

# The Wise-Compassionate Framework: Redefining Educational Systems for Equity and Holistic Student Success

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## **Abstract**

In an era of increasing diversity and complexity in education, the Wise-Compassionate Framework (WCF) offers a revolutionary model that integrates compassion, cultural responsiveness, and evidence-based interventions within the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) paradigms. This article introduces the WCF's evolved iteration, emphasizing its applicability in supporting multilingual learners and promoting equity. By synthesizing established theories with new insights, the WCF offers educators, school leaders, and researchers a profound, practical approach to creating inclusive educational environments that foster academic achievement and social-emotional well-being.

## **Introduction: The Need for Innovation in Education**

Education stands at a pivotal crossroads. Traditional methodologies, while foundational, often fall short in addressing the complex, interconnected challenges faced by students—especially multilingual learners navigating diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes. As educators and researchers, we are called to develop frameworks that are not only research-based but also practical, adaptable, and inclusive.

The Wise-Compassionate Framework (WCF) was developed in response to these pressing needs. The WCF is inspired by years of experience as an educational consultant, former principal, and professor working closely with multilingual communities. It integrates compassion, cultural responsiveness, and systemic change into daily educational practices. It builds upon established theories while introducing innovative strategies to support multilingual learners at all levels.

Recent research underscores the profound impact of culturally responsive teaching and the necessity of addressing students' social-emotional needs to enhance academic outcomes. Zaretta Hammond (2015) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching activates the brain's learning centers, leading to deeper understanding and retention. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) highlights the importance of critical consciousness in education to challenge systemic inequities. For multilingual learners, whose linguistic and cultural assets enrich the educational environment, such approaches are particularly vital. The WCF extends these insights, providing a comprehensive model that ensures every student is supported.

## **The Trapezoid Model: Reshaping Educational Support Structures**

At the heart of the Wise-Compassionate Framework (WCF) is the Trapezoid Model, which transforms educational support systems from hierarchical to inclusive. This model marks a decisive departure from traditional pyramid frameworks, which often suggest a top-down delivery of interventions. The Trapezoid Model, in contrast, establishes a robust foundation of universal support that progressively narrows as interventions become more targeted and specialized. By centering equity in its design, the Trapezoid Model addresses the diverse needs of students, ensuring multilingual learners receive the targeted, culturally responsive support necessary to thrive academically and socially.

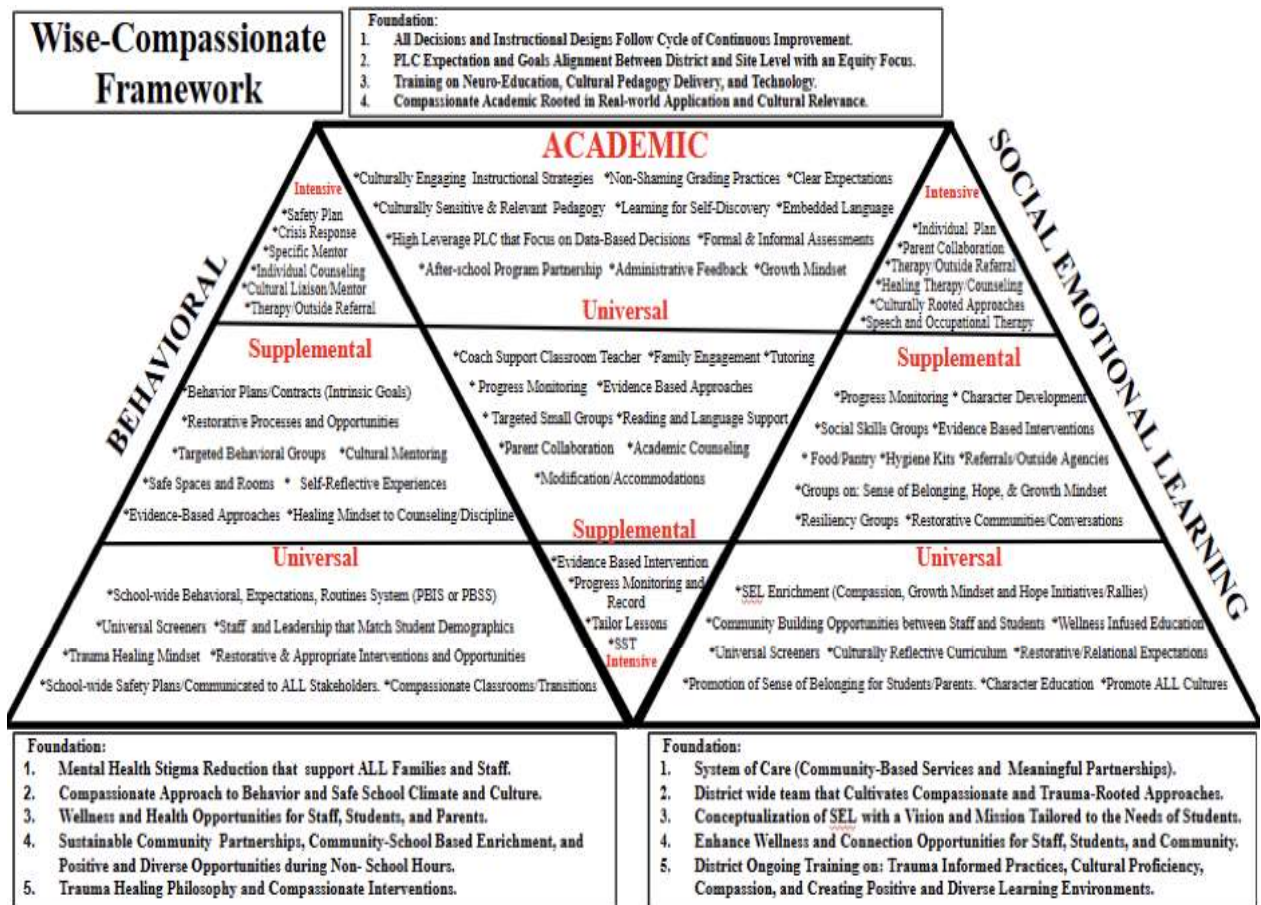
*The Universal Tier* represents foundational support provided to every student. This includes high-quality, culturally responsive instruction and social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives. For multilingual learners, this foundational support incorporates strategies that leverage their linguistic strengths and honor their cultural identities (Gay, 2018). Examples include integrating students' home languages into classroom practices and using culturally relevant materials to create a learning environment that fosters inclusivity and engagement.

*The Supplemental Tier* provides additional, targeted interventions for students who need more support. For multilingual learners, this might involve small-group language development sessions, academic coaching, or focused instruction in specific subject areas. Research demonstrates that targeted academic interventions, such as those outlined by Campbell and Mogashana (2024), help students develop essential study habits and organizational skills while addressing specific learning gaps. These strategies ensure that multilingual learners continue to progress without being separated from their peers or the broader curriculum.

*The Intensive Tier* is where students with the most significant needs receive individualized, comprehensive support. For multilingual learners, this could include personalized learning plans that address both language acquisition and content mastery, as well as collaboration with specialists such as ESL educators and cultural liaisons. Frequent progress monitoring ensures these interventions remain adaptive and responsive to the student's evolving needs (IES, 2020). This tier exemplifies the WCF's commitment to ensuring every student, regardless of background or challenges, has access to a pathway to success. Additionally, involving cultural liaisons or community representatives can strengthen trust and communication between schools and families, fostering a more holistic support system (Nordmeyer, Boals, MacDonald, & Westerlund, 2021).

**Figure 1**

*Wise-Compassionate Framework*



(Mercado, 2021)

The Trapezoid Model's inclusive design underscores the WCF's commitment to equity and holistic student success. By providing culturally responsive instruction at every tier, schools can ensure that all students, particularly multilingual learners, thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. This structure serves as a roadmap for educators and school leaders striving to transform their institutions into equitable, inclusive spaces where every learner's potential is realized (Mercado, 2021).

### Centrality of the Academic Domain in the WCF

The Wise-Compassionate Framework (WCF) reimagines education to meet the complex needs of multilingual learners by integrating compassion, cultural responsiveness, and evidence-based interventions. This holistic approach fosters academic excellence while celebrating students' cultural identities and emotional well-being. The Trapezoid Model aligns seamlessly with the WCF's focus on the interconnectedness of academic achievement, cultural identity, and emotional well-being. While behavioral and social-emotional domains are critical components of the framework, the academic domain remains central to its mission of holistic student success. The WCF offers a roadmap of actionable strategies and tiered interventions that help educators, administrators, and communities implement its principles effectively.

The WCF emphasizes that academic achievement cannot be isolated from students' cultural identities and emotional well-being. The following principles and tiered interventions offer a clear and accessible roadmap for educators, administrators, and communities to translate the WCF into actionable steps. By detailing foundational practices, tiered support structures, and culturally responsive strategies, the WCF provides a guide that allows schools to evolve into inclusive, dynamic environments where multilingual learners thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

### **Foundational Principles for Educational Practice**

*Cycle of Continuous Improvement:* The WCF promotes an iterative process where educators regularly assess and refine instructional strategies to meet the dynamic needs of multilingual learners. This principle emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching practices through ongoing reflection and data-driven decision-making (DuFour et al., 2016).

*Equity-Focused Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):* Create collaborative teams where educators analyze data, share equity-driven strategies, and develop targeted interventions for multilingual learners. These PLCs enable teachers to work towards shared goals of equity and excellence, exploring critically conscious teaching ideologies and addressing deficit discourses about students (Hernández, 2022).

*Training in Neuro-Education and Cultural Pedagogy:* Educators receive professional development in brain-based learning and culturally responsive teaching. Understanding how multilingual learners process information enables teachers to design instruction that enhances engagement and comprehension (Hammond, 2015).

*Compassionate and Honest Communication:* Foster trust and collaboration among educators, students, and families through open and empathetic dialogue. This approach creates a positive learning environment where every stakeholder feels valued, respected, and understood. Providing information in students' home languages and honoring their cultural perspectives cultivates strong, meaningful relationships within the educational community (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010).

### **Tiered Interventions: Strategic Support for Multilingual Learners**

#### ***Universal Tier I***

- *Culturally Sustainable Instruction:* Integrate students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum. Use literature, examples, and materials that reflect classroom diversity (Gay, 2018).
- *Language Development Across the Curriculum:* Embed language objectives in all content areas to support multilingual learners' language acquisition alongside academic learning (Echevarría, 2023).
- *Positive Learning Environment:* Establish classroom norms that promote respect, inclusion, and a growth mindset, encouraging all students to take academic risks (Weeks, 2023).

#### ***Supplemental Tier II***

- *Targeted Language Support:* Provide additional instruction in small groups focusing on specific language skills needed for academic success (Kuhl, Russell Valezy, & Bettney, 2021).
- *Academic Coaching:* Offer guidance to help students develop effective study habits, time management, and organizational skills, which have been found to have a positive effect on student mental health (Campbell & Mogashana, 2024).
- *Family Engagement:* Collaborate with families to support learning at home, providing resources and communication in the family's preferred language (Ross, 2023).

### **Intensive Tier III**

- *Individualized Learning Plans*: Develop personalized plans that address specific academic and language needs, setting clear goals and monitoring progress closely (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2020).
- *Collaborative Interventions*: Involve specialists such as English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, speech-language pathologists, and counselors to provide comprehensive support (Hartman, n.d.).
- *Cultural Liaisons*: Utilize community members or staff who share students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to bridge communication and build trust (Nordmeyer, Boals, MacDonald, & Westerlund, 2021).

### **Implementing the WCF in Community School Models**

Community schools, serving as hubs that connect students, families, and communities, provide an ideal environment for implementing the WCF. These schools adopt a holistic approach to education, recognizing that student success is deeply intertwined with family engagement and community support (Blank et al., 2012). The WCF aligns seamlessly with this model, enhancing its effectiveness for multilingual learners by addressing their unique linguistic, cultural, and socio-emotional needs.

### **Synergy Between School and Community**

To effectively implement the WCF within community schools, fostering a strong synergy between the school environment and the surrounding community is essential. This collaboration can be achieved through several strategic initiatives.

- *Cultural Celebrations*: Hosting events that honor the diverse cultures represented in the school fosters an inclusive atmosphere that values multilingual learners. International festivals, cultural fairs, and heritage months allow students to share their traditions, enhancing pride in their identities and enriching the entire school community's understanding of global cultures (Gay, 2018).
- *Community Partnerships*: Establishing collaborations with local organizations expands resources available to students and families. Partnerships can provide language classes for parents, health and wellness programs, and after-school enrichment activities. For instance, local community centers or libraries can offer bilingual resources and technology access, supporting both academic and language development (Blank et al., 2012).
- *Parent Education Workshops*: Offering workshops empowers families to engage more actively in their children's education. These sessions equip parents with strategies to support learning at home, navigate the educational system, and advocate for their children's needs. Providing these workshops in home languages and at convenient times increases accessibility and strengthens the home-school connection (Auerbach, 2012).

### **Addressing Mental Health and Wellness**

The WCF emphasizes the importance of mental health and wellness, acknowledging that multilingual learners may face additional stressors such as acculturation challenges, language barriers, and experiences of trauma.

- *Trauma-Informed Practices*: Training educators and staff to recognize signs of trauma and stress enables them to provide appropriate support and create safe, nurturing environments (Weist et al., 2014). This includes understanding cultural expressions of

- distress and being sensitive to the unique experiences of immigrant and refugee students.
- **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Integrating SEL curricula that consider cultural contexts enhances students' ability to manage emotions, set positive goals, and establish healthy relationships. Culturally responsive SEL practices help multilingual learners develop resilience and empathy, contributing to a more inclusive school climate (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018).
- **Access to Counseling Services:** Ensuring students have access to culturally competent mental health professionals is essential. Schools should provide counselors trained in cultural competence who, when possible, speak students' home languages. This accessibility reduces barriers to seeking help and supports overall well-being (Weist et al., 2014).

### **Moving Beyond Traditional Models: The WCF as a Transformative Tool**

Implementing the Wise-Compassionate Framework (WCF) represents a paradigm shift in education, requiring educators to reimagine their approach through a lens of compassion, equity, and responsiveness to linguistic and cultural diversity. This transformation moves away from one-size-fits-all methodologies towards more individualized and inclusive practices. By adopting evidence-based strategies within the Trapezoid Model, schools can foster environments that celebrate linguistic diversity and promote academic success for multilingual learners. The WCF's holistic approach ensures that each student's unique strengths and needs are recognized and nurtured, paving the way for a more equitable and compassionate educational system. To fully realize this vision, educators and school leaders must embrace specific implications that arise from the WCF:

#### ***Implications for Teachers and School Leaders***

- **Professional Development:** Investing in ongoing learning about culturally responsive pedagogy, second language acquisition, and inclusive practices is crucial. Continuous professional development enables educators to better understand and meet the needs of multilingual learners (Hammond, 2015).
- **Reflective Practice:** Encouraging educators to examine their biases and assumptions fosters a growth mindset toward teaching multilingual learners. Reflective practice leads to more adaptive and effective instructional strategies (Ladson-Billings, 2021).
- **Leadership Commitment:** School leaders must prioritize the WCF's principles by allocating resources, setting inclusive policies, and modeling compassionate practices. This commitment signals to the entire school community the importance of embracing equity and diversity (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

### **Where We Need to Go: Envisioning the Future of Education**

Adopting the WCF represents a profound commitment to educational equity and excellence. For multilingual learners, this means schools become environments where their languages and cultures are not only acknowledged but celebrated as invaluable assets.

- **Asset-Based Approach:** Recognize and leverage the strengths that multilingual learners bring to the classroom. Valuing students' linguistic skills and cultural knowledge enhances learning experiences for all and promotes positive self-concepts among multilingual learners (Gay, 2018). This approach shifts the focus from perceived deficits to the unique assets multilingual learners possess, fostering a more inclusive and empowering educational environment (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). By incorporating students'

cultural references and leveraging their home languages, educators can create a rich learning context that supports both language acquisition and academic achievement (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008).

- *Student Voice and Choice*: Involving students in decision-making processes empowers them and increases engagement. Providing opportunities for student input in curriculum design, classroom management, and school activities fosters a sense of ownership and agency (AVID Open Access, n.d.; Tuhkala, Ekonoja, & Hämäläinen, 2021). This approach transforms learning from something that is "done to them" to something that is "done with them," resulting in a pivotal shift that can empower and motivate students throughout the learning process (AVID Open Access, n.d.).
- *Technology Integration*: Thoughtfully integrating technology can support language development and provide access to resources in multiple languages. Educational technology tools facilitate personalized learning and connect students with global communities, enhancing language skills and cross-cultural understanding (HMH, 2024; Rintaningrum, Aldous, & Conway, 2023). For instance, virtual reality platforms can transport learners to English-speaking environments, enhancing cultural understanding and real-world language application (FinSMEs, 2023). Additionally, technology-assisted cultural diversity learning allows representatives from diverse cultures to engage without extensive travel, fostering better cross-cultural understanding and competence (Shadiev, Hwang, Azarfam, & Gong, 2023).

### **Conclusion: A Call to Action**

The Wise-Compassionate Framework offers a transformative, research-based approach to reimagining educational systems. Grounded in evidence and equity, the WCF directly addresses the pressing need for practices that are inclusive, culturally responsive, and effective—particularly for multilingual learners navigating complex linguistic and cultural landscapes. Failure to adopt holistic frameworks like the WCF risks perpetuating systemic inequities and failing our students. Multilingual learners often face significant barriers, including achievement gaps, limited access to rigorous content, and social-emotional challenges (Olsen, 2014). These obstacles not only hinder their academic success but also contribute to cycles of disadvantage and marginalization. Without intentional, compassionate strategies to support these students, we risk overlooking their unique strengths and perspectives while reinforcing inequitable systems.

### ***Opportunities for Transformation***

By embracing the Wise-Compassionate Framework (WCF), educators and school leaders can unlock transformative opportunities that address systemic inequities while cultivating environments where all students—especially multilingual learners—thrive. The WCF empowers educators with tools and strategies to:

- *Enhance Academic Achievement*: Culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate instruction improves educational outcomes for multilingual learners (Hammond, 2015). By recognizing and leveraging students' cultural and linguistic strengths, educators can deepen understanding, foster engagement, and ensure meaningful learning experiences that bridge gaps in academic achievement.
- *Promote Social-Emotional Well-being*: Compassionate, inclusive school climates support students' mental health, reduce anxiety, and promote resilience. When students feel seen, valued, and emotionally safe, their capacity to engage and succeed academically increases (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018). By integrating culturally relevant SEL practices, schools can

- nurture emotional intelligence, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding.
- *Build Stronger Communities:* Schools are more than institutions for academic instruction; they are hubs for collaboration, support, and growth. Community-centered approaches allow schools to partner with families, local organizations, and other stakeholders to provide comprehensive resources and opportunities (Blank et al., 2012). These partnerships strengthen the collective commitment to student success and foster a shared sense of responsibility.

## **A Unified Vision: From Framework to Action**

Realizing the full potential of the WCF requires a united effort from educators, school leaders, policymakers, and communities. This is not merely a call to adopt another educational model; it is an invitation to transform education into a system that values compassion, equity, and responsiveness to diversity. This vision compels us to move beyond transactional teaching methods and embrace relational, equity-focused practices that empower multilingual learners. Each step we take—whether integrating culturally responsive strategies, building trust with families, or creating spaces for student voice—propels us closer to a system where diversity is celebrated as an asset rather than a challenge.

Transformation cannot rest on the shoulders of a few; it demands collective action. By aligning our efforts, we can dismantle barriers, disrupt inequitable systems, and reimagine education as a dynamic, inclusive, and compassionate ecosystem. Every stakeholder has a role to play, from teachers refining their practice to policymakers advocating for systemic reform.

## **Your Role in This Transformation**

The urgency for change cannot be overstated. Every decision we make as educators, leaders, and community members has the potential to either reinforce the status quo or ignite a revolution in equity-centered education. The time to act is not tomorrow or next year—it is now.

- *Commit to the Principles of the WCF:* Align policies, curricula, and daily practices with the WCF's principles. Recognize multilingual learners as contributors of linguistic and cultural wealth, and ensure that teaching strategies, instructional materials, and schoolwide initiatives reflect this recognition.
- *Invest in Professional Development:* Equip yourself and your teams with the knowledge and skills to implement the WCF effectively. This includes training in culturally responsive pedagogy, second language acquisition, and trauma-informed practices. Continuous learning empowers educators to meet students where they are and guide them toward success.
- *Collaborate and Advocate:* Build coalitions with families, community organizations, and policymakers to ensure sustainable, systemic change. Advocacy at every level—local, regional, and national—amplifies the impact of the WCF and ensures that the framework's principles are integrated into the broader educational landscape.
- *Amplify Student Voice and Agency:* Foster environments where students feel empowered to shape their educational experiences. By actively involving multilingual learners in decisions about curriculum, school culture, and classroom practices, we cultivate a sense of ownership, belonging, and motivation.



### ***Final Call***

The journey ahead demands courage, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. At this pivotal moment in education, we must confront the undeniable truth: the stakes have never been higher. The (WCF) offers not just a roadmap, but a transformative vision for what education can—and should—be.

Imagine classrooms where every multilingual learner feels valued, where their unique perspectives enrich discussions, and their cultural heritage is celebrated as a vital asset. Envision families from diverse backgrounds discovering genuine support, understanding, and partnership within equitable systems. Here is where communities are strengthened by the success of every young person, regardless of linguistic or cultural background.

This vision is within our reach, but it demands immediate action—every step we take today shapes the future our students deserve, no matter their cultural or linguistic background. The power to create this future lies within each of us. Every decision we make, every policy we implement, and every interaction with a student or family is an opportunity to breathe life into the principles of the WCF. This work requires urgency, for every day of delay is a day of unrealized potential for our learners.

Let this moment be the one where we collectively rise to meet the challenge before us. Let us commit to being the educators, leaders, and advocates our students need and deserve. Together, we can forge an educational system that doesn't just embrace diversity but thrives because of it—a system that cultivates academic success, empathy, cultural understanding, and global citizenship. The future of education is in our hands. Now is the time to be bold, to lead with compassion, and to embody the change we envision. Our students are counting on us. Let's rise to the occasion. The time for transformation is now. The future begins with us.

### **Author's Note**

As educators and leaders, we have a profound responsibility to shape the future of our society by nurturing the potential of every student. The Wise-Compassionate Framework is more than an educational model; it is a call to action—a commitment to equity, compassion, and excellence. Let us embrace this framework to create schools where every multilingual learner feels valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

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