

## When a Bully is President: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies in a First Grade Dual Language Classroom

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Wednesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016 was a difficult morning. I (Sandra) had just gone back into the classroom that academic school year as a first-grade dual language teacher working with Sara, a student teacher. At this point in the school year, Sara had taken over the mornings and had begun conducting our morning meetings. Sandra walked into the classroom before the bell rang to find Sara already busily working at the computer preparing for the day.

Transcription	Translation
<p><b>Sandra:</b> ¡Buenos días maestra!</p> <p><b>Sara:</b> Buenos días.</p> <p><b>Sandra:</b> ¿Qué crees que debemos hacer hoy? Creo que necesitamos hablar de lo que pasó anoche.</p> <p><b>Sara:</b> Estoy de acuerdo, pero no estoy segura que yo estoy cómoda hablando de esto.</p> <p><b>Sandra:</b> Yo no me siento lista para hablar, pero siento que los niños van a necesitar desahogarse de lo que está pasando. ¿Por qué no dejamos los planes de la mañana a un lado y hacemos un espacio para que los niños discutan lo que están sintiendo? ¿Tú lo quieres hacer o quieres que yo lo haga?</p> <p><b>Sara:</b> Mejor tú lo haces y yo apoyo.</p> <p><b>Sandra:</b> También, a lo mejor podemos dejar que los niños pinten para tener otra manera de expresarse. ¿Qué piensas?</p>	<p><b>Sandra:</b> Good morning!</p> <p><b>Sara:</b> Good morning.</p> <p><b>Sandra:</b> What do you think we should do today? I think we need to talk about what happened last night.</p> <p><b>Sara:</b> I agree, but I am not sure I am comfortable talking about it.</p> <p><b>Sandra:</b> I do not feel ready to talk about it, but I think the students are going to need to talk about what happened. Why don't we put the morning plans to the side and make space for students to talk about what they are feeling? Do you want to do it or do you want me to?</p> <p><b>Sara:</b> You do it and I'll support.</p> <p><b>Sandra:</b> Maybe we can also let students paint so they have another form of expression. What do you think?</p>

As you can see from the vignette above, both authors might not have been ready to have a discussion with their first-grade students about the results of the presidential election, but we knew that students would be talking about it and we wanted to create an open, welcoming, safe space where students could share their feelings. We adjusted our morning plans accordingly.

During the 2016-2017 school year, we worked together to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies in the classroom. Our intention was to center the curriculum on our Latinx students' dynamic languages, practices, and knowledge and to create a classroom space where Latinx students' backgrounds and cultures were not only welcomed, but made central to our classroom learning. In this article, we share some of the changes we made in the classroom and the ways we supported our students in processing the events that took place in the national political arena, while affirming their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) seeks to “perpetuate and foster- to sustain- linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). CSP calls for re-centering the curriculum, repositioning students and teachers as curriculum makers, and honoring the perspectives and practices of students of color. CSP is a dynamic, assets-based pedagogy. It values the wealth of knowledge and resources students bring into the classroom and responds to the social change of our evolving world.

CSP has four key features: 1) a critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices, and knowledges; 2) student and community agency and input (community accountability); 3) historicized content and instruction; and 4) a

capacity to contend with internalized oppressions.

Various studies have shown how the public school system in the United States has failed to support the academic achievement of students of color. In her book *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela (1999) described the instructional and curricular practices of a high school in Texas that negatively impacted the achievement of Mexican heritage students. The school organized formal and informal ways of fracturing students' cultural and ethnic identities and created social, linguistic and cultural divisions among students and teachers. We consider these actions to be a direct result of an educational framework steeped in a history of White supremacy, one in which a hierarchical system of racial dominance and exploitation systematically privileges white people and oppresses people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Perez-Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Velez & Solorzano, 2008). As such, we began taking steps towards dismantling this structure in our own classroom. In the following article, we will share some of our journey in that process.

### **Literature as a tool for social action**

Multicultural literature is a tool for critical dialogue and action, but it is the role of the teacher to facilitate dialogue and support students in order to promote problem solving and action (Freire, 1990). In order to accomplish this, the books teachers select must be reflective of students' experiences and lives. We were both strong believers in using multicultural children's literature specifically pertaining to Latinx culture, but we knew the power would lie in incorporating a comprehensive approach to cultural awareness for our students in order to foster transformative learning experiences (Osorio, 2018). In this article, we share some of the books we studied throughout our academic year, as well as our approach to using those books, in order to better support our students and engage them in critical conversations.

## Methods

### Context

Lincoln Elementary school is located in a small urban community in Illinois. In the 2010 census, 5.2% of the community's total population of 41,250, identified as Latinx. The school houses one of the Spanish-English dual language programs for the district. The dual language program is a strand within the school. Nine of the twenty classrooms in the school are part of the Dual Language Program. The school district moved from a transitional bilingual program to a two-way dual language model in 2013. The former was focused on serving only Native Spanish speakers or students from Spanish speaking households and was largely viewed as a remedial program to help students acquire academic English language skills. The new two-way program serves both native Spanish speakers in the classroom as well as students learning Spanish as a second or third language, and it is viewed as an enrichment program in which students simultaneously acquire two languages, helping them become biliterate, therefore, better prepared for academic success. The program is self-contained, meaning each teacher at their grade level instructs in both Spanish and English. The district adopted a 90/10 model of language instruction. In kindergarten, 90 percent of instruction is in Spanish and only 10 percent is in English. The time allotted to daily Spanish instruction decreases each year as the English instruction increases until a 50-50 split is reached in fifth grade.

Lincoln Elementary is a neighborhood school, which indicates student enrollment is based on proximity, except for students who are native Spanish speakers who choose to receive bilingual services. The majority of the native Spanish speakers in the dual language program are bussed from outside the neighborhood to the school. In 2016, these students accounted for approximately 25 percent of the 438 total students across kindergarten through

fifth grade. Of the total student body, 30.4% were classified as Latinx and 30.6% were classified as English learners by the state report card data

(<https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>).

During the 2016-2017 school year, our classroom had a total of 25 students, twelve boys and thirteen girls. In first grade, the instruction was 80 percent in Spanish and 20 percent in English. This meant that three of the core subjects (Literacy, Writing, and Math) were in Spanish, while Science and Social Studies were taught in English.

The school district divides students in the dual language program into two groups: Spanish dominant and English dominant. According to these categories, there were 17 students considered Spanish dominant and 8 considered English dominant. These categories did not take into account the wealth of languages students spoke. For example, some students were trilingual: two knew a Guatemalan dialect from home, one knew Chinese, and yet another knew Hebrew. We point out that we had both Spanish dominant students and students learning Spanish as a second or third language because these varying abilities, as well as varying identities, caused different levels of tension through the implementation of CSP.

In terms of their academic abilities, the data from the normed Fountas and Pinnell Spanish Benchmark Assessment (Sistema de evaluación de la lectura) given at the beginning of the school year requires students in first grade to demonstrate reading skills at least at a level C. We had 14 students that were at levels AA, A, or B, considered below the targeted benchmark. We had three students reading at a level C, on benchmark, and the remaining eight students were between levels D and H, reading above or well above the beginning of the school benchmark.

This assessment, of course, just labeled a student's reading proficiency at one particular point

in time and did not provide a complete picture of the wealth of abilities each individual student had. While the majority of our students may have been labeled as limited in their reading abilities, this did not prevent them from participating in our classroom activities that promoted critical consciousness. We did not have any student classified as special needs, but did have one student receiving speech and language services and three that received social services.

### **Data Collection**

The data presented here is part of a larger study that looked at the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogies in an early childhood classroom. This project was supported by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Early Childhood Assembly as part of the professional dyads and culturally relevant teaching (PDCRT) program. Here, we present some of the steps we took as teachers to center our Latinx students' languages, practices and knowledges in the classroom. This included focusing instruction around thematic units, bringing in Latinx children's literature, and welcoming parents and community members' knowledge into the classroom. It also included bringing in a book that may have been viewed by some as controversial, *When a Bully is President: Truth and Creativity for Oppressive Times/Cuando el presidente es un bulli: La Verdad y la Creatividad en Tiempos Opresivos* by Maya Gonzalez.

This study was a critical action research study. Teacher inquiry, also known as action research, can be defined as a systematic, intentional study of one's own practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). We knew we wanted to be intentional about how our classroom was structured and which classroom practices and pedagogies we

implemented.

We decided to use an action research model because of the action-reflection cycle that it contained. The cyclical process is: planning, acting, observation, and reflection. This process is then repeated several times, while transforming the context and practices that are being implemented (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001).

Critical action research takes action research a step further by combining critical theory with the action research paradigm (Davis, 2008). We chose this method because critical action research is based on the assumption that “society is essentially discriminatory but is capable of becoming less so through purposeful human action” (Davis, 2008, p.140). We felt that some of the teaching practices we had learned in our graduate education were discriminatory towards our Latinx student population. They were discriminatory because they did not view Latinx students from an asset-based perspective and failed to take into account their cultural, linguistic and socio-economic differences. We knew we had to take immediate action to change that.

Critical action research promotes social justice by looking at the existing power structures and inequalities present in the community under investigation. Therefore, one of our most pressing and primary objectives was to replace the Eurocentric curriculum that was provided by district administration and employ literature, classroom practices and activities that brought to the forefront the wealth of knowledge Latinx students possess. This would allow our Latinx students to see themselves reflected in a positive way, while simultaneously providing a new lens for students who are not from Latinx backgrounds with which to consider Latinx populations’ contributions and value. We knew this would likely be something different from what both groups had previously been exposed to. This encompasses our motive to focus

on implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom.

Data collection included observational notes, field notes, audio and video recordings of classroom activities and discussions, student artifacts, and teachers' reflective journal. When one of us was teaching, the other individual was either video/audio recording or writing down notes on what was happening in the classroom. We tried to record events that happened on a daily

basis such as morning meetings once to twice a week. We recorded whole-class or small-group discussions related to Latinx children's literature or Newsela articles read in class.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began during the data collection process. Since this was a critical action research study, we participated in reflective discussions on a daily basis. We used our lunch and planning periods at least three times a week to discuss what we saw occurring in the classroom, what was working, what was not working and what, if any, changes needed to be made. We engaged in analysis and interpretation concurrently while collecting data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This allowed us to observe emerging themes from the beginning and helped us to reexamine specific issues across the various classroom practices or group discussions.

Throughout data analysis, we viewed video recordings, took notes and transcribed audio recordings. Our first layer of analysis consisted of an overall open coding of themes to examine the students' and teachers' discussions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The analysis was grounded in the data gathered during the discussions, the field notes, and the teachers' reflective journal. The analysis began by reading through the field notes as well as transcriptions from the audio- recordings while making comments about each of them. Some of the initial codes included: understanding of immigration, teacher does not shy away from

difficult conversations, current events, students critical towards president, white privilege and deportations.

When all the data was transcribed, we conducted a more systematic level of analysis using a constant comparative method. We completed a more focused coding where we looked for salient categories and wrote initial memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Upon reviewing data for each individual discussion or classroom activity, we looked for connections within and across all the discussions or activities. As we visited and revisited the different data sources for coding and synthesizing the data, deeper characteristics or properties of significant data came to the surface (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

### **Findings**

The following excerpts shared here are from our first-grade classroom during the 2016-2017 academic year. We as teachers were working together to make changes in our classroom to implement culturally sustaining pedagogy while our first graders were experiencing life during a tumultuous 45<sup>th</sup> United States presidential election. We decided it was important that our Latinx students read books and engage in activities that connected to their lives and allowed them a space to share their own experiences. Below we share how we: 1) affirmed students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds; 2) organized studies around thematic units; 3) prepared for difficult times ahead; and 4) supported students when the 45<sup>th</sup> presidential election winner was announced. Our primary focus was to implement a culturally sustaining pedagogy in our classroom and center the voices of our Latinx students.

#### **Affirming students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds**

Even before the school year started, we knew that our focus for the academic year

would be to affirm our Latinx students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as placing the funds of knowledge students brought into the classroom as the central focus of our classroom practices and curriculum. We met over the summer to plan out how we would start out our academic school year with our new first graders. There is not enough room in this article to share every single thing we did, but we will share some key examples to give you an idea of how our classroom practices changed. We read books such as, *I am Latino: The Beauty in Me* by Sandra Pinkney to demonstrate to students some of the many positive aspects of being Latinx. Our school district had been promoting the use of interactive read alouds as an integral part of

balanced literacy instruction and had provided teachers with a binder full of book suggestions and lesson ideas. However, as we took a close look at the suggested texts, we immediately realized these did not represent our classroom population. We knew we had to look for books outside of these suggestions because when children "cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in society" (Bishop, 1990, p.ix).

Another classroom practice that had been promoted by our district was the use of Morning Meetings. Each teacher in the district had been given a copy of the Morning Meeting Book by Roxann Kriete. While the book did have some great ideas about how to run the meetings, overall it did not do enough to affirm our students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We decided to start our morning meetings by having our students recite the Mayan precept IN LAK'ECH: YOU ARE MY OTHER ME

IN LAK'ECH

*Tú eres mi otro yo.*  
You are my other  
me. *Si te hago*  
*daño a ti,* If I do  
harm to you,  
*Me hago daño a mí*  
*mismo.*  
I do harm to myself.  
*Si te amo y respeto,*  
If I love and respect you,  
*Me amo y respeto yo.*  
I love and respect  
myself.

This was one of the poems banned by Arizona House Bill 2281 targeting the Mexican American Studies program. We liked the fact that it was bilingual and talked about loving and respecting yourself and others. After using this poem for a couple of months, we decided to make a change. Sandra had seen a video of an African American father speaking affirmations with his toddler age daughter into a mirror. We thought having our students speak positive affirmations each morning would be a great way to get students to self-reflect and begin their day. Some of the affirmations that we used included: Yo soy inteligente. Yo soy respetuoso. Yo trabajo duro. Si no sale algo bien solo trato otra vez<sup>1</sup>.

We made sure to develop activities/lessons that brought students' funds of knowledge into the classroom (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). One such example was sending home a history of my name parent interview, such as the one from Scholastic (<https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/teachers/blogs/alycia-zimmerman/migrated-files/pdf-of-name-research-interview-form-1.pdf>). This was an opportunity for parents to share some additional information about their child's name.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

"The History of My Name" Family Interview Research

Interview a parent or other family member to learn about how you got your name. Use what you learn from your interview to answer the questions on this page. Try to answer as many of the questions below as possible. Write your answers in complete sentences.

Who picked out your name?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

How did they decide on your name? Is there a story behind your name?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Does your name have any personal or cultural meaning to your family?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

What would you have been named if you had been born a boy/girl (opposite of what you are)?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Does your family call you by any nicknames? How did you get your nickname?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

What do you like about your name?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you learn anything else that you'd like to share?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

We knew that a name was an important aspect of a child's identity and made sure to read books, such as *Rene Has Two Last Names / Rene tiene dos apellidos* by René Colato Laínez and *My name is Yoon/ Me llamo Yoon* by Helen Recorvits to accompany this exploration. We used the information collected from the interviews for students to make an artistic representation of their name with words from their parent interview around them. This was then placed in a prominent place in the hallway so others could see.

We also invited parents to come into the classroom throughout the school year. Parents were invited to come into our classroom to celebrate their child's birthday. This was an

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: I am smart. I am respectful. I work hard. If something doesn't work out, I just try again. opportunity for parents to share with their child's classmates stories and pictures of when their child was young.



It also gave fellow students an opportunity to ask questions to better get to know their classmates. Parents were also invited to come talk to our class about topics related to our

thematic units. For example, during our community unit, parents were invited to come into our class to talk about their job. This put the students and their family front and center. In order to accommodate parents whose work hours did not allow them to come into our classroom, we offered parents the ability to video record them. Sandra would set up a convenient time with the parents, many times over the weekend and go into their home to videotape them. This gave parents the opportunity to add to the wealth of knowledge in our classroom without having to physically be there.

### **Immigration Thematic Unit**

We knew we wanted to organize our academic year around thematic units. After looking across the various topics we had to cover across content areas, we decided we would begin the school year with a thematic unit focused on immigration. This would be a topic that would relate closely to our Latinx student population. We also decided on this topic because it coincided with the election of the 45<sup>th</sup> president in which the subject of immigration played a crucial role. We knew that this was causing some fears and stress for our students given some of the conversations were overhearing in the classroom. We wanted this to be our thematic unit so that it would open up a space in the classroom to have discussions. We continued to bring in Latinx children's literature that centered Latinx authors, such as, *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña, *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *Separate is not equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh. We learned about the students as individuals, their family, and then our community as a whole.

We connected our immigration unit to the discussion of community, which was one of the required topics in first grade social studies. In elementary schools, one common way to learn about the community is to do a community field trip, which we did by walking around the school neighborhood. While this activity gave us some ideas about the resources found in

our community, it also excluded the majority of the Latinx population in our classroom since they were bussed from a far end of town. In order to counter this, we decided as teachers to go beyond the school neighborhood and visit the neighborhoods where our students lived and the stores, parks, and churches they most likely visited.



We took pictures of all these locations and brought them into our classroom space. Students were excited to see their favorite paletería (local ice cream shop) or the store where their mom worked. We took these pictures and did a sharing of memories activity. In this activity, students were given the opportunity to choose a picture from our community and share one personal memory they had from that location. This allowed students to learn from each other while ensuring to tap into the Latinx students' knowledge, which might have been completely excluded had we just stopped at the neighborhood walking field trip.

We also had students interview their parents and guardians about their reason(s) for choosing to live in our town and why they had decided to immigrate here. We turned the information into a bar graph to align with the math skills we had been learning. Some of the reasons collected were:

1. Because it's a small community
2. Porque es un lugar muy bonito y tranquilo
3. Good place to raise child and I grew up near here
4. Vivia mi hermana y porque es un lugar muy tranquilo; no es

- muy grande ni muy pequeño  
5. Viven mis hermanos y este pueblo es muy tranquilo y bonito<sup>2</sup>

Sandra also found stories to use in place of our social-emotional curriculum, *Second Step*. The *Second Step* curriculum gave us great ideas of how to integrate social-emotional learning into our classroom but we felt that the photographs and stories were not representative of our students so we looked elsewhere for stories with which our students might be better able to connect. Two such stories that we used were *Julia Moves to the United States* by Sean McCollum (<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2014/julia-moves-to-the-united-states>) and *Zahrah's Hijab* by Sean McCollum (<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/texts/zahrahs-hijab>). This allowed us to still cover the standards but with narratives more reflective of our Latinx students' experiences. The story, *Zahrah's Hijab*, may not have been about a Latinx child but it gave students a perspective of someone that experienced similar struggles to theirs.

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<sup>2</sup> 2. Because it is a very beautiful and tranquil place

4. My sister lived here and because it is a very quiet place; It's not too big or too small

5. My brothers lived here and [town] is very tranquil and beautiful

### **Preparing for the Election**

Since the political discussion leading up to the election had already infiltrated our classroom we decided to take this student interest and make it our focus in our balanced literacy block. We had various guided reading groups read articles from Newsela which provided non-fiction text in Spanish. Students read articles such as the job of the president, the proposal to expand the U.S.-Mexico border wall, and the immigrant ban. We also used

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stories from the *Teaching Tolerance* website, such as Papalotzin and the Monarchs: A Bilingual Tale of Breaking Down Walls (<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2006/papalotzin-and-the-monarchs-a-bilingual-tale-of-breaking-down-walls>) also available in Spanish.



While the text may have been above the independent or instructional reading level for some students, we teachers broke the text up into several sections and provided visuals to support the text; basically, making it into a picture book. Since the monarch butterfly was a symbol of immigration, this story allowed us to connect to news story of the possible expansion of the wall at the United States-Mexico border, the topic of immigration we had discussed as part of our community unit in social studies, as well as, to our science content of the butterfly life cycle.

During these small group discussions, students shared how they were feeling, such as Oscar stating he was “triste” (sad) thinking about the possibility of being told to leave his home. Even feelings of uncertainty, like Soledad stating “Mi hermana también nació en México” (My sister was also born in Mexico) when she realized how she might have to be separated from her parents and sister because, unlike them, Soledad was a United States citizen. As you can see, students knew that things were going to change in their lives given the 45<sup>th</sup> presidential election, even though they did not know to what extent yet. It was important for us as teachers to provide a space for students to not only express their feelings, but also learn from each other

and support one another. We knew that this presidential election was causing feelings of uncertainty for students, but instead of shying away from difficult conversations, we wanted to bring it to the forefront and provide lots of opportunities to discuss and debrief students' own personal feelings. **Post-election**

Given the results of the 45<sup>th</sup> presidential election we saw an increase in students' fears and anxiety. This is demonstrated with the morning meeting discussion we had with our students the day after the winner of the presidential election was announced. After discussing who had won, students shared their thoughts and feelings. Some of which included: "¡Nos va sacar de la casa<sup>3</sup>!" "He is going to lie for 4 years!" "¡Donald Trump va a hacer una guerra<sup>4</sup>!" and "Donald Trump wants to build a wall." From listening to our students share their thoughts and feelings, we clearly understood that the election of our 45<sup>th</sup> president had heightened their sense of insecurity and disempowerment. Although we had already created a classroom community that had focused on several topics to counter these effects, we felt we had to do more.

Soon we found a book, *When a Bully is President: Truth and Creativity for Oppressive Times/Cuando el presidente es un bulli: La Verdad y la Creatividad en Tiempos Opresivos* by Maya Gonzalez. The focus of the book was not on the president himself, but on how individuals can act during difficult moments. We wanted to focus on the CSP explicit goal of demanding explicitly pluralist outcomes that are not centered on White, middle-class, monolingual, and

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<sup>3</sup> He will kick us out of our home!

<sup>4</sup> Donald Trump will start a war.

monocultural norms of educational achievement. One way that we defined achievement in our

classroom was providing a space for students to share their true feelings about topics that personally affect their lives. We provided a space for this to occur by having small groups of students read and discuss this book.

We started our small group discussion of the book by talking about what they knew about our current president and the actions he was taking.

Connor: Donald Trump is going to build a wall. A giant wall. How could he do that?

It's like, it's like this (showing how tall with his hands).

Miguel: As big as our whole school!

Connor: The thing would have to be higher than the clouds, than this (school) because airplanes can go higher than the clouds. I have been on airplanes. Every airplane I have

been in was above the clouds so why would you build it? There is no real point to it.

The discussion continued as Stacy shared how our president “did not like girls”, Carlos said our president “did not like Mexicans” (Carlos being Mexican himself), and Valentia stated “Donald Trump quiere separar a los hijos de sus padres.”<sup>5</sup> While we can clearly see that Connor does not have an in-depth understanding of the various ways individuals migrate to the United States, we do see that every single student felt like the president did not like an aspect of their identity. The topic of the president wanting to “sacar a todos los inmigrantes<sup>6</sup>” and separate families was one that was reiterated in every single small group.

Some of the messages of the book were how 1) seeing a bully makes us stronger, 2) together we are strong, and 3) being your true self. The students and Sandra had various discussions related to these topics. When asked why seeing a bully makes us stronger, Valentia

<sup>5</sup> Translation: Donald Trump wants to separate kids from their parents.

<sup>6</sup> Translation: wanting to expel or get rid of all the immigrants

stated “Porque cuando alguien es bulli y lo ves le quitas el poder.”<sup>7</sup> We discussed the term bully a lot throughout our discussions, students shared their experiences with bullies and we discussed what to do if they see someone being bullied. We talked about how students could support the person being bullied. When students were asked what they could do, they shared things like “Puede ser feliz con otros; pueden hacer ‘signs’<sup>8</sup>,” “decir, ‘Tú puedes vivir aquí. Tú puedes tener algo que tú quieres.’<sup>9</sup>” and “trabajar en armonía y ser amables<sup>10</sup>.” Students recognized they had to come together to combat bullying. They understood they had to be aware of bullying in “order to fight back” as one student put it. The key message of the book was being your true self and not letting anyone change you. We felt that this message was what our students needed to grasp and internalize from the reading and discussions. We wanted to affirm our students’

identities and help them realize that while some things might change due to the election of our new 45<sup>th</sup> president, they as individuals did not have to change who they were. One activity we decided to do with students was having them draw a picture of themselves with pictures of things they liked, things that were important to them, and things they felt they were good at.



Students drew things, such as, their family, Pokéman, pizza, taking care of a little sister, or even feeding their dog. This was a way for us to support our students and show them that they did not have to make a huge gesture such as protesting like they saw on TV, but by staying true to themselves they were standing up for themselves.

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<sup>7</sup> Translation: Because when someone is a bully and you see them you take away their power.

<sup>8</sup> Translation: You can be happy with others, make (secret bonding) signs

<sup>9</sup> Translation: Say you can live here. You can have something if you want it.

<sup>10</sup> Translation: Work in harmony and be friendly

### Struggles

While in this article we were able to share some of the teaching approaches we used as we took steps towards implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy in our classroom, we do not want to give the impression that this was easy work. We were fortunate that there were two of us in the classroom from the start of the new academic year. Having another teacher in the classroom allowed us to bounce ideas off each other or talk through challenges. It also gave us differing perspectives. When one of us was teaching, the other teacher would sit and observe, video recording or writing down notes. This allowed us to collect a wealth of information, which we could analyze and consider as new approaches were decided upon. While most teachers do not have another teacher in the classroom with them, similar work can be done while partnering with a teacher within the same grade level or even across grade levels. You may also enlist and collaborate with a literacy specialist that works with your students. The important thing is that both teachers share a commitment to implementing culturally sustaining pedagogy in their respective classrooms.

Another challenge we faced was time. This is the reality for all teachers. There is never enough time. We had lots of school wide events, drills, and assemblies that cut into our instruction time. We did our best to plan ahead and make sure we gave ourselves the necessary time to cover the material we deemed most important, but we would be lying if we said it worked out as expected every time. There were multiple occasions when we had to cut student discussions short, or revisit the activity the following day because we simply ran out

of time.

The final struggle we would like to discuss is the difficulty in finding material. We acknowledge that many times this is what stops fellow teachers from doing similar work. There is a scarcity of books available containing Latinx themes. According to the Cooperative

Children's Book Center (2016) of the approximately 5,000 books published in the United States in 2014, only 66 books contained Latinx themes/topics and roughly 59 books were authored by Latinx authors/illustrators. This means that very few of the children's books published each year authentically represent Latinx cultures (Naidoo, 2010). Our commitment to doing this work was greater than the challenge of finding the material. Sometimes we had to plan months in advance to ensure we found the books needed and to order them from either a library or book publisher. We also turned to online resources such as, *Teaching Tolerance* and *Rethinking Schools* to mediate this struggle.

### **Conclusion**

In the data presented above, we shared some of the changes made in our first-grade dual language classroom as we grappled with ideas on how to implement culturally sustaining pedagogy in our classroom. We do not present this information as a "how to" guide because CSP does not have a list of tasks that are to be completed. Instead, we present some of the ways in which we worked towards making our Latinx students' backgrounds, languages and practices central in our classroom. We took students' funds of knowledge and experiences to create the curriculum together. We took the resources given to us from the school district and made sure to take it further by carefully selecting the texts or readings we would use to better respect aspects of our student population's

lived experiences. This table below presents the tenets of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) and how we tried to address each one.

<p>A critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices, and</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We wanted to tap into Latinx students’ funds of knowledge therefore we read texts that presented positive aspects about being Latinx, such as <i>I am Latino: The Beauty in Me</i> by Sandra Pinkney, <i>Rene Has Two Last Names / Rene tiene dos apellidos</i> by Rene Colanto Lainez, <i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de la Peña, <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>Separate is not equal</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>2. Morning meeting included reading/saying the poem IN LAK’ECH: YOU ARE MY OTHER ME and</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>positive affirmations in Spanish</li> <li>3. Instead of just doing a community walk, the teacher went and took pictures of places that the Latinx classroom population would frequent since they did not live around the school</li> <li>4. Socio-emotional lessons were done with text relevant to students’ lives, such as, <i>Julia Move to the United States</i> by Sean McCollum and <i>Zahrah’s Hijab</i> by Sean McCollum</li> </ol>
<p>Student and community agency and input (community accountability)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We completed the “History of my name” parent interview</li> <li>2. Parents were invited into classroom to discuss the day their child was born (as a birthday celebration). For parents that couldn’t come during school hours, the teacher visited their home and videotaped the discussion to present to the class</li> <li>3. Parents were invited into the classroom the discuss their job as part of our study about our community</li> <li>4. We had parents come in/ be interviewed about why they have chosen to migrate to our town. This was a way all families could participate in the discussion of immigration.</li> </ol>
<p>Historicized content and instruction</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We organized thematic units, the first one being immigration</li> <li>2. Our guided reading group read Newsela articles around current events</li> <li>3. We connected the discussion of expanding the wall at the U.S.-Mexico border to the story <i>Papalotzin and the Monarchs: A Bilingual Tale of Breaking Down Walls</i> from Teaching Tolerance</li> <li>4. We had classroom discussions about the 45<sup>th</sup> presidential election</li> <li>5. We held several readings and discussions on the book <i>When a Bully is President: Truth and Creativity for Oppressive Times/Cuando el presidente es un bulli: A Verdad y la Creatividad en Tiempos Opresivos</i> by Maya Gonzalez</li> </ol>
<p>A capacity to contend with internalized oppressions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We wanted to tap into Latinx students’ funds of knowledge therefore we read texts that presented positive aspects about being Latinx, such as <i>I am Latino: The Beauty in Me</i> by Sandra Pinkney, <i>Rene Has Two Last Names / Rene tiene dos apellidos</i> by Rene Colanto Lainez, <i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de la Peña, <i>Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh and <i>Separate is not equal</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</li> <li>2. We held morning meeting which included reading/saying the poem IN LAK’ECH: YOU ARE MY OTHER ME and positive affirmations in Spanish</li> <li>3. Parents were invited into the classroom the discuss their job as part of our study about our community</li> <li>4. We had parents come in/ be interviewed about why they have chosen to migrate to our town. This was a way all families could participate in the discussion of immigration.</li> <li>5. We read and discussed the book <i>When a Bully is President: Truth and Creativity for Oppressive Times/Cuando el presidente es un bulli: A Verdad y la Creatividad en Tiempos Opresivos</i> by Maya Gonzalez</li> </ol>

While a lot of our classroom discussion and activities had to do with the 45<sup>th</sup> presidential election, which both of us felt unprepared to discuss in order to support our students, we knew we had no choice. As the classroom teachers, we were able to support each other through reflective discussions. We worked together to provide a space for our students, as well as for us, to begin to process our feelings about what was occurring in

the United States political context. Our students and their families had a wealth of knowledge that we intended to welcome in the classroom. We believe we were able to take some steps towards that. Our ultimate goal for the school year was for our Latinx students to feel that their culture, language, background, and practices were welcomed and affirmed in our classroom. Through the various activities that we implemented, we were able to do so.

### **Implications**

The themes in this study underscore the importance of having educators affirm students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as engaging in current events. It is important to make sure that the classroom curriculum does not exclude students of color, but rather highlights the many positive aspects that students bring into the classroom. A compelling way of doing this is connecting with the parents and community. There is so much to learn from others, and by welcoming them into the classroom a space, such learning can be created. Rather than ignoring or shying away from difficult conversations, educators can create a learning environment that supports students through difficult and harmful events. The students in this study are keenly aware of the hostile and unwelcoming environment towards communities of color. Instead of omitting these realities, there is power in engaging these difficult conversations in an attempt to build solidarity and a call to action to address these incidents of hostility. Further research is warranted to fully address how these students' experiences impact their academic growth and willingness to tackle complex issues that extend beyond the classroom.

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