

# Steps toward Unifying Dual Language Programs, Common Core State Standards, and Critical Pedagogy: Oportunidades, Estrategias y Retos

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## Abstract

Recent education reforms have begun to reframe academic discussion and teacher practice surrounding bilingual educational approaches for preparing “21st century, college and career ready” citizens. Given this broader context, in this article we examine ways that we might join implementation of dual language programs, Common Core State Standards, and critical pedagogy at the school and classroom levels via a teacher, school administrator, and teacher professional development program. We focus on a concrete example of a partnership between a progressive dual language school along the U.S.-Mexico border, known as Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School, and a bilingual teacher education program in the College of Education at San Diego State University, which prepares teachers and administrators to implement and develop dual language instruction aligned (but not beholden) to Common Core State Standards. We include discussion of a Freirian-based instructional program that helps unite the opportunities presented by dual language programs and standards-based reform initiatives in a deeper equity and social justice framework for educating students. We discuss opportunities (*oportunidades*), strategies (*estrategias*), and challenges (*retos*) encountered during this collaborative work between the bilingual teacher preparation program, a Dual Language school, and one exemplary fourth grade teacher team and their enactment of a critical pedagogy-based curriculum. We conclude with a discussion of implications of our work for education of multilingual learners and the educators that work with them.

## Introduction and Significance

The educational inequities faced by Latino students and other students from low income, and multilingual immigrant backgrounds in the U.S. are well documented (Gándara and Contreras, 2010; Valencia, 2008). Ameliorating these inequities is a complex matter given the wide range of historical, economic, and systemic societal and educational structural issues, and racial/ethnic and linguistic discrimination dynamics at work (Oakes, 2013; Orfield, 2014). Progressive educators, researchers, and policy analysts have long argued that approaches to education reform that do not honor the cultural and linguistic resources of Latinos are likely to fail, now and in the future, as such positive concerns for social justice and equity have primarily done so in the past (Portes, 2013, Valencia, 2010). Despite these reservations, we are aware of ongoing efforts and opportunities for transforming education in a positive manner that addresses these concerns directly and can help ameliorate inequities. These efforts bring together the best of what we know about how to implement effective teaching and learning, culturally responsive pedagogies, and teacher preparation. At the same time, there is also awareness that any significant transformation of educational practice in everyday school settings must be configured so as to take into account the realities of educational policies and school governance, and funding regulations mandated at state and local school levels, and by the federal government.

Given this broader context, in this article we examine ways that we might join implementation of

dual language programs, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and critical pedagogy at the school level and classroom level via partnerships with progressive teacher preparation, school administrators, and staff development programs. We focus on a concrete example of a partnership between a progressive dual language school along the U.S.-Mexico border, known as Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School (CVLCC), and a bilingual teacher education program in the College of Education at San Diego State University (SDSU), which prepares bilingual teachers and administrators to implement and develop dual language instruction aligned (but not beholden) to CCSS.

CVLCC is unique in that its vision for learning is informed by critical pedagogy and guided by both a global and local community perspective. This schooling context is also unique because of the ways in which the SDSU bilingual teacher education program in the Dual Language and English Learner Education Department (DLE) implements its partnership with school administrators and teachers. The partnership is dynamic and involves the active day-to-day sharing of knowledge and analysis of praxis across institutional and unit boundaries—from the bilingual teacher education program and its participants, to the school organization and leadership, to teacher and teacher aid collaboration in designing and implementing classroom instruction, and to non-teaching staff involvement in building a school-wide learning community joined with the community at large. We focus on opportunities, challenges, and given existing constraints.

Our article proceeds as follows. We start by first briefly mentioning general ways in which dual language programs and their focus on multilingualism provide opportunities for learning that serve but extend the goal of standards based learning. We also mention important ways that instruction drawing on critical pedagogy is an essential framing resource for ongoing meaning making in classrooms that likewise serves but goes beyond the goals of standards based learning. The discussion reviews challenges that emerge in the process of realizing opportunities.

We next turn to a more detailed description of CVLCC and the bilingual teacher education program of SDSU and how the partnership between these institutions takes advantage of opportunities and resolves challenges encountered along the way. We call attention in particular to strategies the partners invoke to attain common goals, as well as their respective interdependent program objectives pertaining to high quality dual language education for San Diego's large Latino Spanish speaking bilingual population.

In the next section of the article, we then drill down to the classroom level and discuss instructional decision making of a fourth grade teacher team at CVLCC. The selected classrooms demonstrate strategies in action at the ground level to highlight how the school vision comes to manifest in the classroom with teachers and students as intellectual partners in learning that is both consistent with tenets of critical pedagogy and standards based education.

We close with comments on implications of the work for thinking about externally imposed demands on teachers, especially teachers of multilingual learners, as a result of social change in the form of increasingly multilingual classroom realities and education reform.

### **Selected General Opportunities and Challenges Presented by Common Core State Standards**

States' and schools' adoption of Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts, and in Mathematics create both opportunities and challenges that can be addressed by innovative partnerships between bilingual teacher preparation programs and progressive schools implementing dual language programs and critical pedagogy based learning philosophies. The CCSS stress students' acquisition of high level thinking and communicative practices in subject matter areas that build on close-in comprehension of written texts and their ideas, and the ability to author texts with complex and dense communication of ideas. The CCSS also call attention to the important role played by related face-to-face speaking and listening skills supporting higher level thinking, reading and writing skills—intersecting areas that are extremely important for English Learners (Valdés, Kibler, and Walqui, 2014).

It is important to note that while the CCSS were written so as to be pertinent to high level academic functioning in English, they address skills that can be realized in any language and not just English. Accordingly, bilingual programs, and in particular dual language programs, must create opportunities for students to transfer

skills across languages—from a more familiar language such as Spanish to English and vice versa. This opportunity for rigorous academic functioning in multiple languages faces a sociopolitical challenge in that many educational policy makers and many in the public at large assume that an end goal of schooling is monolingualism in English rather than elective multilingualism. A strategy ameliorating this concern is to provide evidence that students participating in dual language programs acquire English proficiency and learn as effectively or even more effectively in English and their non-English language as other students from similar backgrounds (Callahan & Gándara, 2014). Research exists showing such evidence, especially when consideration is given to students' need to develop English proficiency over an extended period of schooling—see Umansky and Reardon (2014).

The CCSS were designed to be standards specifying goals for instructional outcomes known collectively as “21st century, college and career readiness skills” and were not intended to specify a curriculum to reach these goals. As we discuss in more detail later in this paper, this brings validation to programs such as CVLCC that envisioned similar goals for instructional outcomes even before the CCSS mandated them. The CCSS also presents further opportunities for implementers of dual language programs with value orientations and strategies for social justice and equity to reframe their curriculum based on a reading of “21st century, college and career readiness” that is consistent with their existing curriculum ideology, such as the case with CVLCC and its critical pedagogy approach. In particular it presents opportunities for teacher education programs, schools, teachers, students, and community members to frame education as fundamentally about teaching and learning activities constructed locally to reflect the linguistic, cultural, and social values of participants. A challenge is that some policy makers and members of the public at large may be fearful that students may be socialized to question existing patterns of distribution of power and privilege despite the democratic rights of U.S. citizens and residents. A strategy to address this challenge and support opportunities for an equity context in U.S. education is to show evidence that the beneficiaries of dual language and critical pedagogy based programs attuned to the CCSS produce active students, teachers, educators and community members concerned with the well being of not just their own immediate community, but of others, including a global community. We show how this goal of producing transformative global citizens is taken up in the partnership we will describe. We now turn to a brief description of the CVLCC school site and the SDSU bilingual teacher education program in the Dual Language and English Learner Education Department before describing how the partnership between these institutions takes advantage of opportunities and resolves challenges encountered along the way.

### **Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School: Promoting *Oportunidades* for Student Learning**

Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School (CVLCC) was established in 1998 as a small elementary school serving primarily Latino students and has since increased its enrollment to over 800 students in grades K-10, with plans for further expansion. Currently, 95% of students are Latino, over 50% are enrolled in the free or reduced-price lunch program, and 53% are classified English Language Learners (ELLs) (California Department of Education, 2012). Over 65% of the school's teachers were credentialed at San Diego State University (SDSU) through the Dual Language and English Learner Education Department (DLE), formerly Department of Policy Studies in Language and Cross Cultural Education. The school has been widely recognized at the local and state levels for its innovative Spanish-English dual language program, which combines a biliteracy approach with a focus on critical pedagogy and global citizenship so that the goal of the teaching and learning process is to develop and strengthen a respect for human dignity, individual worth, and civic action in every student.

Within the school district, CVLCC is one of the highest performing schools and has drastically improved its Academic Performance Index scores from 680 in 2005 to 880 in 2012, exceeding the state goal of 800. In acknowledgement of this accomplishment the school was awarded the Title I Closing the Achievement Gap Award for the 2010-2011 academic year and was named a 2012 California Distinguished School (<http://www.cvesd.org/Pages/home.aspx>). In 2012, CVLCC adopted the national Common Core State Standards at all grade levels, one year before the standards were mandated (<http://www.cvesd.org/Pages/home.aspx>).

## San Diego State University Dual Language Teacher Preparation Program: Promoting *Oportunidades* for School Leadership and Collaborative Teacher Development

The Dual Language and English Learner Education Department (DLE) prepares bilingual educators in policy and practice to meet the needs of English Learners in diverse settings from structured English immersion to dual language programs promoting biliteracy and global competence (<http://go.sdsu.edu/education/dle/>). The credential, certificate and Master of Arts programs prepares all students from undergraduate to graduate programs to be reflective and transformational practitioners for the purpose of elevating the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners through collaboration with schools, families and community. As of this writing, DLE has credentialed over 2,500 bilingual teachers.

Over a decade ago the DLE department at SDSU, seized an opportunity to promote transformative educational reform when it created a collaborative partnership with CVLCC's innovative school director and a group of highly qualified, progressive, and passionate dual language educators. The structure of this partnership is reciprocal in that teacher-leaders and administrators from CVLCC are also instructors in the credential, certificate, and Master of Arts programs. DLE faculty also provide professional development for the school teaching staff and engage in classroom observations as part of the practice that informs the pedagogy used in their methods courses. Furthermore, this partnership is reciprocal in that the school helps prepare pre-service, credential candidates with real time issues and strategies, and then, once candidates have received their credential they hire them to teach at the school, eventually helping to mentor the next generation of teachers. The school director explains, "Our purpose is to hire and retain teacher leaders that embrace a commitment to teaching and learning in a multilingual, global, and critically conscious environment. We actively seek graduates from the DLE program because teachers enter the classroom with a solid foundational knowledge about biliteracy/bicognition, biculturalism, and critical pedagogy" (Dr. Ramirez, personal communication, October 20, 2013).

The overarching mission of DLE is to prepare teachers to effectively serve students who come to school with a primary language other than English and to facilitate the learning process for students to become bilingual, biliterate/bicognitive, and multicultural. DLE's primary focus is to support educators at all levels in creating multicultural democratic practices and bring bicultural voices to the center of classroom discourse. In order to do so, the DLE faculty, program graduates, and administrators that hire these graduates have identified the "Five Things" graduates of the program know and are able to do in their classrooms.

1) **Ideological and pedagogical clarity:** DLE graduates develop a roadmap toward their ideological clarity as it relates to and informs their classroom practice. They know who they are as teachers, their personal beliefs about teaching and learning, and how this affects the students that they teach. This is a complex area of understanding that involves self-knowledge and dispositions that ensure that educators have a strong belief in the worth of all students and their ability to achieve.

2) **Biliteracy development and success across the content areas:** DLE graduates possess the theoretical knowledge on important socio-political issues and tensions surrounding language policy. Accordingly, graduates of DLE recognize their role as advocates for English and dual language learners in their classrooms and school communities. DLE graduates promote dual language learner student success through standards based instruction in Spanish and English. They create rich, authentic opportunities for students to read, write, speak, listen and think critically using the appropriate, grade-level academic language in order to develop biliteracy/bicognition in English and two or more additional languages.

3) **Collaborate with peers, students, parents, administrators, and community:** DLE graduates recognize that complex social relationships dictate equitable access to knowledge and power inside and outside of the classroom. The focus is to work side by side with key stakeholders in receiving and providing feedback at all levels. Critical to this process is the ability

to build authentic relationships by engaging in community scans and asset mapping to gain first hand information of community and students' funds of knowledge.

4) **Create inclusive learning environments:** DLE graduates are committed to creating inclusive learning communities, where teacher, school leadership, student, and parent each play an integral role in supporting student success. It includes considering students' cultural and linguistic background as assets, as well as using data on learning outcomes and performance, to inform differentiation and personalization of each student's instruction and services, and create partnerships between home and school.

5) **Global (linguistic and cultural) competence:** DLE graduates model and acquire teaching principles of global competence through respect of linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom, school, and community. This perspective of critical-global literacy combined with their unique worldviews of respect for linguistic, cultural, and social perspectives empowers graduates of DLE to develop and enact 21st century pedagogies.

DLE prepares teachers to facilitate the development of students' bicultural/bicognitive identity and sense of belongingness as they negotiate at least two languages and two worlds. As Darder (2012) asserts, critical bicultural/bicognitive pedagogy holds the possibility for a discourse of hope in light of the social tensions, conflicts, and policy contradictions that students must face in the process of their bicultural development (p. 101).

We now turn to a discussion of particular on the ground strategies that have taken root in the collaboration between CVLCC and the DLE Department that have enabled fulfillment of the opportunities we have described.

### **A Collaborative Model for Preparing Critically Conscious Dual Language Educators: *Estrategias for Realizing Oportunidades***

Rather than following the status quo in teacher preparation and professional development, the DLE bilingual teacher preparation program and CVLCC entered into a partnership where the expectation and goal is for teachers to know and be able to engage all students in high quality instruction and full rigorous access to the curriculum regardless of students' language or socio-economic status. In order to do this well, teachers are guided to engage in the critical process of continuous learning and unlearning, conscious thinking and rethinking, and the commitment to change practice based on new understandings, with the desired outcome of improving student learning. This collaborative model was developed with the understanding that a student's school community, in this case the U.S.-Mexican border, provides the educator with the needed knowledge on how to contextualize and deliver the curriculum regardless of the restrictive language policies and standards waves. The infrastructure for this collaborative model sustains the bilingual community at the center. It is the heart—*el corazón*—of the program with the fundamental capacity to establish, cultivate, and support humanizing relationships that support the collective work of the community, pre-service teachers, practicing teachers, and the school leadership team.

#### ***Estrategia: Leadership Context***

Given CVLCC's location, only eight miles from the California-Mexico border, the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the surrounding community are central to understanding school-level decision making and classroom practices. Romo and Chavez (2006) characterize the borderland as a hybrid space in which individuals are constantly negotiating multiple languages and identities: "the geopolitical border between Mexico and United States represents the beginnings, endings, and blending of languages, cultures, communities, and countries" (p. 142). Teaching and designing instruction for students in borderland contexts, consequently, raises a number of issues and challenges that are specific to the complex relationships between socio-economic status, race, culture, and language.

One of the ways in which the school's administration seeks to be responsive to the blending of cultures and hybrid language practices in their community is in the design of the dual language curriculum. Unlike other dual language programs in which students are primarily taught in their native language the first years—with incremental increases of English language instruction—students at CLVCC begin instruction in Kindergarten with 50% of instruction in English and 50% in Spanish. This decision, which has been contested by some proponents of the traditional dual language model, reflects the administration's knowledge of the community and understanding that most of their students are bicultural and biliterate upon entering school and benefit most from receiving equal instruction in both languages. The ultimate goal of the curriculum is for students to achieve and maintain fluency in both languages, not only in order to ensure high academic achievement, but to promote students' active membership and connection to the multiple languages and identities they navigate in their daily lives.

In their work on border pedagogy, Cline and Necochea (2006) have argued that teachers working in borderland communities require certain dispositions in order to appropriately serve their students. The characteristics identified in their research as contributing to effective teaching practices and supporting students in navigating two worlds are, "open-mindedness and flexibility", "passion for borderland education," "ongoing professional development", "cultural sensitivity", and a "pluralistic language orientation" (p. 271). At CVLCC, the close coordination and joint planning between teachers across language areas reflects a strong "pluralistic language orientation" and plays a critical role in reinforcing the status of Spanish within the curriculum. Students are held to the same rigorous standards and expectations in Spanish as in English and are taught to engage in critical thinking and reflection in both languages. As we describe in the next section, opportunities for ongoing professional development are designed to challenge and further develop teachers' thinking on key issues associated with teaching students in borderland contexts. Teachers are also prepared, supported, and expected to tailor instruction based on the specific characteristics and needs of their students and are encouraged to think of the classroom as a dynamic and ever-changing environment.

In addition to the role of teachers' practices and dispositions, Rodríguez and Alanís (2011) have identified three critical components of effective leadership in a dual language setting that draw heavily on the concept of "border epistemology of school leadership." These include advocacy, socially cognizant behavior, and curriculum expertise. CVLCC's school director, Dr. Ramirez, is a strong advocate for the benefits of the dual language approach and has been instrumental in creating a shared vision for the program, based on the critical pedagogy philosophy and its focus on social justice. He has worked to provide teachers with professional development and support that allow them to put key components of the curriculum, such as critical thinking, global citizenship, and community participation into practice. The fluid and open communication between the teachers and the school's administration, as well as the planning of instruction across subject areas and grade levels also helps to ensure that curriculum expertise, as well as knowledge of the community is shared and utilized to inform decision-making at all levels.

Beyond the CVLCC context, Dr. Ramirez is involved in advocating for the dual language approach as a member of the DLE bilingual teacher preparation program faculty. In this capacity, he applies his experience and expertise, in the form of concrete leadership and classroom examples, as well as school data, in support of implementing a critical pedagogy curriculum. CVLCC's strategies of leadership are mindful of the integration of the learner's language(s) and culture(s), promote the development of biliteracy/bicognition skills, and recognize the voices of students, community members, and teachers as crucial to the teaching and learning process.

### ***Estrategia: School-Wide, Ongoing Professional Development***

Because of the reciprocal nature of this collaboration, the DLE department chair, Dr. Alfaro, facilitated a one week Paulo Freire institute for the CVLCC teaching and administrative staff focused on the capacity to "begin anew," which constitutes one of the most critical qualities for fostering the transformation for teaching and learning: "The capacity to always begin anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live [life] as a process—live to become—is something that always accompanied me throughout my life. This is an indispensable quality of a teacher" (Freire, 1993, p. 98).

From a Freirean perspective, this professional development and many more that followed created a space

where everyone was challenged to rethink and renew their individual and collective vision beyond the standards and test results. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Darder, 2002).

This institute was grounded on the essentiality of inquiry through the process of critical dialogue among teachers with teachers, teachers with students, and students with students. Freire (1970) emphasized that dialogue is essential to the development of critical consciousness. The road to critical consciousness necessitates moving beyond the narrow focus on standards, methods, and test scores and toward a more humane and critical pedagogy that validates multiple perspectives and promotes students' engagement with their local and global world. In introducing the institute, Dr. Alfaro echoed this sentiment:

“I am humbled and honored to have the privilege of facilitating a team of highly talented, committed, passionate, intelligent and skilled educators from whom I learn so much. In our collective work this week we are aiming to interrogate through critical dialogue our ideology and our pedagogy to solidify our praxis and to begin anew. In closing the achievement gap, yes, we have shed the stereotypes and the deficit thinking attached to being a program improvement school and a school that teaches English Learners. But, we know there is more work to be done. We must be clear within ourselves and have this reflected in our own pedagogy and practice what it means to be transformational teacher-scholars.”

It is important to note that this institute took place right at the height of the state and district acknowledgement of their success in closing the achievement gap from 680 to 880. When the CVLCC school director invited Dr. Alfaro to the school to facilitate this institute he mindfully stated, “At a time when we are celebrating and acknowledging our collective effort, passion, and hard work in leading our students' academic success, I don't want us to become complacent; I want us to be challenged to go deeper into our ideological and pedagogical clarity.”

Bartolome (2008) has argued that pre-service and practicing teachers often emerge from teacher education programs having unconsciously absorbed assimilationist white supremacist, and deficit views of nonwhite, low-income, non-English speaking students. Despite there not being definitive research that links teachers' ideological stances with instructional practices, many scholars suggest that a teacher's ideological orientation is often reflected in his or her beliefs and attitudes and consequently reflected in the manner he or she teaches students (Alfaro, 2008; Bartolome, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Macedo, 2010; Nieto, 2010; Sleeter, 2001).

Facilitators and participants at the Paulo Freire institute shared a belief that equally as important to preparing teachers with the skills, strategies, cultural, and linguistic competence necessary to teach English and Dual Language Learners well, is the necessity for a teacher's mindfully-articulated ideological stance. In order for teachers to make an ideological shift that will positively impact the lives of students they must first confront the invisible yet pervasive nature of oppressive dominant ideologies and the harmful impact they have on the education of Latino immigrant children. It takes a teacher's conscious decision to juxtapose and better understand if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and perpetuate unfair and inequitable conditions (Bartolome, 2008).

Ultimately we see that the collaborative model for preparing critically conscious dual language educators is sustained by a fundamental belief informed by critical pedagogy that teachers and their students must enter actively into posing problems within their curriculum context to consider possible strategies for intervening within their reality and thereby transforming their world. Through ongoing professional development, teachers and administrators at CVLCC alongside DLE faculty engage in a process of reflection and analysis to continuously evolve and re-conceptualize their pedagogy in order to best serve their students.

## **Teachers and Students as Intellectuals: *Estrategias* for Action and Interaction in the Classroom**

The stance that CVLCC takes—that teachers and students are intellectuals—calls on teachers to develop a culturally relevant pedagogy that will not only authentically engage students, but also reinforces the inherent value and legitimacy of their knowledge and experiences and those of their community. The school's

Core Beliefs set expectations for students to “involve themselves in the community and establish awareness of global perspectives” (<http://www.cvlcc.org/>). The school’s vision statement describes the school’s “philosophy of critical pedagogy and international perspectives”, and a desire to foster “critical and self-reflection” among students (<http://www.cvlcc.org/>). Together the school’s Core Beliefs and vision statement announce a school-wide goal to promote academic achievement and a standards based education in English and Spanish that is concerned with worldwide equity through praxis. We highlight how the school vision comes to manifest in fourth grade classrooms by looking at fourth grade collaborative teacher planning, classroom interaction, and design and use of classroom environments.

At CVLCC, the fourth grade consists of a team of three teachers, a Spanish Language Arts/Social Science teacher, an English Language Arts teacher, and a Math/Science teacher. Each teacher has a class of approximately 30 students, who rotate to different classrooms to receive instruction in the three core content areas every day of the week. Teachers see approximately 90 students over three class periods each day. The Math/Science teacher delivers four days of math instruction and one day of science instruction per week. Instruction in the core content areas is reduced some days for instruction in Mandarin, Physical Education and a school-wide service learning component.

### ***Estrategia: Collaborative Teacher Planning***

In accordance with the CCSS, CVLCC teachers design curriculum and instruction with the aim of supporting students in both their acquisition of high level thinking skills and their ability to demonstrate understanding and create new knowledge through communicative practices that are academic and evidence-based. Significantly, these practices and goals were something CVLCC had done from the outset:

“Since we first started the school, the vision has always been to make sure that we are producing transformative, critical thinking students. Basically, this means that they are able to adapt to any kind of situation, and we are providing them with tools to empower themselves and to become leaders. In order to do that, students need to be able to negotiate with each other. They need to be agreeing and disagreeing in a respectful manner so that they can be leaders. They need to be able to substantiate their opinions and what they stand for with facts and evidence” (Mrs. Maldonado, curriculum specialist interview).

CVLCC shares CCSS’s emphasis on the production of high-level academic language for the specific reason that the school views language as the essential means through which students empower themselves. Mrs. Maldonado continues:

“And we have always been about dialogue... We wanted to allow them to make mistakes; we had to make sure that we had a low affective filter, whether it was in an English classroom or in a Spanish classroom... We always wanted to make sure that our kids were able to use that craft of the language to become authors. Even before CCSS, we were having author fairs, where students were writing books and then presenting them to the community and putting them in the library, and having our kids being researchers, going out into the communities and doing service learning projects” (curriculum specialist interview).

The school’s focus on developing literacy in English and Spanish, combined with expectations for students’ high-level academic functioning positioned the school to use the CCSS as an opportunity to elevate teacher and student practices that were authentically generated from and, therefore relevant to, the socio-cultural context of the school community.

During collaborative teacher planning, the school administration and support staff, such as content specialists and literacy coaches, work with teachers to support their instructional decision making processes and to ensure that adequate progress is being made in terms of their team-and school-established, end-of-unit, and end-of-school year expectations. The fourth grade team has combined four hours of horizontal planning among themselves, as well as vertical planning with the fifth grade team each week, for curriculum design and to coordinate lessons. The addition of vertical planning with strategic grade clusters since CCSS implementation demonstrates how the school interpreted the CCSS—in this case, vertical alignment of anchor standards—in



order to elevate, with purpose and intentionality, what they had already been practicing around collaborative teacher planning (Mr. Lyons, teacher interview).

### **Estrategia: Classroom Interaction**

Teachers' dialogic learning in their professional development and collaborative teacher planning, coupled with their commitment to a critical pedagogy philosophy impacts teachers' ideas about the important role of dialogue in students' learning process:

"To think and dialogue about text and come out with a total changed thought is a mind-set that says, 'There is no wrong answer,' and 'I am going to enter into this process with my own thinking and I am going to leave with changed thinking due to what happened throughout this process.'

This mind-set allows one to feel vulnerable to say, 'Oh, I don't get this,' or 'What do you mean by that?' These are things I like to celebrate with my students" (Mr. Lyons, teacher interview).

During one lesson, the fourth grade English Language Arts teacher, Mr. Lyons, directly addressed the fact that many students would encounter barriers along their close reading process, which is an area of emphasis in the CCSS. He explained as he drew a staircase with landings and roadblocks on the white board, "Each time someone in our community of learners encounters a barrier, dialogue breaks down those barriers and leads to better comprehension of the text." Mr. Lyons anticipates Shanahan (2013), who warned, "under the CCSS, students will be more frustrated by challenging texts, and this means other instructional supports will be needed to help and encourage them along this path. Teachers must learn to anticipate text challenges and how to support students to allow them to negotiate texts successfully, but without doing the work for them" (p. 6). On view of a critical pedagogy philosophy where the teacher is not the sole producer of legitimate knowledge, Mr. Lyons depends on student-to-student dialogue as instructional support.

The school's emphasis on dialogical classrooms, or as one administrator described, "productive noise in classrooms," makes the CCSS for Speaking and Listening of central importance because they provide the foundation for classroom interaction and student voice. Teacher designed work documents help students record and structure their thinking for subsequent communication; CCSS Speaking and Listening standards set expectations for their oral language production and reception. For example, after a pair of students completed a work document related to an informational text they had read, they formed a group of four students, exchanged documents, and engaged in dialogue to share feedback verbally. During this group dialogue one fourth grader said:

"...it is important to understand what the author states in the text because they have their opinion, then we have the teacher's opinion, then I have my own opinion which I formed by looking at evidence in the text and, finally, my own experience—where I live in relation to the world. The dialogue with my classmates helps me to view things through different perspectives..."

The teacher's emphasis on critical thinking and the co-construction of knowledge through interaction are key elements of the teacher's critical pedagogy perspective. Throughout the peer editing activity students are continuously provided with opportunities to challenge and revise their own thinking, as well as that of their peers. Significantly dialogue was the centerpiece of this learning process: whenever students would hit a barrier or reach a plateau the teacher facilitated their collaboration and reliance on each other to push each other's thinking. Students possessed the language (using sentence frames earlier in the year) to say, for example, "Can you please rephrase your question, could you please clarify, I don't understand?" Collaborative, dialogical work built and sustained the learning community because students had the respectful language to be critical and the confidence to ask for clarification. The dialogical process of student empowerment is not just a student phenomenon, but takes place within the solidarity of relationships with others (Darder, 2002). Teachers create dialogical conditions within their classroom to support their student's process of developing a language of critique for both individual and collaborative empowerment.

Previous research has established the importance of a "facilitative social environment" (Flores, 2007, p. 34), where the teacher is "key not only in organizing the social uses and practices of language(s), both oral and written across social contexts, but also in the type of social interactions, socio-cultural rituals, expectations, and

*respeto/respect* that become the ways of knowing, the ways of being, the ways of acting, the ways of doing, and the ways of socially interacting in the classroom” (p. 34, original emphasis). At the beginning of a curricular unit, Mr. Lyons discussed with his students how he viewed their role in their own learning and that of their peers: “This year you are the teacher, you are responsible for your learning and that of your classroom community.” It was common for Mr. Lyons to refer to students as teachers. For example, during the same activity discussed above, Mr. Lyons facilitated a discussion, “Ok, now, so your job as teachers: How can you help him?” In keeping with a Freireian conception of critical pedagogy, Mr. Lyons works to create a classroom environment where every teacher is a learner, every learner is a teacher (Freire, 1970).

### **Estrategia: Classroom Environment and Artifacts**

The teachers’ efforts to integrate the critical pedagogy approach with the Common Core State Standards in both languages are also reflected in the classroom environment and the various artifacts students interact with, which include, but are not limited to classroom displays and bulletin boards, worksheets and handouts, and student “cuadernos” (*journals*). The room environment reflects thinking process. Rather than room environments only posting student work, which can have limited and disconnected relevancy to ongoing learning, teacher and administrators ask, “Can my students use the room to help them think about the lesson that is being taught?” For example, in one fourth grade Spanish Language Arts classroom, the teacher designed a large bulletin board, which provided an elaborate visual representation of the process of analyzing and working with different types of texts. The board depicted the silhouette of a person holding up a sign (in a protest-like posture) displaying a phrase that was referenced and recited by the teacher and students regularly and included in other teaching materials: “Los seres humanos piensan libremente y pueden crear su propio entendimiento del mundo.” (“*Human beings think freely and can create their own understanding of the world.*”) The phrase, which is heavily influenced by the critical pedagogy perspective, highlights the importance of critical thinking as a universal value, applicable to all people and realms of life, rather than a skill necessary for academic achievement.

On the same bulletin board, underneath the person holding up the sign, there was a statement that read, “Somos críticos, distinguimos entre información” (“*we are critical, we distinguish between information [that is]*”) followed by the words “objetiva” (*objective*) and “subjectiva” (*subjective*) and a list of features associated with each type of information. The board also illustrated the steps students are expected to follow when analyzing texts, which involve: “escribiendo notas en el margen” (“*writing notes in the margin*”), “analizando palabras desconocidas” (“*analyzing unfamiliar words*”), and using their notes to identify the author’s main argument and supporting details. Alongside these steps, the teacher attached samples of students’ work to the board, showcasing their note-taking practices, as well as the worksheets students were using to help them decipher unfamiliar terms found in the text.

The bulletin board described is an example of how the teachers at the school work to bridge some of the principles of a critical pedagogy-inspired curriculum with the Common Core State Standards, which represent a more teacher-directed and outcomes-based approach. The focus on text analysis, particularly of ‘informational texts’, as well as students’ ability to extract an author’s key arguments and supporting evidence from a text are all key components of the fourth grade CCSS reading standards. While the goal of developing these specific skills is visible in the bulletin board’s content, there also appears to be a strong focus on the process of learning and on how to support students in engaging with and finding meaning in texts.

The blending of both approaches through classroom artifacts can also be seen in the English Language Arts classrooms. In Mr. Lyons’ fourth grade class, the following phrase was displayed on one of the classroom walls: “A Community Conscious of Others.” There was also a poster that specified the “Expectations of Dialogue” for the class, which included: “Listen to others’ ideas with care,” “Ask questions to check understanding of information,” and “Respect your classmates’ ideas.” These statements and guidelines are oriented towards building community in the classroom and establishing values for learning with others and appear to draw from the emphasis in critical pedagogy on dialogue and reflection. Similarly to the Spanish Language Arts class billboard, these English classroom displays co-exist with others that provide definitions for terms, such as ‘metaphors’ and ‘similes’, as well as ‘figurative language’, which reflect a concern for acquiring specific grade-level skills and

concepts. Another large bulletin board titled, “We are critical readers and precise writers,” provided students with a diagram outlining the features and structure of a narrative text, as well as the process involved in the close reading of text, which was broken down into steps very similar to those in the Spanish class.

The examples discussed illustrate some of the ways in which the teachers at the school negotiate and generate connections between the critical pedagogy perspective and the demands of a standards-based teaching approach. Some of the practices that are represented visually in the classrooms, such as close reading and analysis of texts, seem to be closely tied to the CCSS and the academic skills prioritized by the standards. The more philosophical and process-oriented elements, however, indicate 1) the teachers’ self-perception not as technicians but as intellectuals who facilitate learning, and 2) the teachers’ efforts to broaden students’ understanding of learning beyond immediate education outcomes through the creation of classroom environments that are grounded in reflection and critical thinking.

### **Conclusion: Facing up to Retos**

While the experience of one particular dual language program cannot provide answers to the many *retos* that arise in dynamic and linguistically and culturally complex education settings, the work of teachers and administrators at CVLCC sheds light on the type of problem-solving and strategies that come into play in trying to meet the many challenges presented by a growing bicultural and biliterate Latino population in the current education scenario. At the heart of CVLCC’s approach lies a spirit of collaboration and partnership, which facilitates the flow of ideas between the SDSU bilingual teacher education program, the school’s administration, and the teachers implementing the curriculum. In addition to reinforcing a common ideology and vision for the school, these partnerships help ensure consistency and quality at all levels of the program. The ongoing professional development opportunities and leadership of the administration also support teachers in articulating and unifying the goals of the CCSS with those of a critical pedagogy-based curriculum.

One of the challenges, which the case of CVLCC highlights, is the tensions teachers encounter when attempting to meet external education standards that demand immediate outcomes and often conflict with the goals of culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum. As some of the examples discussed illustrate, developing and exploring different strategies that can help align a dual language, critical pedagogy-based curriculum requires that, when analyzing and implementing the CCSS, teachers have knowledge of their students and the broader school community, and flexibility in classroom level decision-making. Meeting this challenge allows teachers to tailor content to best suit the interests and needs of their students and is essential to implementing a truly student-centered curriculum that positions students as intellectuals and agents of change in their own right.

Implementing a dual language curriculum that is both culturally responsive and attends to the academic language development of students is highly challenging. The CCSS place an emphasis, across grades, on students’ developing the ability to comprehend and generate complex texts involving communication of information—and to do it in ways that involve high level reasoning skills and linguistic skills that increasingly support academic content learning. The primary focus espoused by many proponents of the CCSS is the preeminent need for students to process texts as isolated, decontextualized sources of information based on their linguistic features including vocabulary, sentence syntax, and intersentential discourse cohesion markers—the ways syntax structurally glues together the meaning of different statements and the ideas they convey (Durán, 2014). Accordingly, the CCSS does present a challenge for teachers to develop a teaching repertoire inclusive of English language development and, more specifically, of how English learners acquire sophisticated comprehension and productive fluency in a wide range of language registers, and language structures performing illocutionary functions common to academic work. We find it problematic that these CCSS standards do not include attention to ways that the design of pedagogy itself must connect issues of developing students’ ability to deal with text complexity given the linguistic, sociocultural, and contextual demands of reading tasks and given student characteristics and social identities in school and classroom settings. This proves even more challenging in the context of dual language education where the status of two (or more) languages connects the life and languages of a community with learning at school. That stated, we welcome this challenge given the opportunities and strategies presented by joining dual language programs with efforts to implement schooling informed by a critical pedagogy through a

teacher preparation program. We have discussed one university and school partnership that refuses to implement the CCSS in a way that reduces language to a technical skill devoid of complex sociocultural meaning and power; and we argue that this partnership is sustained by a fundamental belief that teachers must be prepared to make the “ideological shift” necessary for providing all students with access to the state-adopted academic standards without standardizing their language, knowledge or creativity (Quezada & Alfaro, 2012). Ultimately, teachers and administrators at CVLCC and DLE faculty view the new standards reform, not as an astronomical shift, but rather as another instance when externally imposed demands of the state, county, and/or district must be used as an opportunity to reaffirm and elevate what the school has been doing for the last decade to successfully close the achievement gap.

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