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# SPANISH LANGUAGE, CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AN ENGLISH-ONLY ENVIRONMENT

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## Abstract

This paper documents the reflections of action research projects generated by two teachers with different cultural backgrounds and grade levels; one is an English monolingual first grade-reading teacher and the other is a bilingual Spanish-English high school teacher. Teachers' professional development is examined by personal testimonies of their classroom action research projects on the literacy needs of their students. Teacher interviews and reflections illustrate how these teachers become researchers and reflective practitioners in the context of their classrooms. The two case studies demonstrate how language policy in the state of California may influence teacher practice in their choices of the cultural representation of literacy lessons. Through researching their own practice teachers gain deeper perspectives of literacy and how learners construct knowledge through learning to read in English as a second language as emergent readers and academic literacy in the primary language as adolescents.

Keywords: action Research, cognitive knowledge, corridos, dialogic, native language, situated learning

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## 2. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study was to raise teachers' awareness of cultural representation in bilingual texts through constant reflection and dialogic exchange via the use of culturally relevant texts to motivate students through collaborative participatory activities in their teaching. This action research is focused on the language and literacy needs of Spanish-speaking children in California's public school classrooms. The interaction of native and second language and the use of the immediate environment to propagate literacy considers two interdependent areas that are pertinent to children's literacy development: historical antecedents of language policy affecting California teacher's professional development and credentialing process, and the importance of participatory action research as a viable path for continual critical analysis and growth. Before presenting the two case studies based on the action research projects of classroom teachers, these two theoretical interdependent constructs will be espoused.

The two main questions that guide the study are: Does action research of teacher practice mitigate critical reflection on the use of native language representation for students' literacy development in spite of English-Only policies? And how are cultural representations in bilingual texts used to enhance literacy development for bilingual Spanish-English students? Two case studies through the process of Action Research are reported in this paper that take distinct positions on the literacy needs of Spanish speaking students; the first case study is Brenda's Reading Recovery project at the first grade level and the second Teresa's Heritage Language project class that includes various secondary school grade levels. Both studies used an Action Research paradigm that promotes creativity, constant reflection and allows the teacher to generate the action in the development of culturally appropriate pedagogy for literacy events.

### *2.1 Historical language policy as a theoretical context*

English-Only policies in California date back to 1855, when the state Bureau of Public Instruction stipulated that all schools must teach strictly in English. This rapid language policy was imposed during a time when the State of California became annexed to the United States after the war with Mexico in 1848. Gradually, the public school system was established in the State and by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century English-Only was the official language policy in schooling. California became the first State in the union to have an English-Only policy (Garcia, 2006, 2008; Gifford and Valdes 2006; Macias, 2014).

Spanish-English bilingualism persists and grows in spite of the lack of institutional support from schools and the deliberate attempt to politically impose Americanization and English-Only policies. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century segregated schools were a common practice and the language shift in law and policy was the initial reason used to marginalize Spanish-speaking children and other language students

that speak a language other than English. After the Civil Rights movement commenced in 1964 California had legislation for education that allowed some form of bilingual schooling. Despite these attempts the institutionalized practices of segregation continued strongly into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In California the language segregation not only continues but language restrictive laws contribute to the lack of achievement for Spanish speaking children (Garcia, 2006). The complexity of how restrictive language policies effect the educational needs of Spanish speaking children is elucidates how the dramatic changes occurring in the racial, ethnic, and linguistic composition of the California public schools magnify the consequences of these changes for Hispanic students by their linguistic isolation, lack of equity and pervasive segregation by singling the native language as the reason for poor achievement (Weisman and Hanson 2002; Gifford and Valdes, 2006).

Plagued with inconsistencies that have many implications for teachers' professional development in 1998, a decade and a half ago, Proposition 227<sup>i</sup> in California eliminated all forms of Bilingual Education programs. After nearly four decades of State and Federal mandates that allowed some form of native language to be used in educating children that spoke another language other than English Proposition 227 has eliminated the need for teachers to be prepared to teach children whose primary language is not English (Balderrama, 2001; Weisman and Hanson, 2002). Even at the formal elimination of bilingual education programs California is leading the nation in the increase of Spanish-speaking children's presence in schools. The state credentialing for teacher certification, requires that teachers focus attention on teaching practices that incorporate students' cultural backgrounds in all school subjects in spite of English-Only mandates. In most cases though, teachers do not know how to do this adequately and this important aspect of learning and teaching is often overlooked. According to Balderrama (2001), "California teacher preparation standards seem to fall short of what both experience and pedagogical research suggest are best for a majority of students. Increasingly, state and national conversations about teacher preparation focus almost entirely on mastery of standards that tend to exclude the needs of English language learners" (Balderrama, 2001, p. 256).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century in California and other United States regions language segregation not only continues but language restrictive laws contribute to the achievement gap that is in fact, wider than ever (Balderrama 2001; Weisman and Hanson, 2002; Gifford and Valdes, 2006). To offset negative effects of the legislation focused on the bilingual classrooms effected by Proposition 227, Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez and Asato, (2000), propose the following guidelines practicing teachers in designing language instruction: "mediated learning or assisted learning; cultural-historical learning communities by use of meditational tools; hybridity organizing principles to include hybrid language practices; use of social, cultural and linguistic resources; enriched diversity and valuing difference in learning; learning as a goal rather than teaching." (Gutierrez, et.al. 2000, p. 99-100).

While the above premises may decrease some of the negative effects of the status of language programs in schools, throughout the years these instructional dimensions, as continual change occurs in the credential process, are plagued with serious problems. The complexity of teacher credentialing and the need to have teachers develop professionally during and after their first year of teaching necessitates that certification processes propagate the need to allow but also require teachers to continue to grow, cognitively and professionally. Central to the continual professional growth of teacher, Weisman and Hanson (2002) point out that ironically Proposition 227 may not have reduced the need for bilingual teachers even if instruction under this policy was designed to be taught by teachers who could at a minimum, understand the native language of the students. In the aftermath of implementation as a policy, research on teacher development has demonstrated that English instruction mandated by 227 is more effective when there is native language support (Gandara, 2000).

Furthermore, to exacerbate the issues concerning native language use in the classroom one of the problems in schooling minority language children is the lack of minority language bilingual teachers in the pool of certificated teachers. This reality, which has existed historically, has a duo complexity with regard to the teachers' cultural identity. The first is the burden of developing learning programs for children that are culturally relevant and which requires not only knowing about children's cultural background but also understanding the nuances of culture that can serve as a foundation for classroom learning. The primary task falls on teachers who are not knowledgeable of the culture of the children they teach.

The other related dilemma but even more complex as a cultural dialectic, is that the few teachers that are self-identified ethnic minorities themselves or are minority culture representatives often have assimilated well into mainstream culture. In some cases, these ethnic teachers operate with a level of fear at being reprimanded for using methods and pedagogy that go against the dictates of district level standards for using the native language of the students for instruction (Gutierrez, et.al. 2000). Even more pervasive is the teacher certification for bilingual teachers in the United States; the majority of Spanish/English bilingual teachers have had limited opportunities to learn academic language in Spanish (Escamilla, 1999). This fact prevents teachers from learning about the Spanish language and cultural heritage of the Spanish-speaking people in California; a heritage that has existed for hundreds of years before English only mandates. These aspects of teacher development and growth are not yet well researched but few universities and colleges offer specific course work in methods courses to teach reading in Spanish. According to Escamilla (1999), in many reading methods classes "prospective bilingual teachers are simply told to learn best-practice strategies in English and do them in Spanish" (p. 127). To reiterate, this is again due to the historical factors that have affected fluency in Spanish for generations of potential bilinguals in establishing public schooling with a dominate culture based on English-Only which from the onset has been hegemonic. This project therefore postulates a well-established

axiom that *language and culture are intimately related*. If a person does not have identification with the language or at the very least, conversation proficiency it is probable that they will not develop an identity with the culture.

In the state of California there has been a shortage of well-qualified bilingual bi-cultural teachers to serve the growing need of Spanish speaking children in the schools. The two teachers whose projects are included in this study are not required by the state credentialing process to use the children's native language nor are they required to be bilingual. It is assumed that since these teachers have already been credential and are practicing teachers they are experienced in discerning what the educational needs are in order to promote literacy in either the second language or the native language. There are a myriad of issues related to recruitment and retention of minority teacher candidates', fluency in the Spanish language and this is a major concern (Guerrero, M. 1997). It has been documented that teachers that "have the capacity to connect with diverse students in preK-12 setting are a driving force behind the demographic imperative to diversify the teaching profession" (Bower-Phipps, Homa, Albaledejo, Mello Johnson and Cruz, 2013, p.29). Later I will present more specific details of the characteristics of each teacher and the elements considered for the selection of their projects for this paper.

## 2.2 *Considerations of language and culture linked to teacher development*

Historically any attempts at offering bilingual schooling have not been systematically organized, or researched in order to draw from systemic pedagogical studies for designing bilingual instruction for constantly changing demographics. Basic literacy is still the main focus of concerns for educators. According to Gutierrez et.al. (2000), "Fundamentally, these new reductive literacy practices (reference to Prop. 227) do not harness diversity and difference as resources for learning; instead, these new pedagogies are characterized by narrow notion of learning, particularly literacy and language learning that define diversity and difference as problems to be eliminated, if not remediated." (Gutierrez et.al. 2000, p.103). According to several studies minority teacher candidates serve as role models for students and are more strongly connected to students' families and communities especially if the teacher shares the same cultural background as the students. This is often referred to as "cultural synchronicity" which encourages the use of classroom materials for learning in the classroom that focuses on the students' previous knowledge and lived experiences from their own communities (Sleeter & Thao, 2007; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

In spite of the discrepancies propagated by 227 recently there are various credentialing mandates for the licensing of teachers that make an effort through new legislation to charge these new professionals with the responsibility to craft culturally appropriate pedagogy. Balderrama (2001), describes the need for better prepared teacher as a most crucial concern, "the increasing homogeneity in teachers,

the increasing linguistic and consequently academic heterogeneity of students, and the emphasis on inadequate standards and technical solutions to teacher preparation—all within a context of a social climate which is anti-immigrant and anti-multilingual.” (Balderrama, 2001, p.257). The new State of California certification requires that teachers focus attention on teaching practices that incorporate students’ cultural background in all school subjects while at the same time adhering to English-Only mandates. Since 2000, more than a decade ago, the certification for teachers designated under Cross-cultural, Language and Academic Development (CLAD) or Bilingual Cross-cultural, Language and Academic Development BCLAD credentialing processes were foreshadowed as a result of the impact of Proposition 227. The emphasis was placed on the needs of EL or English Language learners. (*See Effects of the Implementation of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Learners, K-12, Findings from a Five Year Evaluation, American Institutes for Research and WestEd, January 24, 2006*).

Furthermore, “while Proposition 227 did not directly amend teacher-credentialing statutes, this legislation managed to make “illegal the use of appropriate pedagogy, such as the use of a student’s primary language” (Balderrama, 2001, pg. 257). In sum, more than a decade in California the campaign to eliminate instruction in any language other than English as an immersion approach was supported by Proposition 227 which mandates English Only instruction for all learners (Weisman and Hanson, 2002). The goal in teaching in English is to assimilate into mainstream society so therefore the emphasis on the use of English in all school subjects disallows their knowledge of concepts that can be used for skill development from students’ native language knowledge. Later in this paper we see this illustrated in a synthesis offered by the Reading Recovery teacher’s reflections on children’s enthusiastic participation of a culturally relevant informational text even if the language used for dialog is English. In light of all the complex issues thus far presented in the preparation of teachers to teach children that speak another language other than English as a native language, the present study attempts to get a glimpse of how teachers make sense of the cultural background of their students and are consciously reflecting on how to best meet their basic literacy needs. Teaching for literacy in either the second language as in the Reading Recovery case study or the native language as in the Heritage Language case study is the main goal for both teachers.

### 3. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

#### 3.1 *The Pilot Study*

A participatory research project as part of a university course become a pilot study of three elementary monolingual English schoolteachers that used bilingual texts to include all students in their classroom on the cultural representations of those texts. The teacher educator and course instructor was part of the team and select-

ed culturally appropriate materials that represented Spanish language cultural representation. Because the teachers did not speak the language of the children, the students in the pilot study classrooms become the interpreters of graphic cultural representation in bilingual texts for the teachers and for other children in the classroom. In all three classrooms the native Spanish speakers comprised approximately one third of the students. These sites represented three distinct communities but all had a sizable population of native Spanish speaking students. The activities in lessons allowed the Spanish language speakers to read aloud in their native language and engage other children who did not speak Spanish. This lesson became an ego-boost for the children who became the interpreters of content for the entire class and resulted in the improvement of their self-confidence. Overall, a warmer acceptance of their native culture by their teachers and other children and an overall improvement in their academic participation were the results. More importantly, the participating teachers became aware of how little they knew of the culture of the Spanish speaking students in their classrooms and acknowledged how advanced the Spanish speaking children's literacy skills were in their native language (Garcia, 2000). This pilot study was focused on providing dimensions of reflective practice with regard to cultural aspects of learning to read. The teachers used children's literature in the classroom that had a cultural representation of the native language of the students to engage all children regardless of language background in cultural dialog and cultural representation that fundamentally allowed mutual respect for all cultural backgrounds that comprised the classrooms.

### *3.2 Action Research as Reflective Practice*

In the present study we consider an action research participatory process model such as the one used as an experiment in the pilot study. This is not a research report per se, it is a documentation of a collaborative process, where teachers interact and dialog their ideas and perceptions of language and culture related to literacy with the university coach and mentor. A major consideration for the present study is that the process of reflective practice in participatory action research must be integrated into a system of apprenticeship. This apprenticeship is being carried out through the Masters level work and the participation of teachers researching their own practice. This integrated approach to prepare teachers to deal with their understanding of diverse learning takes into account the cultural knowledge of their students when considering literacy development either in English or the native language.

Given the flux in the state of California to prepare teachers to teach in multicultural, multilingual communities and the university program goals to guide teacher to become agents of change in present day schooling practices, a viable approach for teacher development is participatory action research. Participatory research includes the development of transformative knowledge as a basis for teacher development at multiple levels of the process. To this end, the view of Action Re-



search adopted for working with teachers for this study is what is referred to as “situated” contexts. These “situated” contexts are linked to children whose language is other than English but are expected to learn in schools that are English-Only, or as in one of the studies, to learn to become literate in English. The focus of both research projects used for this paper is on the development of reflective practice. For our purpose the model of reflective practice proposed by Schon, (1983) seems to match our actions. Schon’s (1987), model is “reflection-in-action”; the ability to mirror a reflective process in the action itself is a way of assessing actions in the process of acting. The action consisting of working through experiences gained from actions after the fact, are based on the notion of master-apprentice relationship where a dialogical processes of reflection between the master and apprentice are mutually shared. Actions are not developed in isolation. (Greenwood, and Levin, 2007). As can be discerned in the two case studies, presented, albeit both have their own merit, the high school case study takes on an active process that is a shared responsibility that is constantly dialogical in forging a “community of learners”. This community includes the students in the classroom, the teacher and the university professor as the project continually spirals to levels of complexity in the lives of those involved that includes the community at large.

It is important to acknowledge and continue to reiterate that both projects are action research studies focused on literacy; the Reading Recovery is a reflection on practical considerations for teaching literacy skills and the Language Heritage study is strong on critical action and transformative change on the lives of those involved; teacher, students and community. According to Mills, (2014), teachers conduct action research projects “for themselves; it is not imposed on them by someone else. Action research engages teachers in a four step process: 1) identify an area of focus, 2) collect data, 3) analyze and interpret data, 4) develop an action plan” (Mills, 2014, p.8).

This paper reports the reflections of two teachers that have conducted action research in their classrooms. The value of teachers researching their own practice is that the results of their work are not imposed from the outside, since the process is meant for teachers to become researchers of their classroom or school community. From the beginning the process included two university courses for a total of twenty consecutive weeks of instruction: ten weeks to understand action research and conceptualize the study, and ten weeks to execute and complete the projects. During this time, teachers are expected to conceptualize and area for research in their own classroom, write a proposal to be evaluated by the university Human Subjects committee and begin the preliminary literature review by generating an annotated bibliography before commencing the actual study in their classrooms. All of this is done during the first ten-week course along with readings and cohort discussions about their ideas and related reading in the university class.

The entire process lasted approximately six months in duration. The second ten weeks of the study sequence, the individual plan is executed, data is gathered and analysed, and findings are then presented at a public forum. The university mentor

is a constant participant. To reiterate, both of these research projects had adopted the definition of action research as “practical action research” with an emphasis on “how to” approach to the learning processes of their students. The high school project however, resulted in a more “critical action research” project, which allowed the teacher to examine the representation of her students from a contextual and community base. This critical dimension is politically constructed. This study actively became transformative, generated many interrelated cultural aspects for consideration and spiralled to levels that are dynamic as a basis for pedagogical change. The Reading Recovery study focused on gleaning a pedagogical approach of knowledge to incorporate non-fictional reading materials for teaching English language skills within a predetermined setting. From the onset this study was contained within the confines of the classroom and does not include the community knowledge of the students until after the study plan was completed. Since the goal of both studies is on the development of reflective practice the action of change in the teacher’s perception of students’ learning is the important focus.

Both studies based on what each respective teacher wanted to accomplish, have their own merit linked to reflective practice. Essential in the process was an ongoing journal kept by each teacher to chronicle their ideas, changing perception and as tool for writing about their project, doing interpretation and finally as a culminating activity generating an action plan for future work. Sharing their work with others is an essential requirement and they must present the results of their study in an organized public forum. A power point presentation is required which includes all the components of their study: research questions, data collections methods, analysis, findings and an action plan. What Mills, (2014) identifies as *Dialectic Action Research Spiral*, was adopted for these studies. Basically, this model for research is conducted by teachers and for teachers and students, and is not research done on them, and as such is a dynamic and responsive model that can be adapted to different contexts and purposes.” (Mills, 2014 p. 19).

### 3.3 *The Characteristics of the Participating Teachers:*

The two teachers were invited to submit their projects for analysis by the teacher educator for this paper are two female teachers in their mid thirties. They are both practicing teachers with full credentials. The Reading Recovery teacher completed her MA and credential as a reading specialist and the Heritage Language teacher has completed the MA in curriculum and instruction and is a bilingual Spanish English high school teacher with a special interest in Spanish literature. She teaches in a World Languages Department. Both projects reported in this paper are the culminating projects for the completion of the Masters degree. The ethnic background of these teachers is also important to note: one teacher is a Mexican American and the other is a Chinese American. Both are American born, schooled in the USA and for all technical purposes are considered English speakers. The bilingual Spanish-speaking teacher has academic proficiency in the native language while the Chinese

American teacher has some knowledge of her native language but rarely, except in personal interactions with her immediate family, uses her native language. The real names of these two teachers are not used in the report or analysis of these studies nor are the names of the schools where they teach provided. Although these teachers have given permission to use their studies for this paper and they are over the age of 18, every precaution is taken to protect their anonymity. This is done as an ethical practice in the research protocol required by the university where these studies were generated. Also, both teachers have read preliminary interpretations written by the teacher educator.

In the next section both studies are presented as:

Study A. The Reading Recovery Case

Study B. The Heritage Language Case

Each study is described according to the sequence of the action research components that the teachers have generated; area of focus, data collection, analysis and interpretation and action plan however, because they are distinct in level, context and application the basic component do not follow a strict pattern for reporting.

### 3.4 Study A: *The Reading Recovery Case*

#### 3.4.1 *Brenda the first grade Reading Recovery teacher*

Brenda was invited to participate in reflective dialogic approach by the professor coach for conducting her action research project at the beginning of the process when conceptualizing the focus of her study. Brenda declined the invitation to integrate materials that had cultural representation because she felt it would take away from her responsibilities as a reading specialist and the expectation that all materials were required to be in English. She wanted to receive guidance in the design through the course on Action Research and the ensuing implementation of her study and wanted to follow the school district guidelines to teach beginning readers to read only in English. She sought feedback on her draft for her research project by examining her transformation in learning to use *informational texts* (which was a new approach in her experience as a reading teacher) to teach beginning reading. Even though the text offered by the teacher educator was a text written in English it had strong cultural representation for children from Spanish speaking backgrounds. Brenda accepted to try out the picture text with cultural representation only as an add-on to her own selection of information texts. She agreed to use the culturally representative book but only after she integrated standard non-fictional materials in after conducting reflection on her pedagogical approach in designing the aspect of instruction required by the mandates of her school and school district for Reading Recovery in English.

In addition, the emergent reading teacher does not speak the language of the children of which three out of the four students are Spanish-speaking children. The theoretical constructs presented in the previous section of this paper apply as evidence of how mainstream teachers prioritize and adhere to the state and school district standards to develop pedagogy focused on literacy in English-Only. In most cases, teaching reading in the early grades is devoid of the intentional representation of the community and culture of the children. The Reading Recovery programs have been very successful with English speaking children who are at-risk of failing but with children that speak another language an additional primary goal besides teaching them to read is to help transition into English-Only classrooms very early in the schooling process. These cases are the norm rather than the exception, and the community culture associated with the native language is not used. Reading Recovery programs in the United States have demonstrated much success in helping academically struggling students to learn to read by highly trained certified individuals and are specifically designed for first grade students (Escamilla, Loera, Ruiz and Rodriguez, 1998). Brenda is a specialist in Reading Recovery. In addition, the few studies that have been done with a reading recovery approach for Spanish speaking children, caution that research on similar programs specifically designed for Spanish speakers (*Descubriendo La Lectura*) "cannot and should not consist of simple replication of studies conducted on English Reading Recovery programs. The implementation of DLL programs has a political and social reality that is quite different from English Reading Recovery." (Escamilla, et.al, 1998, p. 75). The decisions about using cultural representation in English reading text is aligned with Brenda's adherence to follow the guidelines dealing with one language, that of the mainstream language. The instruction provided to these emergent readers will follow a systematic plan for transitioning to English-only programs in the early grades. Brenda articulates the importance of following this plan in the next section. Brenda's formal action research study lasted four weeks but she included a fifth week for sharing a text written in English provided by the university coach that had cultural representation in a post study reflection. These reflections and discussion are presented in the last section of Study A.

#### 3.4.2 *Brenda: Identifying the area of focus*

In conceptualizing her study Brenda used the following factors which are important to consider in planning for reading recovery: "My study, however, takes into account younger students, who are just beginning to read and are encountering various roadblocks in their early development. They have been identified early on as at-risk for reading failure and are best described as *struggling emergent readers*." (Action Research project Study A, Interview based on project proposal, Fall 2013)

As stated in the previous section, this common practice of Reading Recovery is a generally accepted model to teach children early in the second language or English-Only so that they do not lag behind the rest of the children in a given school. Pre-

sumably, when children succeed in Reading Recovery they will be able to make the transition from the use of their native language to learning all subjects in English and have a chance to achieve in all school subjects. The teacher is charged with insuring that these children who are identified as lagging behind the norm, are reading at grade level in English by the end of a given semester during the school year. Thus this teacher works with a small number of children but not in a full classroom.

The following excerpt is a reflective approach to making sense of how she can improve the knowledge her students bring to the reading task:

So what about students who have a limited amount of background knowledge and whose prior knowledge does not align with that of the dominant culture? The four participants in my study, however, all come from cultures other than the dominant one and are learning English as a second language. They also all live in low-socioeconomic conditions, a factor that may limit their exposure to experiences such as playing in the snow or traveling in an airplane. My study explores the kinds of concept-learning support students like these may need in order to interact with nonfiction books successfully.....(Action Research Project, Study A, Project Reflections, Fall 2013).

#### 3.4.3 *Brenda: Collection of data*

Brenda collected multiple data by using qualitative data collection methods and video taping her sessions of the oral reading sessions and writing activities. She adds, “although informational texts may seem less accessible to students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, for students with low-socioeconomic backgrounds, the targeted social setting is that of the dominant culture which encompasses most educational and career opportunities.” (Action Research Project Reflections, Project Study A, Fall 2013).

The data sources that Brenda collected were student surveys, writing samples and video recording –these were primary sources. Secondary sources included running record assessments that confirmed the primary source observations. (The actual forms used in Brenda’s study are offered for review in Appendix A).

In spite of her own perceptions of the cultural needs of the students with whom she works, Brenda was able to reflect on how she could improve instruction based on self-analysis of her lessons. As she succinctly states, “because the data collection process happened as I was actively engaged in teaching, I was an active participant observer, playing the role of both teacher and researcher. But because I video-recorded portions of the lesson, I was able to step back and re-watch the lessons through the lens of a passive observer”. (Action Research Project Reflection, Study A, Fall 2013).

#### 3.4.4 *Brenda: Analysis and Interpretation*

Based on careful consideration and reflection on conducting literacy events with remedial readers, Brenda in her final discussion of the project noted that she de-

veloped skills of discernment regarding the literacy needs of the children. She also managed over time, to build a momentum for moving her knowledge base forward by taking into consideration all of the factors involved in teaching English as a second language. As one of her final reflections illustrates, she is even more connected to learning process, then at the beginning of her study:

The texts, however, did present the participants with some points of difficulty, which involved two main areas: use of language structures and concept learning. To address these difficulties, I took notice of the interactions between the students and texts that highlighted the interplay between the three language modalities. I found that if the students orally rehearsed and then wrote a message with a particular language structure, that activity supported the later reading of that same structure. While classroom curricula often tend to separate the three activities (reading, writing, English language development), my study showed that the integration of the three activities effectively unlocked language complexities and may have possibly accelerated language acquisition. (Action Research Project Reflection, Study A, Fall 2013).

Brenda documented how she has achieved a level of confidence in using informational text to teach students in English that she did not possess before the study she states: "I possessed new understandings, capabilities, and confidence. This experience highlighted for me the point from which I had begun and the progress I had made." (Face-to-Face Interview, Study A, Fall of 2013).

#### 3.4.5 *Brenda: Post Study Reflection*

In addition, to succeeding with her proposed study Brenda made a special effort to contribute one lesson that had cultural representation. This was done however, only after she finished the work proposed for her action research study with emergent readers. She chose to keep this separate and only used the cultural literacy lesson shared by the teacher educator or coach as an add-on activity but not as a formal part of her action research study. This was done deliberately and methodically. To reiterate, for this paper then, the teacher provided us with a written reflection of children's engagement with graphics in a book that they were familiar with conceptually. Although the text of this picture book is in English, the children were enthusiastically involved in making cultural interpretations. Her approach consisted of showing the book title individually then reading aloud while pointing to the pictures to three Latino male students that are English language learners who come from homes where Spanish is the primary language. This text "*What can you do with a paleta?*" is a culturally illustrated children's picture book that is written in English by Carmen Tafolla, a Mexican American poet and recipient of the *Art of Peace Award*. There are many children's books available in both English and Spanish that have award-winning graphics and art that can be used for teaching beginning readers to read by using a contextual base of lived experience. Brenda the Reading Recovery teacher noted aspects of the children's culture that she had not noticed before as she involved them in a discussion of the meaning of "*paletas*" in their lives. The following are excerpts from the teacher's reflections done after

completing her Action Research project. In this activity as she engaged children in the story line of the book:

**The first student** responded right away to the title saying, "I know what a paleta is! Ice cream!" He continued to use the word "paleta" while he was describing the pictures. When he heard the word "fruta," he said, "You say fruta like this: fruits." He laughed at various places in the book and seemed to enjoy it.

**The second student** (whom I had never heard utter a word of Spanish) responded to the title as well saying, "It's in Spanish???" Then it was like a switch went on in his brain that triggered all his Spanish language knowledge. He pored over the picture on the first page and named the tacos, tortillas, and paletas. On a later page, he went through all the ice cream flavors and named them using a mixture of Spanish and English. He told me that his favorite flavor was "limon." He laughed at several places in the book and seemed to enjoy it. He commented specifically on the picture of the mother saying, "She's tired and hot. She wants a paleta." When we finished reading the book, he wanted to write in Spanish and although I am not supposed to teach in Spanish, I made an exception and let him write in his journal, "La paleta esta buena."

I asked **the third student**, "What do you know about paletas?" He said, "I know you can eat it!" As this student flipped through the pictures, he told his own story of what was going on. I noticed that he always referred to the popsicles as "ice cream," not the Spanish "paletas." This student only used Spanish once when he described his favorite flavor, which was usually chocolate but also "limon." When the text said, "all the colors of the sarape," this student translated it saying, "They mean rainbow." This student also laughed in several places at the story and seemed to enjoy it. (Teacher Written Reflections and Face-to-Face Interview, Study A, Winter 2014).

#### 3.4.6 *Teacher Educator Reflection and Interpretation of Brenda's Post Reflection:*

Noted in these excerpts based on the children's engagement with the text but more specifically the use of culturally appropriate graphics in the text, is the enjoyment of seeing their familiarity with the cultural representation of something that is part of their everyday lives. In addition, the most interesting aspect is the interplay by using their native language fluency and using their "funds of knowledge" often referred to by researchers (Moll and Greenberg, 1999). This aspect also referred to as "situated learning" is also the basis for drawing from community acquired knowledge and lived experiences as a culturally responsive way to teach children to read and thus children become literate by using their oral repertoire of native language skills. Later, this language skill in native language fluency in decoding and comprehension can be transferred to the second language. According to Lave and Wenger (2005), this activity based on the learner's situated knowledge from his lived experience is "implied emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than "receiving" a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity *in* and *with* the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and world mutually constitute each other." (p.33).

Much research has been conducted in the areas of linguistically responsive teaching and the consensus is that if teachers make a concerted effort at including the knowledge that children already possess into literacy events they are impacting

the learning in positive way “rather than treating the native language and culture of the children as a deficit for learning. Not placing value in the linguistic resources of the students also may translate into lower expectations, and unchallenging instructional practices. According to when teachers show respect for and interest in the students’ home language, they send a welcoming message.”(Lucas and Villegas, 2011, p.60). In addition, it has been shown in many research studies that to encourage students use of their native language promotes development of literacy skills based on knowledge they have developed in their communities. A teacher could advocate for language development based on the notion of using strategies from the repertoire of language to make connections between prior knowledge and learning new ideas especially in English. (Cummins, 2000; Hawkins, 2004).

In Brenda the Reading Recovery teachers own words, we can see the interspersed notion that even though she can clearly see a change in affect in the reading process she still adheres to the idea the one must stick to teaching in the second language if the students are to succeed in the mainstream schooling. Her final reflection illustrates many of the aspects that clearly point to how the engagement with print would be enhanced if children were allowed to use their native language to make sense of the message in the books read. In spite of the fact that as stated previously, the book was written in English, somehow the association with the child’s culture is seen as an unacceptable mode for reading instruction:

As a teacher, I thought the most interesting thing was seeing the second student [in reference to the excerpts presented above] totally switch modes when it was “ok” for him to access his Spanish language knowledge. It was a source of pride to him that he knew both the English and Spanish words for some things. It was something that he felt expert in. This student in particular is a behavior problem in his classroom and often is not motivated to complete his schoolwork. He doesn’t have a high self-esteem when it comes to learning and academics. It was enjoyable for me to see a lift in his affect when he was engaging with the book. He showed confidence and independence—two qualities that he does not show regularly or often. (Action Research Project Reflection, Study A, Winter 2014).

This reflection is interpreted within the theoretical framing of the present study: that often children’s cognitive capacity in their native language goes beyond the skills used to teach them to read in their second language.

### *3.5 Study B. The Heritage Language Case*

#### *3.5.1 Teresa: The Heritage Language High School Teacher*

In the next section, the process of reflection and transformation continues with the high school teacher. In this project we as a team, participate in the co-construction of knowledge: the emphasis is on an exploratory co-learning process that has a commitment to social change in education. As with the previous project an action plan was presented in a public forum designed as a culminating experience. However, the work continues to spirals to other levels of knowledge construction in the



continuation of a dialogic process of planning, implementing and establishing information gathering.

In the high school study the Action Research project based on the work of Pablo Freire (1970, 1973 and 1985, cited in McIntyre, 2008), uses as a focus critical reflection on the dialectical unification of theory and practice (McIntyre, 2008. p. 3). As a team, which included the teacher, educator as a “coach” and “friendly outsider”, and Teresa the high school teacher who was commencing her second year of teaching, forged a path for examining how Spanish-speaking students responded to community based knowledge in a form of *corrido* studies (ballads). These cultural songs based on oral tradition, became the basis for students engagement with language. The dialogic aspect of working through contradictions in the process was done in a collaborative manner with the high school teacher within a context that is referred to as a *Language Heritage* class. One of the functions of the teacher educator as a “coach” in the action research process is to “open up lines of discussion, a kind of good Socratic teacher” (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 125). To this end, as Teresa’s project unfolds our collective discourse followed the lines of communication proposed by Gee and Green (1997), whose cultural model frames language discourse:

The cultural model is a group’s construction that becomes a resource that an individual may call on to guide his or her actions. Furthermore, such models, constructed within a particular context, may link with others in complex ways o create more complex models. These models become framing models that particular members or groups within a society draw on to guide their actions in particular domains of life. (p.124).

The process that begun with this project and that continues is based on constant dialogical communication in which the teacher is in constant engagement with relational dialectics in her own thoughts and then expresses these in an elaboration as a *Bakhtinian* notion of life as an open monologue. The contradictions between opposing desires and needs within relational communications thus exemplify, “a distinction between language and speech and its conceptualization of the dialogic nature of speaker-hearer relationships---communication that frames perspective ---by contrasting a speech communion (dialogic) perspective with a linguistic perspective, Bakhtin defines speaker-hearer relationships as reflexive.” (Gee and Green, p. 129). The relationships between the teacher, her students and the university coach are constantly changing. Similarly, because these tensions are appropriate to propel the action of the research project to other levels they are also promoting, excitement, enthusiasm and engagement that make the spiraling effects successful and become language networks. We will note these spiral effects as I explain how the project unfolds.

Teresa was having a difficult time trying to figure out how she could change her teaching approaches to engage students in learning the structures and grammatical functions of their native language. Teresa is bilingual and as a child was schooled in a special award winning school prized as a model two-way immersion school to develop bilingual academic skills in both English and Spanish. Initially she did not

make the connection of the importance of the cultural agency she possessed was until her second year of teaching in a high school setting where her students were predominately Spanish-speaking students but were not literate in their native language. The following is her explanation of this contradictions and how she dialogically learned to resolved them to forge a path for literacy events linked to the community culture of her students:

I decided to go into teaching Spanish because of the importance in maintaining the language and its cultural importance. This cultural value was instilled in me through my education at Summerwood school. I was taught to feel important and feel pride because I was bilingual. Leaders at Summerwood, like principal, Julia Reyes, fostered this cultural pride. The leaders at this school serve as an example of success and of upholding bilingualism as central to our identity, an example that we don't see too often. (Personal interview with teacher educator, Winter 2014)

Once I got into teaching, it became difficult to hold this philosophy as part of my practice. In our department the method is to teach language by focusing on grammar principles. It isn't about teaching cultural topics, but rather can kids tell the difference in what past tense to use or can they identify when to use the subjunctive becomes the focus. As a new teacher it became easy to follow this curriculum, and so I did. (Action Research Project, Reflection, Fall 2013).

### 3.5.2 *Teresa: Identifying the area of focus:*

Teresa begun the conceptualizing of her Action Research project with a slightly pessimistic attitude based on the frustration she felt intuitively about not meeting the challenge to educate students who were recent immigrants from Spanish speaking countries but primarily from Mexico and who struggled with identity formation in a country that appears socially not to place value on their ethnic and linguistic culture. Teresa was fortunate on several levels in the initiation of her study. She managed to jointly conceptualize an action project with her university "coach" that was connected to the culture of her students. She also begun to collaborate and exchange ideas with other teachers that taught in the same community but at other schools within the same district who also value teaching culturally relevant material and developing pedagogy in the native language of the students. These groups become Teresa's support system as she ventured out to develop culturally relevant pedagogy based on ideas and skills that require that she step out of her "comfort zone" given that she did not learn how to do this through the credentialing process.

Most importantly, Teresa wanted to place value on her students' bilingualism and bicultural identity. She still felt skeptical, and was not convinced that culturally relevant materials could be used to teach literacy skills. Teresa therefore wanted examine through action research whether teaching through a culturally centered curriculum improves the writing skills of students in the Heritage Language class developed for native Spanish language speakers. Furthermore, she was interested in seeing if this approach also helped students to develop a deeper sense of cultur-

al pride and belonging with a positive regard to their own culture. Teresa expresses her initial trepidation in using a different approach to develop literacy skills in the native language:

This action research project was created from a place of passion and fear. I was working with my heart as I developed a curriculum tailored for my heritage class students to try to meet their needs. At the same time I was running from the fear of becoming like my colleagues, a grammar “drill and kill” teacher. My heritage students need and deserve so much more than to learn only the grammar and mechanics of the language. Aside from a welcoming and accepting environment, in our class we learn about our own history and the important forces that make us who we are. For many of my students this is the first time they get to really learn about their culture in an academic setting. (Action Research Project Reflection, Fall 2013)

### 3.5.3 *Teresa the corrido project:*

In order to foster cultural pride a corrido unit was developed since most of the students with the exception of three, are Mexican students. The *corrido* as a genre has been propagated in the Mexican region along the border with the United States although historical sources debate as to whether it was developed in the interior of Mexico even before the border was established. It is certain though that the *corrido* form is a cultural constant in the lives of Mexican people (García, 1994). Thus, the unit was culturally relevant and students learned academic vocabulary by examining cultural history through *corridos*. These Spanish language songs similar to ballads are part of oral tradition spanning 500 years in the new world originating from Spain’s poetic *Romancero* form. Although the songs are composed using popular communicative language, their historical analysis and meaning are erudite systems of poetic discourse. Teresa’s students are familiar with *corridos* since they hear the music at home with their families and which are constant as a part of the larger community expressive communication mode since they are also portrayed through television, videos and social media in both Mexico and the United States. Teresa’s teaching and learning objective provided learning opportunities with a familiar concept to analyze the meaning within songs and the historic events recounted in *corridos*. These texts according to Teresa “became the cultural bridge making learning material relevant and comprehensible as students learned academic vocabulary and furthermore gain a deeper understanding of the mechanics of their native language.” (Action Research Project Reflection, Fall 2013). Teresa formal study was designed for five weeks of implementation it continued and spiraled to other lessons and builds on knowledge gained in each previous lesson.

### 3.5.4 *Participants, data collection and the educational context:*

The student participants for this study included 61 students, both male and female from four different grade levels spanning from ninth grade to the twelve grade. All students are native Spanish speakers: 58 Mexican ethnicity, 2 from El Salvador and

1 from Peru. The demographics of the school are 60% Latino students, which are also the lowest performing group. The remainder of the student are Asian, African American, Filipinos and the 3% Caucasian. Only 22% of the entire school population has been reclassified as fluent English proficient. The school is in a low-income neighborhood and more than half of the school is on a free or reduced lunch program subsidized by the State of California.

In order to insure that she was doing research on her own teaching and not just randomly imposing a cultural unit for getting students engaged, Teresa developed three distinct measures of student interest. Two were conducted at the beginning of the learning unit as well as after the unit was implemented. These required a writing sample, which she compared with a posttest using the same writing prompt. These were compared at the end of the unit for vocabulary usage, grammar and spelling and content related to the materials presented in the lessons. She also gathered data from a self-identified cultural questionnaire and an ethnic label that included intensity of ethnic identification. (Sample forms are included in the appendix for Study B.) In addition, Teresa also conducted interviews with 15 randomly selected students and kept an observation journal of student engagement.

### 3.5.5 *Data Analysis and Interpretation:*

Although this study continues more than ten months after the initiation of the action research project, only partial results are reported in this paper. To illustrate the intensity of the teachers' cognitive and transformative change over time Teresa continues to engage in developing larger units of pedagogical approaches by using the community knowledge of the students in academic learning based on their lived experiences. As she started with the *corrido* units she continued to generate ideas for other curriculum to enhance the knowledge and excitement in student's learning but continued to keep the academic level challenging so that her students could acquire academic skills in their native language. After the *corridor* unit she introduces literature by Gabriel Garcia Marquez connected culturally to students' lives. As she states in her reflections during a recent interview with the university coach:

It was interesting to see the effect of this curriculum on students during their *corrido* project. I felt extremely proud when one of my "non-academically" driven students took lead in the *corrido* project. He's really interested in history and so creating a song based on the life of historic figure we learned, grabbed his attention. He took the lead on this project and he and his team created an amazing video.

For the Gabriel García Márquez text we used the unit of heroes and leaders. We analyzed the main characters in the story and determined whether they were leaders and should be viewed as so. They really enjoyed "La siesta del martes." The main character is stealing for his family (they are very poor), and the mom holds her head up high and describes him as a well-mannered boy that she raised well. Here is where we discussed whether they view him as a leader for what he did for his family, or is he simply a thief. In thinking about the actual text I think students had a hard time following GGM liter-

ary writing style (heavily descriptive and use of metaphors and the skill of reading between the lines). They really enjoyed the discussion based on the themes in the story. (Reflective Face-to-Face Interview with teacher educator, Winter, 2014).

Teresa as a reflective practitioner continues to examine her thinking and selection of materials to teach her students. The process for the transformation from being acutely aware that her lessons have to be culturally appropriate for her students was not at all linear but was riddled with doubts and fears. Teresa in her own words states: "As I scanned through the brief writing samples, I became overwhelmed with fear and doubted whether I would be able to improve my students' writing and literacy." At this point Teresa turns to her university "coach" and the other teachers in her support network and is reassured that she must continue with her project. To this she states, "Through this support system, I found the strength and motivation to push my students forward and take them on a journey of self-discovery. Little did I know that I too would learn about myself, as a researcher and as an educator." (Action Research Project Reflection, Fall, 2013).

In the execution of her Action Research project Teresa constantly learned to do dialogic reflection with her "coach" (teacher educator) on the significance of her own transformation in becoming an educator charged with the task of promoting literacy through community events for Spanish speakers. Teresa knows well that the opportunities to end the cycle of poverty in the context of her student's lives are critically connected to education. More importantly though, Teresa recognized the importance that her insistence on what she terms "cultural discovery" was empowering students to use their home cultures as sources for developing cultural pride in their use of language. In addition, understanding the importance of families in the generation of knowledge from their own community was novel in their learning experiences; they had not been guided to value this form of knowledge previously in school curriculum. What they gleaned from participating in the study of *corridos* was a way to include the active roles of their parents and grandparents in being the informants concerning historic events and the value of heroic figures in the history of Mexico and the United States. As writing tasks, Teresa had the students conduct interviews with family members and interpret them for written and oral presentations in class. She states, "They were using their native language to communicate and find connections in their interviews. Not only that, but they were listening to *corridos* and identifying the themes and elements of the song." (Action Research Project Reflections, Fall, 2013).

The results of Teresa's transformation in thinking of herself as a reflective practitioner go beyond the confines of this paper since she was very successful at executing all the goals and aims of her project and continuously saw positive results in student achievement. Furthermore she learned more about the needs of her students with regard to their fears of using the native language to learn; much more than she ever imagined. In a deeply sensitive tone, she writes in her reflection the following,

Through the case studies, [refers to ones the teacher conducted of her students] I also learned that even though students enjoy our class it makes them uneasy to speak Spanish. Many talked about their fear of saying something wrong and being laughed at. A few talked about how when at times they do not feel that they can speak either Spanish or English correctly. These case studies highlight the complexity of navigating the world of two cultures and finding your place in these juxtaposed worlds. (Action Research Project Reflections, Fall 2013).

### 3.5.6 *Teresa: Teacher Educator Reflection and Interpretation*

Once again we see the mismatch of home culture with what the school offers as a formal education. The home culture is not valued in the design of schools especially with the idea of providing the tools needed to form a foundation for learning based on language skills. Academic instruction in the native language with the exception of few and isolated situations, is not an option for the majority of Spanish speaking children in schools. In the past much of the language acquisition research point to the importance of language learners having an advantage in learning concepts if they have a well-developed foundation in their first language (Padilla, 2006; Rubio & Attinasi, 2001). The levels attain in generating ways to include community based language within a school setting continues to fascinate the teacher while becoming aware of the endless possibilities. In the eloquent results of this case study we are reminded of the importance of “situated meanings and cultural models of community language—“language in use” called reflexivity language as social action with a focus on what members of a social group are accomplishing through their discourse, rather than focusing solely in language form or function. Thus without contextualized cue it is not possible to determine the meaning of words without context. Situated meanings are negotiated between people in and through social interaction. (Gee and Green, 1997, p.22).

## 4. DISCUSSION: A COALESCING PERSPECTIVE OF THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS AND LITERACY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

This paper has documented the reflective process of two very distinct teachers, two distinct school communities and grade level needs for literacy. In addition, both studies have a completely different focus with regard to developing literacy skills for students’ native language other than English but are expected to learn and achieve in school through English-only pedagogy. A main advantage of having a *glimpse* into the reflective lives of two teachers as they undergo a transformative journey toward change in their practice is a mere contemplation of the distinct students’ developmental levels. We witness early literacy in children’s decoding skills in the Reading Recovery situation and are transported to the world of a teacher who is a native speaker of Spanish, the native language of her students. Through the teacher’s reflections we witness how she ‘teases out’ the direction for the learning needs of underserved students at the high school level. We not only

see how each teacher grows in the changing perspectives of their craft but also of the complexity of processes they undergo to recognize the empowerment they gain as teachers in creating relevant pedagogy for their students. This insight is consistent with past studies that have proposed ways to offset the negative effects of Proposition 227 legislation with a focus on teaching bilingual children in English Only situations. We see as suggested by the theoretical literature, how these two teachers conduct mediated or assisted learning by the use of mediation tools and the use of social, cultural and linguistic resources from the community to include hybrid language practices that place importance on an enriched diversity and valuing difference in learning (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez and Asato, 2000; Balderama, 2001). To some extent we also witness what Lave and Wegner (2005) identify as learner's *situated* knowledge based on lived experience with implied emphasis on a comprehensive understanding of the whole person rather than on a body of factual knowledge about the world which is not directly from their lived situation or experience of the learner. This is also encouraged by Moll and Greenberg (1999) notion of "funds of knowledge", the interplay of language production by tapping into the fluency of the native language in cultural representation of something, which is part of everyday lives.

An explicit goal of this documentation was to capture aspects of how teachers mitigate their professional growth through critical reflection. This critical reflection may offset the results of the language policies that were propagated through their credential process. In understanding teacher development beyond the university preparation and advocating for critical reflection on practice, action research promotes the notion that teacher empowerment takes place when teachers develop the knowledge-work skills, and the pedagogical abilities through researching their own practice toward the 'action' of change and agency. According to Elliot (2007),

'Action' involves initiating change in a social situation to bring about something new in the web of social relationships that constitute it. The consequences of 'action' for the agent and those effected by them, where they will lead, cannot be entirely foreseen in advance. 'Action' therefore becomes a matter of continuous negotiation with others through the construction in process of 'transient accounts' as it unfolds in the process. The full story of 'action' can only be pieced together after the event. (p. 208)

The two projects documented in the paper were carefully monitored for six months or more through reflective dialogic interviews that captured constant change of perspectives related to cultural literacy. Albeit distinct the transformation that occurs is well noted in both cases. Also noted is the prevalence of the belief that one 'must' teach according to what the certification expects or the school structure dictates. Initially both teachers articulated strong emotions in discerning a focus for their studies. Rather than producers of their practice each teacher was inclined to follow the instructions they received within the institutional confines of their programs or departments. Through the critical reflection process however, we see aspects of "cultural synchronicity" a model proposed by Sleeter and Thao (2007) and by Villegas, and Irvine (2011), which encourages the use of classroom materials

for learning focused on the students' previous knowledge and lived experiences from their communities. This illustrates the need for credentialed teachers to develop professionally during and after their first year of teaching to grow cognitively and professionally through their practice in order to develop more "holistic" approaches for teaching linguistically diverse students.

The Reading Recovery teacher was surprised and delighted to note how students responded to the cultural representation in the materials for a reading lesson in English. Students were alert and confident when she presented them with culturally relevant materials (even if it was after the formal project). The value of presenting this aspect is to clearly note the enjoyment in children's expression of what they know from their lived experience, and a sense of comfort that the teacher can appreciate what their knowledge base from their own community. In the discourse presented in the teacher's post reflection, we note the "aha" moment in the tone of the statement about the children's interest. This activity, although may seem insignificant illustrates an important point worth mentioning; "action" especially on changing perspectives when they become a matter of continuous negotiation in the context of decisions about appropriate material for literacy. As Elliot (2006), states in the above excerpt "construction in process of 'transient accounts' requires constant negotiations." Resistance to incorporate culturally relevant material for literacy may be a result of many factors but the primary reason appears to be a belief supported by the structure of the Reading Recovery program. This program gives full control to the teacher and does not formally require that the materials used represent the lived experiences of the students. Including family, cultural traditions in the literacy activities with the objectives of teaching children to read has been extensively researched for bilingual literacy development (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nieto, 2003; Moll & Gonzales, 2004). Several intervening factors also contribute to the teacher's decision to research her practice as an English-only approach. One such factor is that she does not speak the native language of the students. In addition, as succinctly stated by Escamilla (1998), "the majority of teachers are native speakers of English and have completed state approved programs for licensing in English" (pg. 61). The Reading Recovery teacher believes that she is preparing children to compete in the mainstream language and that this will promote their success. She explicitly articulates this in her reflection when identifying the focus for her study. The meaning and connections to the knowledge children bring from their own community is not considered. However, a change in perspective about these issues nor the consequences of the actions taken by the teachers cannot be foreseen in advance. The documentation and the process model used to mentor and guide the teacher to consider a different approach for integrating culturally appropriate pedagogy cannot be forced. Did the teacher develop critical reflection on meeting the literacy needs of her students? One phrase in her post reflection protocol may give us a glimpse of how she may be amenable in the future to children using their native language to write after being exposed to their culture; "When we finished reading the book, he wanted to write in Spanish and although I



am not supposed to teach in Spanish, I made an exception and let him write in his journal, "La paleta esta buena." Allowing children the use of their native language for learning is the exception rather than the rule. As Weisman and Hanson (2002) and Gifford and Valdes, (2006) document, the complexity of restrictive language policies effect the educational needs of Spanish speaking children by the racial, ethnic, and linguistic composition of the California public schools continue to magnify the consequences on achievement of Spanish speaking students. This is done in multiple ways but clearly through linguistic isolation, lack of equity and pervasive segregation by singling the native language and lack of advance levels of rapid acquisition of English, as the reason for poor achievement.

Just as the Reading Recovery teacher the Heritage Language teacher had trepidations about how to instruct her students. In her initial reflection and in her post reflection this apprehension is noted. The connection of the importance of the cultural agency she possessed as a native Spanish English bilingual teacher was not recognized until her second year of teaching in a high school setting. Although most of her students are predominately Spanish-speaking students they are not literate in their native language nor are they literate in English. They are considered low achievers in all respects of the assessment process for schooling. It was not until she-begun work for her MA degree and started to research her own practice that she embraces the most significant aspect of her teaching situation that would transform her practice. Through reflective practice the Heritage Language teacher become convinced that using the cultural experience and community based knowledge of her students as pedagogy promoted higher order thinking and learning skills in her students. Just as the Reading Recovery teacher though, this 'action' was discovered only after she initiated change in the focus of her teaching objectives. Instead of focusing on grammatical structures to engage students in academic language she conducted inventories and encouraged students to develop an identity with their native culture and language: an aspect that her students had never experienced in their schooling. This transformation in the teacher's thinking linked to her practice promoted a "spiraling" learning effect throughout the entire academic year of schooling. In her ongoing reflections about her practice the teacher acted out a wide range of approaches for working with concrete dimensions and perspectives.

In sum, the ideas of social situated context for language learning in California based on the theoretical premises and the results of two action research projects presented in this paper illustrate the complexity of issue in teachers' professional development. The praxis-oriented activities forged by team collaborative emphasize a comprehensive process aimed at changing consciousness of the practitioners involved in reflective practice. We seek growth through change that is reflective in our discourse, our pedagogies and our ethics toward educating children that speak a language other than English, especially if that language is alive and throbbing and furthermore has existed for centuries in the communities of which generations have been deprived of an equitable education. The participants in these studies

also seek a dialogical safe space to generate inquiry-oriented frames of mind for critical reflection. This continues to be our quest toward achieving equity in education through action research.

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<sup>i</sup> Since the present article was written, reviewed and accepted for publication there has been a change proposed in California legislation for the certification of teachers that will affect practice through Proposition 227. SB1174 is a proposal voted and passed by the State Senate that will place an initiative before voters on the November 2016 ballot asking to amend portions of Proposition 227 which limits public school instruction to English-only. Currently, public schools are not able to teach legally in any language other than English, unless parents have gone through a cumbersome waiver process of which many are unaware.