds so that they could benefit school districts in their specificities:

- All students will achieve high academic standards by attaining proficiency or better in reading and mathematics by the 2013–2014 school year.
- Highly qualified teachers will teach all students
- All students will be educated in schools and classrooms that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.
- All limited English proficient students will become proficient in English.
- All students will graduate from high school. (YELL, 2006, p. 181).

While some expressed that “NCLB has made this a different world! Now, there is an emphasis on demonstrating how school programs contribute to student academic achievement” (WILK CZENSKI; COOMEY, 2010, p. 60), others saw it as a controversial law for putting educators under great pressure, as they were held responsible for increasing

student achievement and narrowing the test score gap among students from different racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Those directly involved in education would need “[...] to understand effective research-based instructional strategies and be able to evaluate student’s instructional progress to make more effective instructional decisions” (YELL, 2006, p. 181).

As time went by, NCLB requirements became a burden for schools and educators, given its striking feature of requiring demonstrable improvements through test scores, which in some respects highlighted the differences and specific needs of each district. A revision was scheduled for 2007, and in 2010 the Obama administration created another law that sought to meet the needs and bridge the gaps left by NCLB.

Signed on December 10, 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was meant to reflect the educators’ and families’ call for a supportive legislation able to provide a basis to prepare students for college and career success. Thus, ESSA amended and reauthorized the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)<sup>3</sup>, setting high standards, establishing policies that prioritized excellence and equity and recognized the importance of supporting school educators in the US. To provide guidance during the transition process from the ESEA (THE USA, 1965), amended by NCLB (THE USA, 2002) to the ESEA<sup>4</sup> amended by ESSA (THE USA, 2015), the US Department of Education offered some tools to better inform educators, school districts, schools and a number of education-related organizations in the country during its implementation.

ESSA (THE USA, 2015) marks a significant return of educational authority from the federal government to the state and local levels. For many state education offices and district school leaders, the act highlights a time when schools’ and teachers’ successes or even their failures were not based solely on students’ standardized test scores. Instead, ESSA requires the use of different tools to monitor students’ learning and improvement to support them on their paths to career success. Therefore, it decreases the stakes and the amount of testing and ensures that the federal government can no longer require these tests as part of teacher evaluation. Public education becomes a joint responsibility, since ESSA unites different stakeholders, such as state education offices, district school leaders, teachers, principals, and families, as well as High Education Institutions, among others. First and foremost, it aims at funding to support disenfranchised schools and children.

With this in mind, teacher preparation is the cornerstone of any educational change. Left poorly addressed, it can become a hindrance to education development. Thus, a significant grant was designated for preparing teacher candidates. According to Fránquiz and Ortiz (2016), implementation changes were not expected to take full effect until the 2017-18 school year. To engage in effective action towards its goal, five Teacher Preparation Transformation Centers are responsible for developing, piloting, and scaling up effective pedagogical practices: National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR); Teacher Squared, led by the Relay Graduate School of Education; Teaching

**3-** ESEA (THE USA, 1965) offered a series of federal grants to districts serving low-income students for textbooks and library books, funding for special education centers, scholarships for low-income college students. Likewise, it provided federal grants to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education nationwide.

**4-** For further information see: The USA (2015).

Works at the University of Michigan; University-School Partnerships for the Renewal of Educator Preparation (U.S. PREP) National Center, based at Texas Tech University; and the Elevate Preparation, Impact Children (EPIC), led by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. These five centers undertook the responsibility of overcoming what appears to be an issue problem in any educational proposal: efficient teacher preparation.

Schooling and society are undoubtedly and intrinsically related. From the ideas, ideals, actions, and values posed so far, we begin to unveil the possible positive outcomes. One must bear in mind, however, that “[...] each society is a society of individuals” (ELIAS, 2001, p. 6), some of whom make up the public administration, obliged by law to provide guidelines, regulations, and resources so that teachers, the ones who are supposed to put the changes into practice, are able to provide students with good quality teaching.

Some may say state leaders are the driving forces behind any successful educational implementation, and that teacher preparation can become a hindrance to the educational development process if implemented poorly. I would counter that statement by positing that success in meeting this challenge relies on the hands of teachers. The effort to provide an effective pipeline of diverse teachers capable of acting in a culturally responsive manner to deliver high-quality instruction to every student is a and rocky road, potholes, and hardships that may demotivate some but challenge others. Thus, successful implementation of policies and evidence-based practice solutions must be built together.

Amidst all the aspects pointed out above, the large number of vulnerable people in Massachusetts—immigrants who happen to be bilingual students—stands out. These students require access to content knowledge to succeed; therefore, stakeholders must ensure that they make the most out of what education can provide, including but not limited to,

- engaging in the development of an Emergent Bilingual student accountability system for your state,
- attending to capacity-building efforts specific to early childhood,
- identifying best practices for emergent bilingual learners,
- identifying best practices for children with disabilities,
- informing parents of their options specific to assessments,
- understanding entry and exit criteria for specialized programs, and
- working with teacher preparation programs in your state. (FRÁNQUIZ; ORTIZ, 2016, p. 2).

During their first year in the country, English Language Learners’ test scores will not count towards the school rating, but they will need to take both assessments for reading and math, and have the results publicly reported. States can include ELLs’ test scores after they have been in the school system for one year, and have to incorporate their results for both reading and math, using some measure of growth, in the second year. The proficiency scores of newly arrived ELLs will be considered like those of any other student only in their third year.

When ELLs begin attending school, they are taken out of their classrooms every day to take English classes, which happen until they reach the proficiency level as measured

by the state. Massachusetts is part of a consortium<sup>5</sup> called WIDA<sup>6</sup>, , which has a set of standards (Table 1) representing the social, instructional, and academic language ELLs need to engage with their peers, educators, and the school curriculum.

**Table 1** – WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards

| Standard                                |                                                                                                                                                          | Abbreviation                      |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| English Language Development Standard 1 | English language learners <b>communicate</b> for <b>Social</b> and <b>Instructional</b> purposes within the school setting                               | Social and Instructional language |
| English Language Development Standard 2 | English language learners <b>communicate</b> information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of <b>Language Arts</b>  | The language of Language Arts     |
| English Language Development Standard 3 | English language learners <b>communicate</b> information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of <b>Mathematics</b>    | The language of Mathematics       |
| English Language Development Standard 4 | English language learners <b>communicate</b> information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of <b>Science</b>        | The language of Science           |
| English Language Development Standard 5 | English language learners <b>communicate</b> information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of <b>Social Studies</b> | The language of Social Studies    |

Source: <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/2012-ELD-Standards.pdf>. Access: September 13, 2020.

WIDA's instructional framework has been under a three-year implementation process over 2018-2021 and has invited educators from its consortium to engage in it as it began introducing a standards-based framework in 2019. This action intends to provide improvements by updating its support for educators who work with ELLs daily.

Undoubtedly, states are responsible for upholding order through laws and regulations that answer societal needs, but this role is under pressure from societal needs versus individual needs and the yearning for democracy. Dewey (2007) gets to the core issue surrounding education: the lack of a genuine democratic society. He states that the purpose of education is to provide individuals in a given society with the skills necessary for continuous learning, i.e., the ability to evolve seamlessly—which can only happen in a truly democratic society.

Teachers are central to this process of meeting the needs of all students and providing them with a more equitable education, for education, society, democracy and

**5-** Eight member states have adopted the WIDA English Language Development Standards and participate in other Consortium activities, namely: New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and District of Columbia.

**6-** "In 2002 an EAG grant provided initial funding for the organization that would become WIDA. Three states were involved in the grant: Wisconsin (WI), Delaware (D), and Arkansas (A), so the acronym WIDA was chosen for the name. At the last minute, however, Arkansas dropped out, and World-class Instructional Design and Assessment was created to fit the acronym. As WIDA grew, however, the original name no longer adequately described its mission. Recently WIDA decided to stop using the acronym definition. Now WIDA just means WIDA. Read our Mission, Vision, and Values to see what we stand for." Available at: <https://www.wida.us/aboutus/mission.aspx>. Access: September 13, 2020.

equity are intertwined in the school context. Educators must therefore diversify their teaching materials and reflect critically about the realities of the students they teach. Consequently, a certain level of tension in education occurs as we develop a better sense of the need for creating ancillary services to support the educational system.

ELLs need to be taught by well-trained, experienced teachers and receive high-quality education, especially in content-area classes. Teachers need to encourage students to fight for the support they need in an equitable educational system in which all students can achieve success while pursuing their personal goals. Aware of this need, the Massachusetts Legislature passed the Language Opportunity for Our Kids (Look) bill, expanding options for ELLs in the Commonwealth's public schools to help students compete in the global economy.

## **The Look English language learners needed**

The Look Act (LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY, 2017) was enacted on November 15, 2020, by the State House and Senate, and signed by the Governor of Massachusetts on November 22. It allows local Commonwealth schools to provide bilingual classes for students who are not fluent in English, called English Language Learners (ELL), thus ensuring equal access to high-quality education and professional opportunities. Look removed restrictions on bilingual education, established a new dual language endorsement, and created the Seal of Biliteracy in Massachusetts.

It specifically eliminates the artificial one-year goal for participation in the EL program and replaces it with benchmarks for achieving English proficiency (LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY, 2017). Another important aspect is that parents can request the district to have their children take classes in their native language so that they can use their background knowledge to better understand ideas and concepts. The Look Act also removes the obstacle of parental waiver to participation in bilingual programs.

In Massachusetts, teachers are tasked with educating nearly 1 million public school students and 20,000 adult learners each year<sup>7</sup>. Over the course of a career, teachers have the opportunity to positively impact hundreds and sometimes thousands of individuals. Wei (2000, p. 21) advocates that “[...] more and more people in the world will become bilinguals, and bilingualism will stay as long as humankind walks the earth.” When it comes to bilingual education, which “[...] is a way of providing meaningful and equitable education, as well as an education that builds tolerance towards other linguistic and cultural groups” (GARCÍA, 2009, p. 26), one must consider the more than 90,000 students who are English Language Learners (GLATTER, 2017). ESSA (THE USA, 2015) defines an ELL as someone

- A. who is aged 3 through 21;
- B. who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
- C.(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (ii)(I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying

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**7-** For further information see: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/StudentsFamilies.html>. Access: June 30, 2019.

areas; and (II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and

D. whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual – (i) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3); (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society. (THE USA, 2019, p. 12).

García (2009, p. 144) emphasizes the importance of translanguaging for bilingual and multilingual societies, as it “[...] is the act performed by bilinguals to access different linguistic features or various modes [...] in order to maximize communicative potential.” It helps construct meaning from the linguistic signs present in the different languages of the communities, and is an essential practice for language minority children who often connect their parents to other individuals while translating and signifying the target language for them. In this regard, according to research conducted by the Council of Great City Schools (2019), the enrollment of ELLs in MA has increased considerably in recent years: 70,883 ELLs in 2013-14; 75,531 in 2014-15; 82,779 in 2015-16.

A striking feature of this information is that teacher preparation must address the need to improve the lives of ELLs across Massachusetts to carve out knowledge and critical thinking skill sets that are essential in an information age. They must also develop students' creativity, innovation, and flexibility, preparing them to make decisions, solve problems collaboratively and ethically, use technology to gather, analyze, and summarize information for acting in a global economy, and inspire others to reach out, serve, and work together. It is not an easy task at all.

When clarifying what has to be done, Freire (2002, p. 38) argues that “teaching requires understanding that education is a form of intervention in the world.” For the educator, reading the word is much more than the means to change society for transformative praxis is realized in the hands of teachers and students as they struggle together for social justice (FREIRE, 2007). He also advocates the importance of listening to difference. In light of his words, we can say without hesitation that interrelatedness occurs when the critical teaching involves the dynamic dialectical movement between doing and thinking about one's practice.

In this regard, the Look Act (LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY, 2017) foresees for the development of ancillary services to support teachers, as it establishes new Educator Qualifications. It “directs DESE to establish educator endorsements for all EL program types including Sheltered English Immersion, Two-Way Immersion, and Transitional Bilingual Education.” (LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY, 2017, p. 3). It also states that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) must establish endorsements by May 1, 2018, including both coursework and a field experience for bilingual education teachers seeking to acquire the skills necessary to teach in a bilingual education context. To achieve this goal, DESE has established Subject Matter Knowledge (SMK) requirements

for educators to obtain Bilingual Education endorsement through coursework and field experience to teach in bilingual classrooms complying with 603CMR7.14(3)(b)<sup>8</sup>, which clearly indicates that SMK teachers need:

1. The basic structure and functions of language.
2. Second language acquisition factors as they affect access to the Massachusetts standards.
3. Social-cultural, affective, political, and other salient factors in second language acquisition.
4. Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) principles and typologies: General academic and domain-specific discourse practices relevant to the grade level (k-5 or secondary), English proficiency level, and content area (English language arts and history; science and mathematics; other content areas).
5. Implementation of strategies for coordinating SEI and English language development instruction for English learners.
6. Federal and Massachusetts' laws and regulations pertaining to English learners.
7. Understanding of diversity and background of English learner populations, including family systems, and communities, and their impact on teaching and learning.
8. Theory, research, and practice of reading and writing for English learners. Practices and approaches for developing reading and writing skills and comprehension in English for English learners who are at different levels of English language proficiency.
9. The role of oral language development in literacy development for English learners.
10. Formative and summative assessments for English learners.
11. Literacy and academic language development. The role of vocabulary development in accessing academic language. (MASSACHUSETTS, 2019, n/p.).

Prior to the Look Act (LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY, 2017), educational policy, dictated by a 2002 ballot measure, stipulated that a non-native speaker should be taught almost all the time in English. The new legislation tempers this one-size-fits-all approach by giving educators more flexibility, including teaching in the students' native language, which establishes a Bilingual Education environment. The purpose of the Massachusetts Bilingual Education Endorsement is to enhance the knowledge that educators have whenever they are working in bilingual education settings. Nonetheless, teachers are not the only ones who need to be knowledgeable when it comes to Bilingual Education. Principals, assistant principals, supervisors, or anyone else who supervises or evaluates a core academic teacher assigned to provide instruction to ELLs must also have a Bilingual Education Endorsement or SEI Endorsement.

The Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy, established under the Look Act (LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY, 2017), recognizes graduates who speak, listen, read, and write proficiently in a language other than English by providing them with a seal on their high school diploma, proving that students have achieved a high level of proficiency, meaning that they can mobilize these languages in authentic, real-life situations. Its goal is to promote long-term study of foreign, native, and heritage languages, document

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**8-** Educator Licensure and Preparation Program Approval Regulations. Available at: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html?section=14>. Access: July 8, 2019.

achievement in biliteracy, and to produce a biliterate, multicultural workforce capable of entering the job market, since the Seal of Biliteracy is supposed to:

Encourage students to study and master languages; • Certify attainment of biliteracy skills; • Recognize the value of language diversity; • Provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills; • Provide universities with a method to recognize and give credit to applicants for the attainment of high-level skills in languages; • Prepare students with skills that will benefit them in the labor market and the global society; and • Strengthen intergroup communication and honor the multiple cultures and languages in a community (State Regulation 603 CMR 31.01(3)). (SEAL OF BILITERACY, 2022).

From 2014 to 2018, schools and school districts around Massachusetts participated in a pilot project by the Seal of Biliteracy. In 2018, the third and final year of the local pilot, over 100 educators had participated in the Seal of Biliteracy workgroup, and 26 schools and school districts received 1,339 awards. But the State Seal of Biliteracy program actually begins with the 2019 graduating class.

Great teachers are also lifelong learners, as they continually seek to improve their skills and add new strategies to their toolkit. But they cannot do much alone—education requires a lot of effort and engagement from those who are involved with it in some capacity. Teachers, students, families, educators, school and district administrators, the public administration as a whole must dive into the sometimes clear, sometimes murky waters of education, keeping in mind that everyone has a role in this process to enhance the necessary skills students need to prepare themselves for living in society. As Freire (2004) states,

Dreams are visions for which one fights. Their realization cannot take place easily, without obstacles. It implies, on the contrary, advances, reversals, and at times, lengthy marches. It implies struggle. In reality, the world transformation that dreams aspire to is a political act, and it would be naive of anyone not to recognize that dreams also have their counter-dreams. (FREIRE, 2004, p. 32).

In other words, dreams, counter-dreams, struggle, victory, compromise, failures, advances, reversals, are all part of life in society; but shared responsibility contributes to the healthy development, learning, and growth of subjects. Engaging people builds relationships between students, educators, families, and the community as, over time, specific relationships develop into meaningful partnerships rooted in the strengths and assets of all involved. Being culturally responsive, collaborative, equitable, and respectful of diverse languages, norms, and values makes a total difference when it comes to removing barriers to participation and crossing students' right to live and learn.

So far, laws, regulations, and guidelines have been presented as a hallmark in the lives of ELLS, their teachers, families, and educators as a result of the Look Act. Moments of tension have arisen before its birth, as actions are taken and reactions occur as a consequence of pushing things and people forward, defining their behavior in professional

settings, providing them with new experiences. As school districts are experiencing rapidly growing enrollments of ELLs, engaged educators wonder how they can meet the needs of such students, what it means to teach language culturally, the kind of knowledge and skills needed to do so, what instructional leaders ought to do to support teachers in developing such knowledge and skills.

## **What is to come:** implications to society and teacher education

Some may argue that schools (principals, counselors, teachers, etc.) have a very straightforward, broad, and consistent way of viewing and best educating their ELLs. While this is mostly correct, it is not always the case. Having spent one school year (2017-2018) in Massachusetts I identified that districts classified as high risk do not give careful attention to their ELLs.

Even though the WIDA guidelines clearly advocate that an ELL student should reach proficiency and be treated like any other student in their third year in the country, I have seen cases of students who have spent 4 years (K-5) being pulled out of classrooms to take class as an ELL student. I began to discover the amount of content knowledge they did not learn during those long years. After talking to some of them, I realized that they were able to think, communicate ideas and thoughts in English much better than in their parents' native language, and could be exposed to the content and join their classmates in all classes taught by the school. A rather simple question needs to be asked: why did this happen?

The answer is rooted in teachers' ability to identify when students are ready to move to the next step in their educational paths. Professional development is the key to this. However, there is something more: the work of an EL teacher must be monitored, guided, oriented to ensure they understand the standards and guidelines, so that they are prepared to mediate the learning process in a way that students do not consider as weak or not capable of acquiring knowledge. That is what equity and democracy are all about and that is why superintendents, principals, teachers, stakeholders take unlimited responsibility for any risks that their ELLs may suffer for not being successful and career ready.

Although Massachusetts has a large immigrant population, "dual-language education has surged in popularity, driven in part by parents who speak only English and see the value of raising bilingual children who can navigate a globalized world." It is also said to be a way to "[...] better serve the students from the city's large immigrant communities, and ultimately the city's employers and institutions" (MASSACHUSETTS, 2017, p. 53). Conversely, some argue against the changes provided by the Look Act (LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITY, 2017). Where democracy and freedom of speech exist, and even stated in the first amendment, one can find opinions against the use of public funding to support the teaching and learning of ELLs:

Talk about jokes. The liberals in Massachusetts have approved sale of marijuana in direct violation of federal law. Now the legislature has over turned the will of a 15-year-old referendum item and will pour more unavailable money demands into teaching those who cannot speak English.

Maybe if you can't speak English you ought not to be in a public school? But I suppose if you are here will illegal parent aliens, they have no problem with legal tax payers paying for their kids' education. Now that makes a lot of sense. The language of this nation is English. There is no reason to teach other than foreign language classes in any other language. If you do not like it, go back to where they speak your non-English language. (NEA, 2017, n/p.).<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) played a major role in passing the Look Act, joining forces with the Massachusetts Educators of English Language Learners, the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, and the Massachusetts Association for Bilingual Education. A joint effort that may not have pleased everyone, but one that certainly benefits ELLs and their families and fosters a child's academic, social, and emotional development and growth. As such, collaborative partnerships between schools, families, administrators, and community organizations are crucial for student engagement and success. When it is absolutely clear how goals need to be met, and hard work is needed to put ideas, ideals, and values into practice, that is when strong bonds are created.

A new partnership was created as an extra effort to support school districts, administrators, teachers, and students intends "[...] to meet the bilingual, biliteracy and multicultural development needs of our students [...]." The Portuguese Language Partnership for Education (PLPE, 2020) brings together "[...] educators from different language education programs in US public schools in the northeast region to collaborate and advocate for Portuguese language programs [...]" as well as local, national, and international experts as supporting members. Its seeks

To expand programming that leads to increased opportunities for students, the Portuguese Language Partnership for Education: Advocates for and promotes Portuguese language, dual language, transitional bilingual education, heritage, and world language programs in public schools, Collaborates to identify program needs; Creates, develops and shares program resources, materials, curricula, and assessments; Plans strategically to develop and foster a framework of staff recruitment and professional development. (PLPE, 2020.).

McGee, Haworth, and MacIntyre (2014) believe that experienced teachers are much better equipped than some principals, as well as other administrators, to create and provide opportunities, conditions, atmosphere, and structures necessary to meet students' needs. They are right in that. However, veteran teachers are sometimes even more difficult to be convinced to change and improve their practices, as they are, may I say, in their comfort zone, not wanting to leave it. Some are so entrenched in their beliefs that they are unwilling to change, to open their minds and try new teaching practices. Alternatively, they have internalized the guidelines somewhat and believe they are doing right by their students, but that is not always the case. They require guidance to ensure they are truly

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**9-** User MarineBob's comment about bilingual education.

infused with the rubrics, standards, guidelines, and other necessary tools to implement meaningful supports for ELL instruction.

Also, because the population of English language learners is growing much faster than the numbers of well-trained specialists in ELL instruction, most schools will need to leverage their existing expertise by encouraging teachers to learn from and collaborate with skilled colleagues. But this requires teachers to be given regular opportunities to model and observe good instruction, plan together, discuss goals and challenges, agree on common teaching practices and tools, and ensure that professional learning opportunities are well aligned to the design of the ELL program. In short, to make it possible for teachers to learn from each other and improve their practice, school leaders will have to find ways to make available the time and resources that allow professionals to collaborate in meaningful ways. (RUSSEL; ESCH, 2018).

Most tasks require a combination of bonding and bridging, a willingness to allow a degree of compromise with those involved with ELL education. Clearly, teachers, principals, counselors, administrators, and families, along with professional knowledge, understood as a body of knowledge imparted by teacher training institutions, provide effective inspiration for identifying the right approach to putting learning into practice that will provide ELLs with the assets necessary to engage and thrive in society. According to Tardif, professional knowledge

[...] correspond to the discourse, objectives, contents and methods from which the school institution categorizes and presents the social knowledge defined by it and selected as models of erudite culture. They are presented concretely in forms of school programs (objectives, contents, methods) in which teachers must learn and apply. (TARDIF, 2014, p. 38).

The better the professional development, the more qualified the teachers will be. No one can deny this statement. But chance happens every time the school year begins: new students come into the classroom and teachers need to be ready to approach them, to understand how they learn, to engage them, to meet their needs, and no amount of preparation can avoid constraints. That is when experience enters the picture. According to Pinto (2021, p. 113-114),

In the case of the teachers of Massachusetts, there is a discrepancy in the knowledge required by English teachers and second language teachers to work in a Bilingual program. While the first only needs a pedagogical knowledge, the second needs not only a pedagogical knowledge, but also a Bilingual Education specific knowledge. They also do not have so much freedom to develop their activities or to put their knowledge and experiences into practice. This happens because they have a lot of goals to achieve to be able to get good results on the evaluation exams.

Teacher education shapes teachers' ability to deal with atypical conditions, develop their skills, which need to be practiced continuously for maintenance and improvement, allowing them to develop professional competence. As Hall (2006, p. 43) argues, "[...]

intellectual work does not consist only of what has been studied, of the theories and methods employed or even of the provisional results obtained. It also has to do with the *practice itself* – with how it is performed”. Difficult times for those struggling to give ELLs some hope, but the good news is... there is hope.

Two educators from Brockton Public Schools have been awarded with the Anne Dow Award for Excellence and Creativity, which recognizes culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. Vula Roumis and Gloria Cho received the award for their work establishing dual-language programs in Brockton. The two are leaders at Manthala George Jr. Elementary School, which serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school is slowly phasing toward becoming fully dual-language, meaning students will have half their day taught in English and the other half in another language. Currently, the school offers this program in three languages: Spanish, Portuguese, and French. After the transition, the school will be known as the Manthala George School of Global Studies. [...] Roumis and Cho cited other benefits of learning foreign languages at a young age, including increased perseverance, problem-solving skills, and vocabulary. Most of the students who have gone through the dual-language program go on to receive Seals of Biliteracy upon graduating high school. Roumis said this skill makes students very sought after by colleges and employers. (MASSACHUSETTS, 2019).

One certainly cannot think of a positive pedagogical experience without the teacher being effectively engaged, confident and aware of their role in student learning, mobilizing investigative action and research-information devices to articulate practice and reflection in the process of building knowledge relevant to their work. It is also of paramount importance that this professional reflect on their development process, as it is essential to give some space for teachers to assume the necessary responsibility for their own professional development.

## **Final considerations**

We are the result of the influence that those around us and events have on us. Individuals are interconnected and bound to each other, directly or indirectly, forming rings that somehow bind us together. These links are invisible and variable, which does not mean that they are weak or unreal. In fact, the acts of separate individuals rely on this unbroken link for the actions of each to fulfill their ends. This is what society is all about.

The beginning and end of this journey are clear to each and every educator in Massachusetts: recruitment, preparation and retention challenges, ongoing professional development so that teachers can advance student learning in an increasingly diverse society. An unpredictable journey that reflects a reverie. There is a great deal of effort to find creative solutions, but the key factor is the teacher who is asked to provide a culturally responsive practice to achieve high-quality instruction for every student.

We must think of Bilingual Education as a strategy to manage differences within a multicultural and multilingual society in which there is room for superdiversity, be it cultural, identity, or linguistic, as a way to provide quality, egalitarian, and meaningful

education, promoting an atmosphere of understanding towards other cultures and languages. Those who work with Bilingual Education need to be aware of its complexity to avoid generalizations, which can lead to contradictions created by neoliberal logic, as it fosters an educational system that is further impoverished, oppressed, and dominated by elite classes. Thus, teachers must constantly evolve to meet the growing needs of ELLs.

Broadly speaking, teachers already possess accumulated knowledge that can and should be used in the classroom. Importantly, academic knowledge and other types, such as family, one's own life as a student, and those acquired through situations experienced during academic life, can also contribute to improve the process of continuing formation and self-formation.

Since teaching and learning process presupposes the development of critical thinking, teachers play a significant role in it by guiding students through the paths of life in society, giving them the opportunity to critically engage with and unveil reality. Thus, proposing this invitation for a deeper understanding of the context in which we live becomes essential given the need to strengthen thoughts, ideas, opinions that are prudent, coherent, and respectful of the other's opinions and points of view as a competence to be developed in students as well.

Stressful educational moments will arise and educators and families must face them, keeping in mind that students need their chance to shine. School administrators must also commit to meet the needs of these students by creating a learning environment that is culturally sustainable and linguistically responsive.

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