ABSTRACT

Luis Enrique Rodríguez García, BELIEFS AND RELATIONSHIPS MATTER: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TENETS AS A FOUNDATION FOR CHANGING TEACHER PRACTICES (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2021.

Teaching and learning processes often reflect traditional practices that do not meet the academic needs of historically underserved students, especially Latinx and Black students. The goal of the participatory action research project and study, anchored by our collective beliefs in critical pedagogy tenets, was to improve teacher practices and student outcomes and co-construct a culture of learning that supported teachers and coaches. I conducted this study with a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group that included teachers and instructional coaches; over three iterative cycles, we planned, co-facilitated, and analyzed data from Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs), coaching sessions, and grade level collaboration meetings. We found that enacting our espoused beliefs in classroom practices required a collective effort, or teaching practices did not fully change. Secondly, by being attentive to adult relationships, school leaders and instructional coaches shifted adult collaboration from contrived to authentic collegiality. By attending to values and beliefs as the engine of change and engaging in *praxis,* reflection in order to act, we iteratively built our change model on the values that sustain us: our beliefs in the power of critical pedagogy and our capacity to translate those tenets to classroom practices and adult learning. While exercising steady flexibility and adapting to changing circumstances, we iteratively ensured that our values matched our pedagogical choices to better serve Latinx and Black students. The findings have a key implication for educational leaders interested in implementing socially just and equitable teaching practices: beliefs are the foundation of changing practice.

BELIEFS AND RELATIONSHIPS MATTER: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TENETS AS A FOUNDATION FOR CHANGING TEACHER PRACTICES

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by

Luis Enrique Rodríguez García

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BELIEFS AND RELATIONSHIP MATTER: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TENETS

AS A FOUNDATION FOR CHANGING TEACHER PRACTICES

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Teresa, who sacrificed her life so that I would have a chance at a better one. To my Tía Silvia, Tío Lupe, and my cousins for their love, support, and acceptance. And to Marco, my husband, for being my *cómplice en las aventuras de la vida*.

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CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING THE FOCUS OF PRACTICE (FOP)

In 1988–89 school year, having recently arrived in the United States and knowing no English, I found myself relegated to the back of the room, sitting alone at a desk facing out to the yard from Mr. Noa's classroom (one of only two Latino teachers at the high school I was attending). I was in a class bearing witness to the English as a Second Language class populated by Latino students, many of them having gone through the American public education system since elementary school. From my perch in the back of the class, I saw them come and go, going through the motions of schooling. They would show up every day, take their seats, open their books, and hear the teacher read. Occasionally, he would ask one of them to read, which I now know was more a classroom management strategy than pedagogical practice.

The following year I progressed enough to be able to join them at the front of the class, and I remember being excited to learn what they were learning. Yet, I found myself immersed in an environment of passive acquiescence from the students, presenting themselves to the bank of education, receiving the meager deposits from a banker who seemed unaware that the banking method of knowledge was bankrupt (Freire, 2011). The students worked diligently day after day, but we only had deposit slips that were IOUs of a better future. Perched in the front of the room, sitting at his desk and reading from a book with a monotonous voice that lulled the students into daydreaming of better settings, day in and day out Mr. Noa maintained the same position, both physically and attitudinally. No teaching. No learning.

"The task predicts performance," the superintendent of the Puerta de Oro Unified School District stated when he opened the administrative institute for the 2017–18 school year. Since I became the principal at Gran Vista Elementary School in 2014, the academic performance of our Latino and Black students has remained consistently behind that of their White and Asian

counterparts in our Spanish immersion school. Before my arrival to Gran Vista Elementary, the instructional coaches provided remedial interventions working with small groups of students. Upon my arrival, the instructional coaches and I worked together to create needs-based interventions and supports. We provided monthly professional development for the teachers that was content-specific (e.g., math, English language arts, etc.). Yet, the results did not change. The superintendent's comment validated what I had already questioned: Are we honoring our students' experiences or simply demanding they learn through a traditional cultural lens? Are we perpetuating traditional teaching practice, expecting certain results and blaming students when we do not achieve them? In the end, I had to ask myself if, as an educational leader, I was enabling or disrupting the teaching to meet the needs of our students? Am I bearing witness to or training another generation of Mr. Noas?

Several questions caused me to question our practices: Were the students performing according to the tasks they had been expected to complete throughout their schooling? Were we perpetuating and replicating the students who attended Mr. Noa's classroom throughout the years? How did the professional development strategies simply or reify a task-centered approach to teaching and learning? Are we perpetuating the traditional teaching practices of feeding the students content and then blaming them for not regurgitating and performing well?

These questions challenged my thinking about our strategies and interventions and how I worked with coaches at our school to improve teaching and learning. The work was personal. Students should not have to compete to be taught by a good teacher. The moral imperative to ensuring Latino and Black students' success derives from the commitment I made of entering the teaching profession to improve the odds of students like me "making it" and decrease the odds of students like me falling through the cracks. To do that, I knew we needed authentic caring

(Valenzuela, 1999) and a shift in our practices from the banking method to critical pedagogy (Freire, 2011). As the principal of an elementary school, I determined that this is where it all begins, and I was compelled to arrest the traditional teaching practices that permeated our classrooms.

As a result, the focus of practice is work with a group of teachers and coaches who are committed to ensuring that our students have a real opportunity to be academically successful. The teachers and coaches were committed to challenging the institutional and systemic status quo of traditional teaching practices that continue to neglect the academic needs of our Latino and Black students. However, the commitment did not always transfer to classroom or adult learning practices that supported what we believed. As I looked to the next generation of teachers at Gran Vista Elementary School, I wanted to focus my work in this participatory action research study on the unique context and needs of our students. The forces at play in our society played out in our context; while we espoused values that are consistent with social justice, we did not always act on them (Argyris & Schön, 1974). To make this happen, we educators had to reflect and act differently; we had to practice Freire's (2011) *praxis* in a more deliberate way.

In this chapter, I introduce the focus of practice (FoP) in the context of the school. Then I analyze the assets and challenges as well as the significance of the FoP. As I solidify the PAR purpose, I detail the research questions and the theory of action. I conclude with an outline of the participatory action research design and the limitations of this study.

Focus of Practice

The focus of practice (FoP) is predicated on the belief that teachers have the capacity to change their teaching methods and habits. While teachers come to their work with a set of dispositional beliefs, pre-service training, and professional experiences, the school principal

indirectly can transform teaching practices. The focus of practice (FoP) uses the elements of critical pedagogy in our teaching. In the Freirian tradition, critical pedagogy is a disruption of the banking system of education in which the students are empty vessels into which the teacher, the only holder of capital, makes deposits of knowledge to be withdrawn at a future date. Using critical pedagogy tenets and practices, educators challenge the structural status quo and create the conditions for the co-construction of knowledge whereby the teacher becomes the student becomes the teacher (Freire, 2011).

In this study, I engaged a group of teachers and coaches as a co-practitioner research team (n=6). The three coaches and I supported the teachers to engage students in practicing problem-posing education and encouraging students to become active agents of their development. Problem-posing education, however, requires iterative reflection among teachers and coaches as we work in adult learning spaces. Changing one's practice is personal and difficult (Marris, 1974; Rogers, 1992). Therefore, the FoP used an innovative coaching model to transform teaching using critical pedagogy tenets as the framework in coaching cycles involving observation, feedback, reflection, and next steps with the principal as a co-participant.

In-service professional development is often under the purview of the school principal. Therefore, I was able to re-imagine coaching with and for teachers. No intervention is a silver bullet (Fullan, 1993); however, because change is personal and incremental (Gwande, 2017, Marris, 1974), we incorporated teachers' perspectives to create, plan, and participate in contextual professional development on enhancing teacher capacity. Including teachers in the process as full participants in a community of practice meant there was a stronger likelihood that their practice would change (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Wood, 2010). Furthermore, they implemented

what they learned in the classroom because of the intentional critical pedagogy-based coaching support we provided (Freire, 2011).

We experienced some hiccups in the fully using these processes in grade-level meetings. However, by using iterative evidence and collective decision-making that included problem-posing, we ensured that adult learning experiences were parallel to those that occurred in the classroom. The uniqueness of this approach is that we consistently reinforced our belief systems so that we could remain vigilant about incorporating critical pedagogy tenets. As we changed teaching practices by holding constant on student learning, we had to model that in teachers' adult learning experiences (Lave, 1996; Mehta & Fine, 2015).

Fullan (1993) states: "A fundamental shift of mind . . . is what we need about the concept of educational change itself" (p. 3). My trusting relationships with the coaches and the work we did together provided me with a unique opportunity to engage teachers in this approach. We worked with three teachers and used the new coaching structures to change teacher practice to improve Latino and Black students' academic outcomes. We co-constructed the PAR project and study to provide teachers with a robust model of support to change their classroom and adult learning practices so that they could more effectively teach the students at Gran Vista Elementary School—students like me.

Next, I provide a description of Gran Vista Elementary School. Then, I provide the rationale for the focus of practice as well as the assets and challenges at three levels: macro, meso, and micro. I conclude this section with the significance of the focus of practice.

Study Context: Gran Vista Elementary

Gran Vista Elementary is a full Spanish immersion school (except for our special day class) of 350 students with an 80/20 model (80% of the instruction is in Spanish in kinder and

first grade and 20% in English). As the grades progress, the level of Spanish decreases, and English increases to reach a 50/50 balance by the second semester of the third grade. There are 19 classroom teachers, and all are bilingual. Our student demographics have remained relatively consistent with the Latino population at around 70%; White average is 13%, and Black is 3%. In an ideal dual-immersion program, the student population is one-third speakers of the target language, one-third English speakers only, and one-third bilingual, but that is not our profile (see Figure 1).

Parental beliefs about immersion programs often diverge from the intent behind the programs' creation. For example, the priority focus of the parents on the English Learners Advisory Committee (ELAC) is the reclassification of their children as fully proficient in English. Yet, given that most of the instruction is in Spanish for the first four years of school, the challenge is complex. The goal of the immersion program is to provide access to Spanish for the students who are learning it while at the same time developing academic Spanish for the Spanish-speakers to facilitate their acquisition of academic English. However, this is a tall order.

In reality, we were focused on facilitating the acquisition of Spanish for our non-Spanish speakers at the expense of the growth academic Spanish skills in our Spanish-speakers. Arguably, most of the English-only students come from homes with college-educated parents, and many of them come from Spanish immersion pre-schools. At this early age for our students, our Latino and Black students most need academic language. The disparity has made the achievement gap a consistent feature in our school. If task predicts performance, the obvious approach to addressing this dilemma would be to change the task. To do that, we need to change teacher practice.

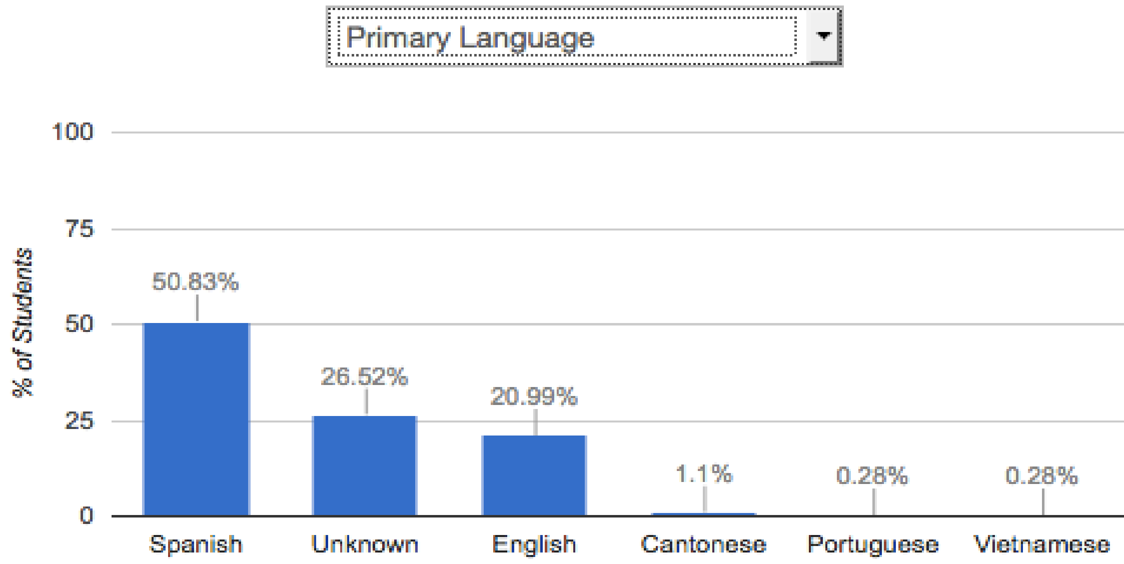


Figure 1. Gran Vista primary language demographic information 2018.

When I became principal at Gran Vista Elementary, the previous administration had determined the content of the professional development, and the coaches delivered it, often in a more traditional, banking method form. As part of their responsibilities, coaches pulled small groups of students for remedial academic interventions. After 2 years of observations, I concluded that the coaching structures were ineffective at changing teacher practice and improving student learning. We need to do something different.

When one literacy coach resigned, I hired a social-emotional learning (SEL) coach in response to the challenges around climate and culture in general and especially the classroom management environment. If the classroom is not an inviting, safe, and welcoming environment, no academic learning takes place. The coach worked with teachers, not with students, to reframe classroom environments. The pushback from most teachers, even from those who had a good reputation, was immediate and unabating. But I persisted because the opportunity and achievement gaps persisted. We made two additional changes to the coaching structure: we added mathematics and social emotional learning as content areas within the facilitated grade level collaboration, and we introduced individual coaching cycles for all the teachers. Next, I provide an explanation of the "fishbone" activity that helped me get at the root cause challenges and assets for my FoP.

Rationale

James Baldwin (1962) challenged us when he posited, "Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced" (p. 11). The rationale for the focus of practice (FoP) was grounded in the persistent performance gap at Gran Vista; that gap is often explained by factors outside our control—poverty and trauma. A second and erroneous perception is that Latino and Black parents are uninterested in their children's education.

Certainly, variables such as poverty and trauma impact student learning. However, the most influential in-school variable is undoubtedly the teacher (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Haberman, 1991; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2007, 2009, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999); the second is the principal (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004).

Through the PAR research project and study, I considered the valuable assets we possess as a school and as a school district to support our teachers. I worked under the assumption that teachers may rely on traditional pedagogical practices that do not meet the needs of their students, but the teachers have beliefs about learning that are different to their practice (Oakes & Lipton, 1998). In planning the study, we aimed to identify teachers' understanding of traditional and critical pedagogy teaching practices and implement more consistently the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education. Coaches supported teachers in classrooms, individual coaching sessions, and in grade-level collaboration meetings to enact their goals and values as social justice teachers. Ascertaining the challenges and assets at the macro (California), meso (district), and micro (school) levels was an essential first step in the PAR project.

Assets and Challenges

The connections among socio-economic status, race, immigration status, and inadequate literacy skills are well-established (Delpit, 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Additionally, connections between student perceptions and emotions and their achievement are well-researched (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). Finally, higher expectations of student learning could narrow what Ladson-Billings (2006) calls the education debt (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Delpit, 2012). In the

context of a Spanish immersion school, where most students are Spanish-speaking and from a low socio-economic status, Gándara and Contreras (2009) urge us to address the academic disadvantages of Latino students. When we add the needs of African American students, who mostly share the economic background of our Latino students, we must become what Delpit (2012) calls "warm demanders.". Warm demanders are those teachers who maintain high expectations for their students, especially the ones historically underserved, while simultaneously caring genuinely for them. She states, "For children of poverty, good teachers and powerful instruction are imperative" (Delpit, 2012, p. 73). All these variables, in and out of school, impact student achievement. This FoP intended to target one set of in-school variables, the teachers, to reshape teaching, and influence student learning with the support of their coaches and me. I use a tool from the improvement sciences to analyze the assets and challenges; the fishbone (Bryk et al., 2015; Rosenthal, 2019) (see Figure 2 for graphic representation of assets and challenges).

Assets: Macro

In November 2016, California voters approved Proposition 58, formally ending the ban on bilingual education in the state after 18 years. (The original Proposition 227 was known as the English-Only initiative). This was a turning point for the state and the school districts that had been offering bilingual programs through a series of wavers. The approval of the initiative indicated a broader acceptance of the importance of bilingual education. In the context of this FoP, this macro asset offers legislative support for this work and the implicit acceptance of bilingualism as an asset throughout the state. Thus, becoming bilingual is almost an expectation in many school districts. Given the increased demand for bilingual programs, the demand for bilingual teachers increased as well, putting pressure on teacher preparation programs and impacting the quality of the teachers in the classrooms. Our aim was to

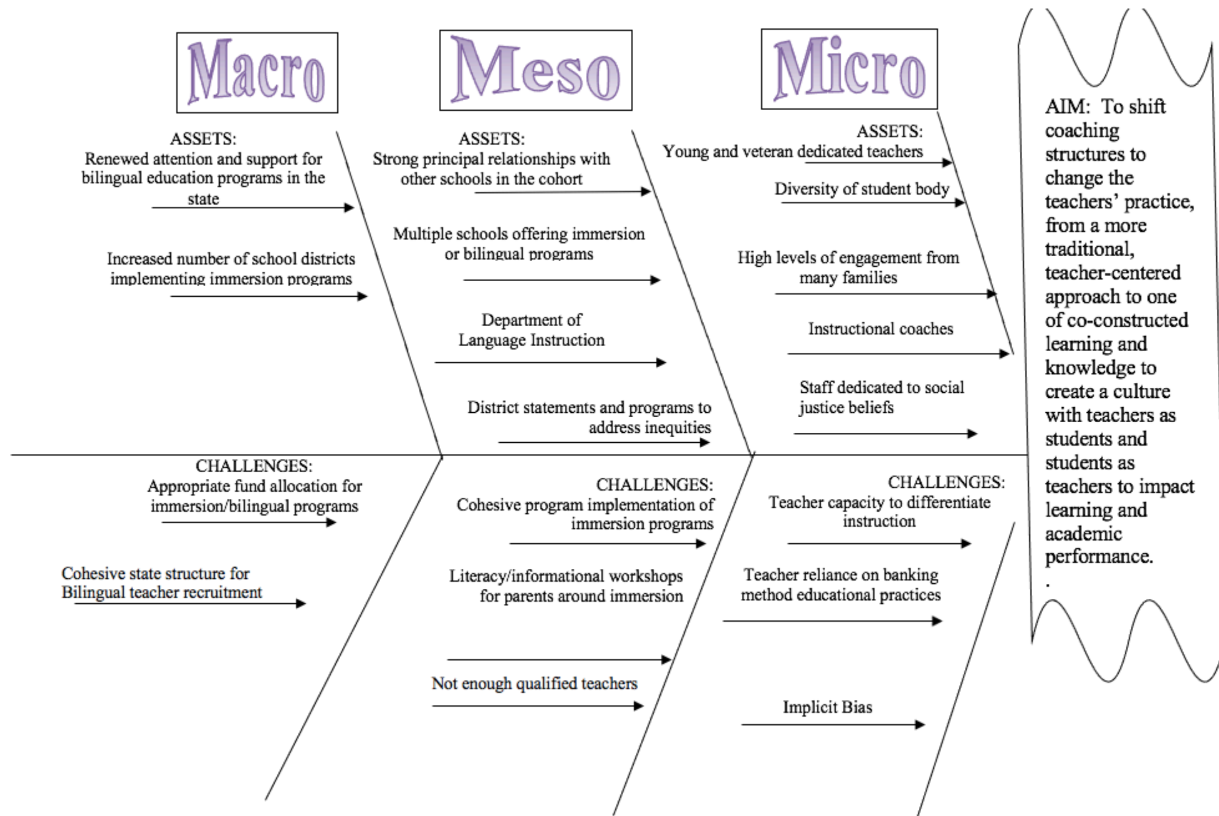


Figure 2. Fishbone of assets and challenges in the macro, meso, and micro contexts.

complement the teacher training by the institutions of higher learning. Our use of critical pedagogy aimed to support the growth and development of the teachers to help them provide the best teaching to the students who need it the most.

Assets: Meso

The Department of Language Instruction at Puerta de Oro Unified School District is the main resource for the immersion and bilingual programs. Personnel from the department lead monthly meetings where the participants discuss the issues facing the different language programs, sustain support networks, and foment a sense of community. Teachers (typically, no administrators attend) gather at these meetings in small groups to discuss issues that affect bilingual education, e.g., cross-linguistic language transfer and translaguaging. Teachers need to network and discuss instructional issues; however, these meetings were limited to content rather than practice.

The elementary schools are divided into different cohorts. Within these cohorts, several schools have a bilingual pathway or are full immersion. Gran Vista is one of three schools in Cohort 7 that are full immersion. The cohort members, despite changes in the supervisor, have developed strong, supportive relationships among the principals. In the context of the PAR, a department staffed by knowledgeable and committed people is an important meso asset for the implementation of bilingual programs in our district as it means that resources and professional development are available to our school.

Assets: Micro

The teachers and coaches are the most important assets at Gran Vista Elementary. The institutional knowledge that our veteran teachers possessed was invaluable for new teachers. With the increasing difficulty and demands on the teaching profession, their experience

navigating these demands provided the new teachers with an opportunity to learn ways to cope and grow in their profession in serving a diverse student body and parent community. Every year as part of the budgetary process, we make professional development a priority in our allocations. We organize the schedule so that, in addition to full group professional learning opportunities, the teachers have weekly grade-level collaboration meetings.

Gran Vista's diversity and parent support are also assets to our program. We have a majority Latino student population, a sizable White, middle-class population, and a consistent significant number of Black students. Additionally, we have a few students of Asian and Southeast Asian backgrounds. The diversity led to opportunities for teachers to diversify their teaching practices and navigate a variety of parent expectations and demands. Participation in parent groups and school initiatives and activities from the White, middle class families was high and consistent; participation by other parents varies. The support of the middle-class families translates into resources for extracurricular activities, partial funding of non-teaching staff, and provision of child-care for parents during school activities and meetings. Parents have also contributed to the professional development of teachers by financing their national board certifications.

Our school had the benefit of a set of young and dedicated teachers and veteran teachers coaching and supporting our work. We had parents willing to provide monetary as well as voluntary support in different initiatives and projects. We had students eager to learn. Finally, as the principal, I was willing to disrupt the status quo by using critical pedagogy theory to challenge students to examine the structures of power and create the conditions for the co-construction of knowledge (Freire, 2011).

Challenges: Macro

Despite the overwhelming approval of Proposition 58, which encouraged the implementation of bilingual education programs, the state did not provide additional funds to support such programs. In fact, Puerta de Oro Unified School District was on the brink of operating at a deficit. In addition, the district had no cohesive system for quality control of the bilingual and or immersion programs. Given the combination of the new demand for bilingual programs, local universities could not meet the increased demand for bilingual teachers. The result was classrooms staffed by teachers who were inadequately prepared to teach and thus perpetuated the performance gap in our schools.

Challenges: Meso

Bilingual programs at Puerta de Oro Unified lacked direction and did not adhere to common standards of implementation. Although the common core state standards do include Spanish standards, without a comprehensive set of guidelines for all school sites with a bilingual program, each site adopted its own implementation practices. Our district's professional development only covers English literacy skills while the bilingual pathways programs adapt those resources as they see fit without guidance from a single administrative authority. This created a haphazard approach to bilingualism with different schools doing different things. Standardizing the implementation of bilingual programs would create a more accurate measure of the quality of bilingual instruction, reduce the duplication of effort in translating curriculum, and allow for more synchronicity in teacher collaboration across schools.

Another challenge of the inconsistent implementation was the lack of a cohesive approach to professional development, not only for the teachers but also for the administrators leading those schools. Just because one may speak the language does not make that person

knowledgeable about bilingual education. This added another layer of complexity to instruction. Not only are our teachers inadequately trained by the higher education institutions, the district has no comprehensive approach to enhancing their instructional skills in a cohesive manner. The professional development typically was focused on content, and its implementation was decontextualized.

Finally, I had to buffer our staff from the never-ending administrative mandates regarding multiple topics. I had five different supervisors in five years of service in POUSD. Although each one supported my growth and development as a principal, it was impossible to build any consistency and continuity with constantly changing superiors, each of whom had to become acquainted with the context of the school and the changes we were trying to effect.

Challenges: Micro

At the micro level, the welcome diversity of the teaching staff, while clearly an asset, also presented challenges given their differing perspectives and experience. The veteran teachers expressed their resistance to implementing any changes because they were unconvinced that our approach would yield the expected results. The new teachers wanted to learn something they could use immediately in classrooms, something practical, tangible, and convenient. At the same time, they also wanted to be viewed as social justice educators who were practicing new ways of teaching. Their contradictory stance represented a challenge for us as coaches to bridge the divide. An additional challenge was parental involvement.

Because parental support primarily came from White parents, the power dynamic created a situation wherein the parents of 13% of the students wanted to make decisions for the whole school population. A corollary situation surfaced in which a fraction of the White parents wanted to make instructional decisions and set norms based on their values (Mills, 1997), deciding that

they needed to have arts because the White parents considered the arts important; they never consulted with the Latinx majority of the parent population. These actions directly contradict our critical pedagogy tenets.

Furthermore, there was a general tension between our Latino and White parents about educational priorities. For our Latino parents, the school is the main provider of skills and opportunities while our White parents expected the school to provide enrichment opportunities. Thus, when the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) made decisions on spending the money raised, the White parents' aim was to provide more art, music, and other experiences that would enhance the academic aspects. By contrast, Latino parents' priority was for their children to know how to read, write, and do math as a way to ensure their academic success.

Striking a balance between the two stances was always a challenging exercise. Two years into my tenure, two White parents from the PTA decided that they would hire an arts coordinator. They recruited that person, and I was asked to provide them with a plan to incorporate her into the instructional day. I had to educate those parents by explicitly telling them that they were getting out of their lane and assuming they could make decisions that were outside their purview. I observed the racing and norming of the space (Mills, 1997) as well as implicit bias at the school.

Implicit bias was not addressed directly at the school. At an instructional leadership team retreat, I challenged our team to think about why our students of color were performing behind their English-only counterparts (with the exception of the Black students). The reaction startled me. I heard comments such as, "They already come with a deficit," and "English Learners have lower academic esteem than White students." There is deficit-laden language and perceptions at the micro level of our school (Gorski, 2013; Hammond, 2015).

The Fishbone Diagram (see Figure 2) summarizes the assets and challenges. The focus of practice is at the head of the fishbone; as a result of drawing on assets and addressing challenges, we expect to impact teachers to change their practices using a new coaching structure at Gran Vista.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) Process

In this section, I discuss the purpose of participatory action research (PAR) project and study. I introduce the overarching research question and the sub-research questions, including a question related to my leadership development, and I present the theory of action.

Purpose Statement

The academic performance gaps challenging our Latino and Black students nationally exist at Gran Vista Elementary. At the start of the PAR, even educators who might consider themselves progressive and would wear shirts that advocate that Black Lives Matter, still tended to pathologize our students, placing the onus for not learning on them. Day in and day out, our teachers engaged in the same pedagogical practices that replicated the banking method while hoping for different results. We had assets and resources at our school, and we needed to tap into them differently.

This participatory action research aimed to build on teachers' capacity and ability, utilizing their professional dispositions to change their practices. Through coaching cycles framed by critical pedagogy tenets, we disrupted traditional practices and re-constructed approaches to teaching and learning in classrooms and in adult learning spaces. At the outset of the PAR, we hoped that the initiatives would lead to a schoolwide change in which teachers see themselves as learners, changing the way they teach to change the way our students learn and thus change students' academic outcomes.

Research Questions

The participatory action research project aimed to answer the following overarching question: How does critical pedagogy inform and support teachers to change classroom practices and improve student learning? We answered the overarching question by collecting and analyzing data to address these specific sub-questions:

1. To what extent do coaches and teachers frame and structure professional learning for teachers by using critical pedagogy?
2. To what extent do teachers modify their practices to incorporate critical pedagogy in classrooms practices and in collaboration with other teachers.?
3. How does leading this PAR project process inform and transform my leadership practice?

Theory of Action

The theory of action for this project is rooted in a set of axioms from the community learning exchange philosophy and methodology (Guajardo et al., 2016), which is premised on the idea that the people closest to the work are best situated to make decisions that benefit the local community.

- If we use a new coaching structure that utilizes critical pedagogy tenets as the framework, then teachers will change their teaching practice.
- If teachers can practice the tenets of critical pedagogy in adult learning spaces, they can enhance their learning and be more consistent in transferring practices to classrooms.
- If the teachers change their teaching practice utilizing critical pedagogy tenets, then students can co-create knowledge with the teachers.

We expected that we could ultimately enhance student learning and dispositions. If the students can co-create knowledge with the teachers, then students will be better able to think critically, challenge hegemonic, dominant practices, and improve their academic outcomes. We sought to learn how best to design processes that fortified the teachers' beliefs as social justice educators about fully enacting critical pedagogy in the classroom. We also wanted to reimagine adult learning in collaborative groups and individual coaching to support teachers' learning, reflection, and actions, thereby illuminating how we to actualize Freire's (2011) *praxis* as a way of being and a way of coming to know.

Throughout the project, we collected and analyzed data on (1) the establishment of a set of values and beliefs that informed the coaching focus and practice and (2) how this approach shaped our individual and collective practices as a school leader, coaches, and teachers. To further describe our direction, I restate our aim from the fishbone and use a tool from the improvement sciences, the driver diagram (see Table 1), that assists me in understanding the primary and secondary drivers of the PAR (Bryk et al., 2015).

Aim Statement and Driver Diagram

The aim of the participatory action research: To shift coaching structures to change the teachers' practice from a more traditional, teacher-centered approach to one of co-constructed learning and knowledge to create a culture with teachers as students and students as teachers to impact learning and academic performance.

The improvement goal of the participatory action research was to use critical pedagogy tenets as the framework to change teachers' practice and support them in becoming more reflective practitioners with the intended outcome of changing students' academic performance, particularly our Latino and Black students. In the following section, I present the driver diagram

Table 1

Driver Diagram

To shift coaching structures at Gran Vista Elementary to change the teachers' practice from a traditional, teacher-centered approach to one of co-constructed learning and knowledge to create a culture with teachers as students and students as teachers to impact learning and academic performance.

Primary Drivers: People and Processes	Secondary Drivers: People and Processes
Principal • Guiding the overall process and co-participating in the coaching and grade-level collaboration sessions • Collecting data on coaching, grade level collaboration meetings, and participants' reflections	Cohort 1 Supervisor • Having her supervising me for a second year in a row brings stability and consistency, and her familiarity with my project provides support for the work. • Her continuing supervision of the same cohort allows for closer collaboration among the other schools with immersion programs.
Coaches • Facilitating the coaching sessions and grade-level collaborations and co-participating in the research • Sharing observations on teachers' response to coaching	Multilingual Pathways Department • The supervisor supporting elementary schools is a former principal who worked at a school with a bilingual program. He understands the challenges and the potential for creating a better system. • He also knows that I am working on this project, which could help us collaborate more closely and intentionally on the professional development opportunities they may be inclined to provide.
Teachers Co-Practitioner Researchers • Providing insight into perceptions of elements of effective teaching practices • Implementing the shifts in practice and reflecting on the effectiveness of the new coaching structures	Student Support School Structures • Aligned with the changing of teacher practices, we are also working on improving our student support school structures through Social Emotional Learning practices in the classrooms.

and introduce the main goals of the FoP and the people and processes that will attempt to attain those goals.

Significance of FoP

There is an abundance of research about teaching and teaching practice (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Much of the work of these and other researchers revolved around the importance of changing teacher practice to improve the learning of our most historically underserved students. In the PAR project the principal, coaches, and classroom teachers engaged in the process of transforming teacher practice by utilizing a coaching approach framed with the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education.

Project Design

The project took place at Gran Vista Elementary, a Spanish immersion school with a substantial number of Latino students and a growing number of African American students. The project involved six persons: three coaches and three classroom teachers (see Chapter 3 for biographies). I discuss the pre-cycle, two cycles of inquiry, data collection, and analysis in Chapter 4.

Although we had worked together, in the first cycle of inquiry we established ourselves as a learning community through circle, a pedagogy of reflection (Guajardo et al., 2016). The pre-cycle focused on self, who are we as agents of change, as educators, as teachers. We explored our values and espoused beliefs and identified the learning conditions for student achievement in a Community Learning Exchange (CLE). The teachers and coaches as co-participants in the project embodied the first two of the CLE axioms: “learning and leadership are dynamic social processes, and conversations are critical and central pedagogies” (Guajardo et

al., 2016, p. 4). I met with the coaches and established the coaching framework baseline, and subsequently met weekly with them and discussed their observations about the progress of the project. I observed coaching sessions and collected data about the teachers experience and wrote reflective memos to document my own leadership development.

In PAR Cycle One, we addressed the pedagogical and interpersonal dynamics that surfaced of the teachers during grade level collaboration (GLC) meetings. The challenges that emerged in different grade levels indicated the need for a different approach to supporting teachers change their practice. We needed to address how espoused values expressed by the teachers in the pre-cycle were enacted in the classrooms but were missing from their adult-adult interactions. Through the data from Cycle One, I got a glimpse of what was needed to shift teachers' practice despite their beliefs and attitudes conducive to change (Fullan, 1993). I captured these processes in reflective memos.

In the final cycle, PAR Cycle Two, we captured the shift in our approach to implementing the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogical interactions and problem-posing education more comprehensively (Freire, 2011). The coaches worked with teachers in their grade-level collaboration meetings, shifting from one grade level to grade level spans to allow for direct coaches' facilitation. The coaches framed the change in teacher practices and engaged the teachers in the co-construction of their shift in practice. I observed the grade-level collaboration meetings and noted the outcomes. I met with the coaches weekly to discuss the progress and surfacing tensions. Participants reflected on the implementation of critical pedagogy through the lens of dismantling the banking system of education as well as on their own growth and development journey lines. I noted coaching conversations. I reflected on my

evolution as an educator and administrator through reflective memos. Finally, I described the implications of the research project.

Significance of the Study

The PAR study is significant to research, policy, and practice because the work we are doing reveals the complications that are often a part of teacher reform work and are not communicated in practice and research. We encountered bumps in the road, and because of the iterative research, were able to use the participant-observers process of closely following teacher practices in classrooms and meetings to diagnose and design responses to challenges (Spillane, 2013). Participatory action and activist research devoted to interrogating our practices as social justice educators is a process that provides this opportunity to be in the "messy, iterative, and generative work that is constantly being made and remade" in our context (hunter et al., 2013). While there is an abundance of research about teaching and teaching practice (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008; Valenzuela, 1999), much of the work of these researchers is from the outside in. As co-practitioner researchers, we had a daily bird's-eye view of the work and could make adjustments as we needed, using iterative evidence to guide us.

The work is important to policy, particularly at the local school and district level. The teachers' initial perceptions of professional learning were as collaborative planning, but we broadened their conceptions of learning to include instructional coaching. We hope this will lead teachers to view learning as analytical and professional evolution in a community of learners who form a peer network of support as opposed to a simple task completion (Lave, 1996; Wood, 2010). The study could inform how coaching individuals and communities of practice as groups

are an important learning space in schools and districts and how we could organize that learning in peer networks that better support them.

Teacher practice makes a difference. Doing something differently without recognizing the differences of the children before them is setting the students up for an experience and sense of inadequacy. The focus of this project is to strike at this issue through investigating how our beliefs in the tenets of critical pedagogy translated to practice and to our work with each other.

Confidentiality, Ethical Considerations, and Study Limitations

Confidentiality of participants and the security of data are important considerations in this study. I ensured that all documents, materials, and other types of data were stored securely in a locked file cabinet in my office. Additionally, as the principal of the school where I conducted this PAR project, I was fully aware of my positional authority, and I needed to maintain that awareness throughout the project to ensure that any potential bias of mine was kept in check and that I instituted sufficient safeguards for the participants to withdraw from the study if they so desired. The adult consent form the participants signed provides specific information on safeguards for participants of this project.

As additional safeguards against my potential researcher bias, I relied on CPR members to provide members checks to ensure that this bias did not prejudice or derail the study. The coaches challenge and push back on some of my ideas, especially when those ideas have not been developed fully. They already are helping me be a better administrator. Throughout the process of writing memos, I challenged my thinking, explored the dilemmas and frustrations that arose, and the glimmers of hope I saw.

There were some inherent limitations in the study due to the qualitative nature of the data collection methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within the framework of ethical

considerations, my positionality could have influenced the way in which the other participants engaged in the study. As the school principal, I was mindful of the issue of power, balancing my researcher-role and my work as the school leader. It was essential that the CPR group established participation norms and that I provided sufficient safeguards for the participants so they could freely express their opinions and perspectives throughout the process. The IRB consent form provided further safeguards as participants could have discontinued their involvement at any time without any repercussions. Finally, I adhered to qualitative research trustworthiness. This study exercised credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter Summary

This study aimed to study teacher practices in classrooms and adult learning spaces and how coaching using critical pedagogy tenets shaped the teachers' thinking and work. Our long-term goal remains: to improve Latino and Black student academic outcomes in the context of a Spanish immersion elementary school. More specifically, this focus of practice aimed to change the traditional teaching practices rooted of the banking system of education (Freire, 2011) to stronger dialogical teaching and learning. The FoP sought to change practices from stagnant instructional habits that do not meet the academic needs of our students, particularly our Latino and Black students, to more constructivist practices that support them as learners. We used a coaching structure to support teachers' shift of their practices to make them more reflective practitioners and supportive of their students and each other as professionals.

In Chapter Two, I examine the relevant extant literature, which provides a framework for the study context (see Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I discuss in more detail the methodology and the

subsequent cycles of inquiry in Chapters 5–7. I conclude with Chapter 8 in which I discuss the findings and implications and reflect on my leadership.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

A teacher's instructional practices have the most direct impact on the learning outcomes of children, especially learning outcomes of students of color. The quality of the teaching practices determines the quality of the learning outcomes. However, as examined in Chapter 1, challenges in the academic achievement of students of color in the United States have a long history (Delpit, 2012; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008; Valenzuela, 1999) that are rooted in the founding of this country and perpetuated by the system and institutions. The learning of Latino and Black students at Dolores Huerta Elementary has been stagnant as well, and in some instances has actually regressed. The challenges are related to teaching, structural, institutional, and systemic factors, not student factors like intellect and motivation (Boykin & Noguera, 2010). Socio-political forces shape the educational system in our country. However, educating children cannot depend on fixing the structural, social, or political context; instead, focusing on how teachers teach, and children learn is still the responsibility of teachers, coaches, and administrators in every school.

Economic inequality and academic achievement are often linked in causal ways that are predictive of future success. For example, vocabulary is important for school success (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2007; Hernandez et al., 2007; Hoff, 2013; Isaacs, 2012), but students from lower socioeconomic strata enter school with far fewer words than their middle-class counterparts. If we accept that students from lower SES are condemned to fail, then they will. However, focusing on the challenges they experience is nothing less than blaming the "victim." A new approach requires a paradigm shift that focuses on the assets the students possess.

Focusing on predetermined and causal factors negates students' capacity to overcome them. Nasir et al. (2016) found that "much of the research regarding the social context of

schooling tends to focus on students' lives and how their socioeconomic conditions affect their education opportunities, performance, and attainment," instead of the cultural assets that students bring to school (p. 351). Because a prevailing myth in the United States is that *one pulls oneself up by the bootstraps*, the idea of self-determination conflates working hard and merit without taking into account the myth of meritocracy that overlooks the institutional and cultural hegemony. Nasir et al. (2016) best summarized the notion of meritocracy as "a frame which suggests that inequality is due to lack of effort rather than to systemically rooted systems of marginalization and oppression" (p. 352).

Too often, focusing on external factors as the reasons for the learning challenges facing students of color absolves educators of any responsibility or obligation to address the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, by creating opportunities in the schools and classrooms so that traditionally more vulnerable students are able to thrive, Nasir et al. (2016) argue that:

> For teachers and instructional leaders to be more culturally competent and responsive educators, they need to have a broader and deeper understanding of the political, social, and economic trends that shape the opportunity structures for students of diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. (p. 351)

What may seem like a contradiction is a statement of fact: there are historical and societal factors that influence the opportunities students of color are afforded. Therefore, educators working with students of color cannot place all responsibility for their students' success on factors they cannot control and instead think about the best way they can impact their students' learning.

The participatory action research project and study aim to improve opportunities for students of color by changing teaching and coaching practices. The focus of practice (FoP) targets two in-school variables that affect student learning: how teachers change their practice to

lead to more equitable outcomes for children and how coaches and the administrator can work with teachers to impact their teaching practices.

The literature review draws from theoretical and empirical studies that explore two areas of pertinent literature: current and recommended pedagogy and coaching practices. In the literature review, I rely on the usefulness of critical pedagogy as a response to normative practices of teaching and learning. The first section is an examination of teaching practices for students of color—both what to do and what not to do—by addressing:

- deficit thinking and teaching and their consequences for students of color;
- English Language Learners (ELLs) in Spanish immersion programs;
- effective teaching practices within the frame of culturally, linguistically, and racially responsive teaching and caring relationships; and
- critical pedagogy and student learning.

The second section on coaching models includes:

- normative coaching practices,
- features of effective coaching practices,
- the role of coaching to change teacher practice, and
- the effectiveness of the principal in changing teacher practice.

The last section summarizes the two sections and their connection to the focus of practice.

From Traditional Teaching Practices to Critical Pedagogy With Students of Color

In *The Racial Contract*, Mills (1997) contends that the United States educational system was designed to educate the dominant white ruling class and not the Native Americans, the enslaved Africans, nor the subsumed Mexicans. In this racialized society,

A partitioned social ontology is therefore created, a universe divided between persons

> and racial subpersons, *Untermenschen*, who may variously be black, red, brown, yellow . . . but who are collectively appropriately known as 'subject races.' And these subpersons . . . are biologically destined never to penetrate the normative rights ceiling established for them below white persons (pp. 16–17).

Mills (1997) further states: "The Framers [of the constitution] manifestly established a government under which non-Europeans were not men created equal—in the white polity . . . they were nonpeoples" (p. 28). Given the societal and historical hegemony of our country, traditional teaching practices in our classrooms reflect a set of beliefs, cultural assumptions, and linguistic norms that have been passed on to teachers and that they often propagate even if they profess to be culturally responsive. Students are expected to adhere to and be shaped by them. Shor (1992) states that traditional education:

> Suppresses, instead of develops, skills and intellectual interests; it relegates students to positions of powerlessness, setting them up to accept powerlessness as adults; it fails to acknowledge the strengths and cultures and prior knowledge of the students; and it gives teachers the ultimate authority. It leads students and teachers to feel disconnected and alienated from the curriculum and schooling. It promotes failure for a large segment of the population, facilitates cultural and social reproduction, and doesn't accurately measure cognitive skills. (as cited by Duncan-Andrade & Morell, 2008, p. 29)

Cognitive skills cannot be measured if there are no opportunities for the students to show what they know, or more important, how they know.

When communities of color and/or low socio-economic status are involved, teachers default to a traditional "banking" approach in which "[i]nstead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and

repeat" (Freire, 2011, p. 72). Freire criticizes the traditional learning environment in which the teacher is the fount of knowledge, the source of identity and thought, the distributor of culture, and the arbiter of what is acceptable and what is not while the students are mere objects. To shift the paradigm of traditional teaching practices, Ladson-Billings (2014) argues for the implementation of a pedagogy that is sustainable, flexible, and adaptable to create "instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity—that is, that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects" (p. 76). As subjects, the historically underserved students in this way become agents of change in their own learning.

Traditional teaching practices persist because of historical and socio-economic and political foundations of the country, where the cultural capital was dispensed to members of the dominant group with the power to make the rules and define knowledge (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Mills, 1997; Nasir et al., 2016). With this racial and socio-political background and cultural and social capital as their point of departure, Social scientists used a deficit approach to language skills to explain the difference in academic achievement by students of color from low socio-economic backgrounds and to legitimize differential approaches to their instruction. The deficit model especially undermines English Language Learners; however, there are alternative teaching practices available such as the critical pedagogy approach.

Deficit Thinking and Language and Consequences for Students of Color

No child enters the education system without experience, without perspective, without knowledge, without culture, or without an identity. Yet, teachers tend to see the particular characteristics or circumstances of students of color as something to be erased or replaced with something more acceptable. While the historical record indicates that people of color have been

treated differently in all levels of society, and although there have been legal victories against discrimination (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954; *Castaneda v. Pickard*, 1981; Lau v. Nichols, 1974; Mendez v. Westminster School Dist., 1946), the perception that students of color are intellectually, and therefore academically, inferior persists in classrooms across the country.

Educators with deficit thinking populate schools across the country and their practices continue to impact students of color. In some instances, because of the perceived notion that students of color are incapable of performing well academically simply because of who they are (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016), teachers display deficit thinking by assuming that parents do not care, that certain children do not have enough exposure to literacy or experiences, or that their families do not value education (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Thus, they diagnose students with a particular difficult or challenging life situation as having the "pobrecito syndrome," and do not hold high academic expectations for them; in short, teachers give these students permission to fail (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Valenzuela (1999) makes the same argument: "Teachers often give students the option of remaining in or leaving the classroom. Typically, the teachers justify their actions by saying that they are trying to inculcate a sense of adult responsibility in these teenage boys and girls" (pp. 66–67). The deficit model has particular consequences for students of color. The students become uninterested and disengaged from their own learning (Valenzuela, 1999). Instead, educators should foster meaningful relationships with students so that they are in a position to be warm demanders (Delpit, 2012) of student academic success and support student academic identity (Simon, 2019).

The importance of genuine, meaningful relationships between teachers and students is not

a new concept. Freire (2011) discusses authentic versus false generosity. Howard (2010) distinguishes the characteristics of *sympathetic* teachers, who feel sorry for students, and *empathetic* teachers, who recognize what students are experiencing in their lives but continue to hold high expectations and actively engage in ensuring that they succeed (see Table 2). Delpit (2012) describes teachers whom she calls *warm demanders* because they form relationships with students so that they can make demands on their performance. Valenzuela (1999) draws on Nodding's (1984) concepts of aesthetic vs. authentic caring in which schools are structured around an aesthetic caring of things and ideas instead of more deeply committing to students. Much like Howard's distinctions between teacher types, the sympathetic teachers follow the rules of aesthetic care while empathetic teachers are more likely to demonstrate authentic caring. Valenzuela (1999) argues that "[r]ather than centering students' learning around a moral ethic of caring that nurtures and values relationships, schools pursue a narrow, instrumentalist logic" that constitutes subtracting their culture and perspective from the school and demands that they follow only a strict, normative form of learning (p. 22). Similarly, Valdés (1996) establishes the importance of relationships through a cultural lens describing the importance of education in terms of *educación*, a mixture of respect, deference to elders, as well as moral, social, and self-responsibility ingrained in the Mexican culture. Reinforcing the importance of interpersonal relationships, Valenzuela (1999) adds:

> [W]hen teachers deny their students the opportunity to engage in reciprocal relationships, they simultaneously invalidate the definition of educatión that most of these young people embrace. And, since that definition is thoroughly grounded in Mexicans culture, its rejection constitutes a dismissal of their culture as well. Lost to schools is an

Table 2

Characteristics of Sympathetic and Empathetic Teachers

Sympathetic Teachers: Feel sorry for students and lower expectations	Empathetic Teachers: Recognize and attend to student predicaments but continue to hold high expectations for student performance
• See limitations • See deficits • Are paralyzed by problems • Have a narrow, limited teacher repertoire due to perceived student capacity • Place little to no value on student's perspectives or voices • View learning as a teacher-dominated practice	• See promise and possibility • See assets • Become active problem-solvers • Develop critical and complex teaching practices to engage students • Listen and learn from students • View learning as reciprocal process between teacher and student • Tap into students' cultural capital as a means of teaching and learning

Note. (Howard, 2010, p. 49).

opportunity to foster academic achievement by building on the strong motivational force embedded in students' familial identities. (p. 23)

In the absence of genuine relationships, teachers fill the void with low level teaching that manifests their beliefs that students of color will not succeed. They characterize Mexican students as "immature, unambitious, and defiant of authority and [assume] that teachers have no power to change the situation since it is the students' fault" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 65).

However, pedagogy can be different and can add to instead of subtract from student learning. Because learning is a social and cultural activity accomplished in collaboration with others, a teacher can authentically care, guide, and model a different approach given the right classroom conditions (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Nasir et al., 2016). A teacher can "show the sermon" that the students need to see (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). In the absence of genuine relationships, the language and attitude of deficit leads to students being objectified; they become dispensable and nonessential parts of the school system (Valenzuela, 1999). Freire (2011) states: "Pedagogy, which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression" (p. 54). Traditional teaching practices and deficit thinking exist in contexts in which Spanish is the main language of instruction and teachers are of the same cultural and linguistic background.

English Language Learners (ELLs) in Spanish Immersion Programs

Dual language immersion programs typically begin in kindergarten with the majority of instruction in the target language, (e.g., Spanish) and a portion in English. The language use balances by fourth or fifth grade. Dual language immersion is a type of bilingual education. Bilingual education is an umbrella term that includes the variant approaches to instruction in a

language other than English. In Spanish dual immersion programs, Latino students provide the raw material (language and culture) that sustains the programs ostensibly created to support English language acquisition by Latino students.

In an ideal dual-language bilingual program, the make-up of the student population is supposed to be one-third target language speakers, one-third native English speakers, and one-third bilingual speakers who serve as the bridge between the two languages. Weintraub (2012) in his research on immersion programs cites Christian (1994) and Howard and Christian (2002) that the primary goal of bilingual immersion programs is to ensure that native speakers and learners of the target language achieve high levels of academic and bilingual proficiency, to develop their self-esteem, and to promote positive cross-cultural attitudes. However, Ballinger and Lyster (2011) point out the challenges with sustaining Spanish even when the students are expected to. When English language learners in dual Spanish immersion programs are denied the opportunity to strengthen their Spanish literacy skills and transfer them to the acquisition of English, they lose more than they gain.

Yet, the original intent of bilingual education has been co-opted to some degree by middle- and upper-middle-class families who see learning Spanish as another advantage for their children. Therefore, the teachers often tend to focus on the monolingual English-speaking students' acquisition of the target language at the expense of the Latino students' academic development. Students who make up the monolingual Spanish-speaking population tend to be from low socioeconomic backgrounds whose parents possess little formal education (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017). The students enter the system already possessing an intricately interwoven link between their language and their culture, and their sense of identity is compromised, if not surrendered, the moment they step foot in the school system for the first time. However, this

process is often overlooked or denied. In a meta-analysis of several studies, Alfaro and Bartolomé (2017) documented how even though "one key goal of Spanish-English bilingual education is to prepare emergent bilinguals to master both standard Spanish and English, it too often comes at the expense of the linguistic capital that low-SES emergent bilinguals bring to school" (p. 12). Meanwhile, the students whose first language is English have the benefit of learning Spanish while the students whose first language is Spanish are not as successful in school.

In addition, the teachers send a strong message. The way bilingual teachers relate to the target language is correlated to the way the language is perceived by the students, both the native target language speakers and English speakers. Ballinger and Lyester (2011) found that "the teachers' own language use and their expectations of students' Spanish production were also linked to students' Spanish use" (p. 303). They argue, that "if teachers appear ambivalent regarding the importance of their own and their students' use of the minority language, their students may perceive them as reinforcing the minority/majority society language divide within their classes" (Ballinger & Lyester, 2011, p. 303). If the ambivalence in the teachers' approach to Spanish is persistent, English is perceived by students in dual Spanish immersion programs as being the language of power.

Both Ballinger and Lyester (2011) and Alfaro and Bartolomé (2017) argue that "the Latino students in bilingual programs often resist speaking Spanish because they perceive themselves as being in a position of inferiority and powerlessness" (p. 23). The sentiment is vividly presented in the stories of Brent and Carlos, two of the students the authors observed and interviewed. When asked why he thought it was beneficial and important to learn how to speak, read, and write in Spanish, Brent replied that "he needed to learn Spanish so that when he grew

up, he could tell the workers what to do" (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017, p. 24). Carlos, on the other hand, when asked why it was important to learn to speak, read, and write in both Spanish and English, responded, "I think it is important so that when I grow up I can get a better job, but I think it is better to speak English" (Alfaro and Bartolomé, 2017, p. 24).

Teachers in bilingual programs must develop a clear understanding of what they are teaching and whom they are teaching so that they honor the language and cultural assets that minority language students bring to the schools and value their culture and identity. Alfaro and Bartolomé (2017) argue that "we need to be conscious that, unless we have the courage to intervene strategically, forcefully, purposefully, and consistently, discriminatory hegemonic ideologies and practices will continue to contaminate our best bilingual education efforts and intentions" (p. 29). Ineffective approaches that aim to address the needs of students of color, speakers of a language other than English, and/or those from low socioeconomic backgrounds exist within frameworks currently present in many classrooms. Effective teaching practices are based on caring relationships that incorporate the students' identity, culture, and their ethnic, racial and linguistic backgrounds.

Effective Practices: Caring Relationships and Culturally, Linguistically, and Racially Responsive Teaching

While students of color and low socio-economic backgrounds face challenges to academic attainment, innumerable ineffective approaches continue to flourish in American classrooms. However, two frames—caring relationships and practices rooted in culturally, linguistically, and racially responsive pedagogies—provide an antidote and a way forward. In a classroom based on the two stated frames, the teacher seeks a "positive relationship between

feeling and thought" (Shor, 1992, p. 24) such that the curriculum content and the pedagogy are integrated into a positive interchange that respects the students' culture.

The two frames are interwoven: responsive pedagogies cannot exist without the existence of caring relationships and vice versa. The critical frame of responsive, caring relationships is reflected in the old adage, "The students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." As Duncan-Andrade (2009) says, "At the end of the day, effective teaching depends most heavily on one thing: deep and caring relationships" (p. 191). Only through establishing deep and caring relationships in classrooms serving minority students can we confront the reality that "in the United States, mainstream instruction is best aligned with the 'cultural repertoires of practice' of White, middle-class students" (Nasir et al., 2016, p. 365). Only then can we equip our students with the tools to confront "the culture of power" and gain "access to the dominant mode of speaking, engaging, and being in mainstream society" while retaining their cultural integrity (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016, p. 602). The culture of power provides the students with more than access. By uncovering the way privilege manifests itself, students gain an understanding of the culture of power, and this understanding provides them with a sense of identity that is not subject to others.

In the responsive caring relationships frame, the teacher sees the child for who the child is: Black, Latino, English Language Learner, LGBTQ, non-binary, gender non-conforming. The teacher has to see the differences in the children they teach and view them as assets that will enable the teachers to address each individual child's needs. Seven teachers of color either in their first year of teaching or in their final semester of their teacher preparation program participated in a qualitative study on the application of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the classroom (Borrero et al., 2016). The participants found that some teachers were too simplistic in

their understanding of a child's identity. For example, some teachers claimed to practice CRP because they taught a book with a character of color or a book written by an author of color. The study participants articulated a deeper understanding of CRP; they realized that teachers needed to learn students' cultures and to expand that understanding of culture beyond identity markers.

Seeing the student in a genuine, meaningful way engenders what Valenzuela (1999) calls authentic caring or *cariño*, as opposed to aesthetic or superficial caring. This is the type of relationship described by Freire (2011) as authentic generosity, which means that it is devoid of egoistic interests. Ladson-Billings (2009) describes culturally relevant teaching in action as that founded in caring relationships:

> The teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community; the teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students; the teacher encourages a "community of learners;" and the teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other. (p. 60)

Effective, meaningful teaching and learning occur when symbiotic relationships are established between the students and the teacher, described by Freire (2011) as the teacher-becoming-the-student and the student becoming-the-teacher, leading to a positive learning environment in which teachers are informed by the culture, race, and linguistic abilities of the students in their instructional practices.

The symbiotic relationship, an ethic of authentic care, Valenzuela, (1999) requires that a teacher "recognize and define what a student needs cognitively, socially, emotionally, and then *act* on his behalf" (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016, p. 606). Within the context of the symbiotic relationship, practices as simple as the incorporation of realia into the instruction,

visual aids, verbal cuing, total physical response, and modeling (Hill, 2010) become effective in addressing the academic needs of historically underserved students. These more intentional practices require a full awareness and acceptance of who the students are so that their culture can be used as a resource for learning. In such environments, teachers teach skills and critical thinking explicitly, and students work collaboratively (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016) taking a more active role in their own learning. The teachers' intentionality leads to providing the students with "multiple rich opportunities to engage the big conceptual ideas in a domain" (Nasir et al., 2016, p. 365). The students become subjects as opposed to objects in their learning (Freire, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Instilling in the students the skills to succeed academically is one part of the equation, even within the frame and context mentioned above. True responsive caring pedagogy requires that we prepare them to succeed in life (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

In classrooms with students who are not part of the hegemonic culture, educators need to create learning environments that are conducive to the development of the students as whole persons. Such environments are grounded in establishing genuine relationships in which students feel valued for who they are and the assets they bring with them to school (Borrero et al., 2016; Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999) and respond to the academic demands and expectations the teachers have of them. The alignment of what Valenzuela (1999) calls the politics of caring and its convergence with critical pedagogy form more effective learning environments. As Nasir et al. (2016) state:

> Caring . . . has to do not only with a teacher's kind regard and love in engaging students but also with concern for their long-term welfare and thus with demanding and supporting high levels of academic achievement and learning. In other words, caring relationships do not lower expectations but, rather, raise them. (p. 367)

Caring relationships are a means to the goal of academic attainment for historically underserved students. Strom and Martin (2015) note that new teachers often arrive in the classroom holding a set of values and beliefs that support the values of caring (Lortie, 1975; Pajares, 1992; Wideen et al., 1998). However, they are frequently assigned to more demanding classes, which may lead them to adopt more traditional forms of instruction as a survival strategy (Scherff, 2008; Tait, 2008). Yet, they possess the potential to establish genuine relationships and create environments conducive to learning. Strom and Martin (2015) observed that "[t]he relationships [the teacher] constructed with his students seemed to contribute to students' eagerness to participate in instructional activities. Observations demonstrate that [the teacher] interacted with students in a friendly and open manner, and students seemed to genuinely like him" (Strom & Martin, 2015, p. 262).

Whether the teaching is traditional or progressive, the students will not respond favorably if the relationship between them and their teacher is nothing more than a transactional one. Without genuine teacher vulnerability and authentic caring relationships between teachers and students, student achievement in underserved communities will be more elusive (Borrero et al., 2016; Strom & Martin, 2015). However, by developing genuine relationships between teachers and students, relationships that consider the child's background and experience as assets and are trusting, encouraging, and supportive, and using critical pedagogy based on human connections and relationships, the teacher can connect with students and offer a more culturally relevant curricular and pedagogical experience.

Critical Pedagogy and Student Learning

In a traditional teaching environment, the teacher dispenses information and expects the students to regurgitate it in some form of assessment. Co-creating knowledge with students

requires that teachers divest themselves of their traditional teaching cloaks and consider who the students are and what they bring to the classroom, building on their perspectives and experiences to give meaning to their new environment. Picower (2012) states:

> It means teaching . . . [students] about the world as it is and how they can be part of changing the world to be more the way . . . they would want the world to be; [teaching students] to think about their situation in the world and their experiences and their family's experiences and what's right about that and what's wrong about that and how those things can be changed. (p. 566)

In a classroom driven by critical pedagogy, teachers facilitate the awareness and development of students as activists. Many teachers do come from teacher education programs that support the theory of critical pedagogy. However, when the teachers meet the reality of the first years of novice teaching, they are not clear about how to enact their espoused beliefs (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Effective coaching is vital for the teachers who have maintained traditional practices and who claim to be social justice educators but do not quite know what that looks like in schools. However, drawing on teachers' espoused beliefs is a good place to start to ensure that teachers enact their belief systems.

Critical pedagogy requires a recognition of the students' reality and a response to the exigencies of their lives with hope and love. Macedo (2006) states that "[c]ritical pedagogy is a state of becoming, a way of being in the world and with the world— a never-ending process that involves struggle and pain but also hope and joy shaped and maintained by a humanizing pedagogy" (Smith & McLaren, 2010, p. 332). Critical pedagogy is the foundation of the different types of hope Duncan-Andrade (2009) describes as essential for nurturing urban youth.

Critical pedagogy is the manifestation of love that Strom and Martin (2015) observed in a novice teacher:

> [The teacher] demonstrated that he cared about his students by going beyond his normal role as a physics teacher, such as working on extracurricular projects based on students' interests during his homeroom period, forming an afterschool drama club and volunteering to step in as a substitute during a prolonged absence of the teacher with whom he shared a room (p. 263).

Critical pedagogy is a shared experience of struggle, progress, liberation, and success. Critical pedagogy in the Freirean mold, "results in an educative process that leads to actions, ideally collective in nature, guided by love and aimed at producing a more just society" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 33). However, accomplishing "a more just society" is a long process that "requires both teachers and students to painfully examine [their] lives and actions within an unjust society and to share the sensibility that pain may pave the path to justice" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 188).

The pain our students experience necessitates pedagogical choices that acknowledge the historical factors that have led to the students' reality and disrupt them. Cooper (2003) states:

> Students are in great need of teachers who, in addition to displaying subject matter competence and sound instructional practice, hold three fundamental beliefs about their role as educators. These include the belief that: teaching is a political rather than neutral act, teachers must work to achieve 'political and ideological clarity' (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000, p. 279); and teachers must resist forces that promote educational and social inequality within schools (p. 104).

The important mandate of critical pedagogy is that we support the learning and development of the students along with the growth and development of their teachers. Ladson-Billings (2014) posits that If we don't support the learning of the teachers, they might reach a point in their profession when they might feel that they have arrived

> [t]o a place of complete certainty and assuredness about our practice, we will stop growing. If we stop growing, we will die, and, more importantly, our students will wither and die in our presence. Both teachers and students can be vulnerable to a sort of classroom death. Death in the classroom refers to teachers who stop trying to reach each and every student or teacher who succumb to rules and regulations that are dehumanized and result in de-skilling. (p. 77)

De-skilling is robbing the students of the political capital they need in order for them to be able to navigate a society intent on maintaining the status quo of subordination and servitude. De-skilling is robbing Carlos of the power he possesses to decide his own destiny and not adhere to preconceived notions of his future and his worth.

The academic achievement of underserved Latino and Black students is dependent on their knowledge that the teachers have their best interests at heart. The students need to know that the challenging of their established perspective is in line with the efforts to make their learning more meaningful and relevant, and not just a pro-forma action by their teachers to the expectation of their schooling.

Summary

Traditional teaching practices continue to dominate U.S. classrooms with devastating consequences for Latino and Black students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. These traditional practices resulted from the institutional and societal dominance of White,

middle- and upper-middle-class cultural, political, and economic norms and expectations. For students of color, such practices perpetuate deficit attitudes and approaches when teaching students who do not conform to this hegemony. The situation is exacerbated in dual immersion programs. With Spanish as the target language at Dolores Huerta Elementary School, the Latino students see their language as inferior to English. Therefore, teachers need to ensure that students of color, members of a group learning to speak English as a second language, and/or those from low socioeconomic backgrounds are empowered. One way to support student access to academic content and rigor is by ensuring that students co-construct learning through the development of meaningful and caring relationships in culturally, linguistically, and racially responsive classrooms.

The first step in creating this type of classroom is to challenge traditional teaching practices by emancipating the teachers who have been conditioned to perpetuate them. Critical pedagogy is one way to begin that emancipation. The question is: How do we support interventions that model the critical pedagogical practices so desperately needed in classrooms serving students of color and low socio-economic backgrounds. For the many teachers whose belief systems are in tune with critical pedagogy, how can we adequately support their intentions? What role does coaching play in this process? The second section of the literature review aims to provide guidance to those questions.

Coaching for Instructional Improvement

Teacher candidates are prepared by university or certification programs that require a classroom practicum under the guidance and supervision of "master teachers." Typically, the student teachers first observe the classroom dynamics and gradually take over the class and deliver instruction without the benefit of the established relationships and prior practice.

Obviously, the expectation is for them to learn the best practices from people who have experience; yet, what is not shared is the incremental steps, the trial-and-error process that led to that sense of confidence or “mastery” of the profession. As Agarwal et al. (2010) found, “Often, preservice programs present remarkable, experienced teachers as the ideal to which their students should aspire and fail to explain that such teaching does not come easily and that nearly all new educators struggle during their first years in the field” (p. 9). Therefore, once new teachers are teaching on their own, it is incumbent on the organization (i.e., school or district) to provide in-service professional development. An important yet underutilized in-service support is coaching.

Coaching is intended to improve the performance of teachers. Yet, few schools or districts have bona fide, systemic, effective coaching models. For example, at our school, coaching has been a consistent structure, but the foundation of values and processes remains somewhat unclear. The purpose of this section is to describe the most common type of teacher professional learning on-the-job, then focus on instructional coaching, and lastly focus on the principal’s role with coaches and teachers. I describe the normative features of professional development. Then I examine normative coaching models and outline effective coaching practices. Finally, I examine the principal’s role in changing teacher practice.

Normative Professional Development Model: Unknown Effects

The most common, normative structure of professional development is to gather the teachers to sit down to a lecture by an expert discharging knowledge and expertise to a congregation of educators, typically teachers and administrators, in which the expert presents a theory, a view, or a perspective without taking into account the context of the educators attending the session. The purpose of trainings of this sort is to replicate a model. The participants are expected to interpret how it applies to their specific circumstances. Hawley and

Valli (1999) argue that traditional or normative approaches to professional development are superficial and fragmented and, I would add, decontextualized. Fullan (1991) argues that this type of professional development presents the dichotomy of a big promise and a big disappointment after "thousands of workshops and conferences that led to no significant change in practice when teachers returned to their classrooms" (p. 315). Sykes (1999) presents a more balanced perspective of the impact of professional development on teacher practice and posits that it is "probably more accurate to claim that teacher professional development's impact is unknown rather than inadequate or meager, but few teachers or administrators express much confidence in it" (p. 159).

Yet, a way to make professional development more applicable to local contexts exists. Along with opportunities for meaningful and intentional reflection about their practices, teacher involvement in professional development decisions from planning to facilitation of the workshop or training are key elements that render such an initiative a more meaningful and effective lever in changing teacher practice (Bláse & Bláse, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; Gimbel et al, 2011; Showers, 1990; Sykes, 1999). The involvement of the teachers in the development of professional development creates "buy-in" from the teachers, and it exemplifies the axiom from the Community Learning Exchange that "[t]he people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25). Professional development has to be contextualized; Joyce and Showers (1988) posit that to be effectively implemented, coaching needs to be provided to guide the teacher during the coaching implementation. However, coaching needs to be contextualized to specific local needs. The following section presents some of the existing normative coaching models.

The Normative Model of Coaching: No One Best System

The literature about what instructional coaching looks like in educational settings is limited. The International Reading Association (IRA) defines instructional coaching as "a means of providing professional development for teachers in schools … that provides the additional support needed for teachers to implement various programs or practices" (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009, p. 155). Costa et al. (2014) define a coach as someone who helps "individuals take action toward their goals while simultaneously helping them to develop expertise in planning, reflecting, problem solving, and decision-making" (p. 43). Yet, according to Galluci et al. (2010):

> There is surprisingly little peer-reviewed research that (1) defines the parameters of the role, (2) describes and contextualizes the work of instructional coaching, or (3) explains how individuals learn to be coaches and are supported to refine their practice over time. (p. 920)

Nonetheless, instructional coaching is a promising approach to addressing these needs (Taylor, 2008).

Instructional coaching as we know it is a relative recent phenomenon. While the idea of teachers supporting one another or receiving coaching support from outside experts has been fostered in the research by Joyce and Showers' (1988) model. More recently, with the advent of accountability, instructional coaching either from within or outside the school, school proliferated since the 1990s standards movement and the 2002 No Child Left Behind accountability dictates. he model consists of four principal elements: (1) the theory and rationale for skill or skills are introduced; (2) these skills are modeled or demonstrated; (3) students (teachers) are provided with the opportunity to practice the skills in a protected setting of

feedback; and (4) these skills are transferred to the classroom (or any given setting) with continued coaching and gradually decreasing support. The pioneering construct of instructional coaching developed by Joyce and Showers in the 1980s consisted of a cycle of observation and feedback as the bedrocks of the process (Peyton, 2019). Arguably, the current instructional coaching models are derivatives of their foundational coaching model.

With the increasing demands on teachers since the advent of the Common Core standards and similar educational policies at the federal, state, and local levels, the demands on instructional coaches have increased as well. They are now expected not only to provide support for individual teachers but also to engage in school-wide instructional reform (Knight & Cornett, 2008). However, while coaching models and programs exist in many districts and schools, little is known about their impact.

The educational system is a multi-billion-dollar network of institutions and corporations ranging from school lunch vendors to academic assessments serving everything from K–12 school districts to colleges and universities. While much of the federal, state, and local funding mechanisms are earmarked for personnel and transportation, the educational institutions wield discretion regarding many professional development activities. As a result, providers of professional development models, including coaching, have flooded the market. The lack of research about what works has not slowed either the supply or demand (Knight, 2006). The next section explores a number of coaching models used in schools today.

Models of Coaching

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) conducted a review of the available research on coaching and in 2004 published an overview that identified four main types of coaching: technical, problem solving, reflective practice, and collegial/team building (Denton &

Hasbrouck, 2009). The report stated, “Based on our review of literature, we suggest an addition to the AIR categories of a group of coaches we designate as *reform* coaches” (pp. 151–52). Each type of coaching is defined below.

Technical Coaching Model

Technical coaching is described as the type of coaching that supports teachers in implementing curriculum or external professional development received in seminars or workshops. Technical coaching can be used in classroom organization to optimize learning. Technical coaches support an implementation model that has been tried successfully elsewhere and that teachers are to replicate. The technical coaching model rarely takes into account the local school context.

Problem-Solving Coaching Model

In problem-solving coaching, coaches work collaboratively with teachers to solve a specific problem or challenge they may be dealing with. These challenges may take the form of specific students’ lack of progress in developing a certain skill or addressing disruptive behavior that interferes with learning.

Reflective Practice Coaching Model

In the reflective practice coaching model, the role of the coach or administrator who observes the teacher is to prompt colleagues to engage in thoughtful inquiry about their teaching. One goal of reflective practice coaching is to have teachers learn to think deeply and analytically about elements of instruction the teachers designed and provided that may or may not have gone well and to apply the conclusions of such reflection toward improved instructional practices. A key characteristic of this model is that it takes place “within a cycle of pre-conferencing, observation, and post-conferencing” (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009, p. 164).

Collegial/Team Building Coaching Model

The collegial/team building coaching model envisions teachers becoming a community of learners. Although the purpose of this coaching model is similar to that of the reflective coaching model, "Team-building coaching is conducted through a professional dialogue within a group of colleagues rather than through a 1:1 process" (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009, p. 165). What this means is that the teachers engage in activities as a group, i.e., reading a book or professional literature, and determining how they are going to apply it to their practice.

Reform Coaching Model

The reform coaching model defined by Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) is based on what Neufeld and Roper (2003) call ''change coaches,'' who support the learning and practice of both teachers and principals. In this coaching type, the coach supports the learning of the teachers and their development as leaders to enable them to support one another.

Cognitive Coaching Model

Costa and Garmston's (2002) model of cognitive coaching has been influential in the coaching literature (Bennett, 2013; Galluci et al., 2010; Kehn, 2016; Shidler, 2009). Cognitive coaching facilitates teacher reflection and posits that, "thought processes and beliefs determine their instructional behavior. Changes in teacher thought processes and beliefs will lead to changes in teacher practice" (Kehn, 2016, p. 23). The coach is taught to ask probing questions to draw on teacher schema and knowledge to support the teacher to engage fully in deciding next steps for improvement.

Blended Coaching Model

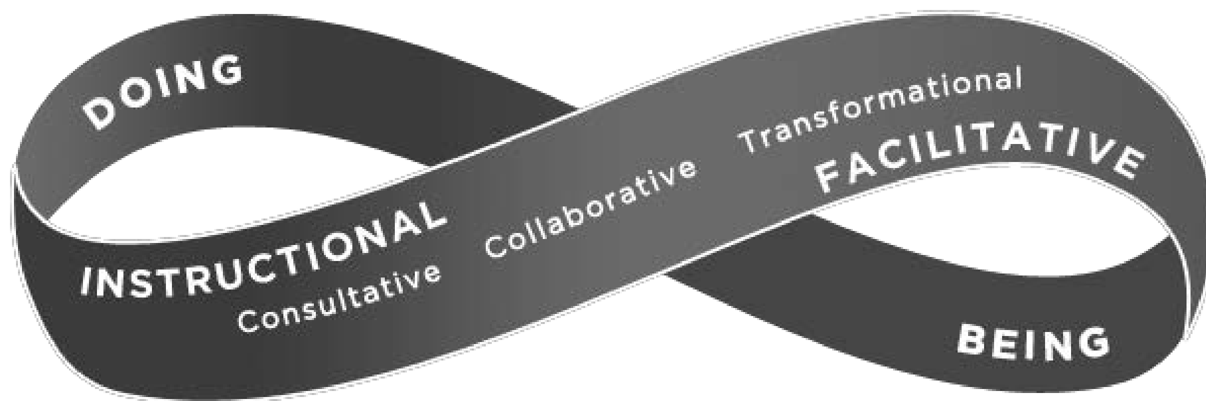
As proposed by Bloom et al. (2005), the focus of blended coaching is on coaching school principals, but its principles can be applied to any coaching situation. In their representation of

the coaching model, the authors show the transition from a more direct instructional coaching approach to being more facilitative, moving from observing and providing feedback to engaging in a reflective practice and guiding the teacher to identifying the best next steps for their practice (see Figure 3). For example, unlike cognitive coaching, which presumes teacher knowledge, in blended coaching, the coach may need to be directly informational (Glickman, 1985) because the teacher needs information about a particular strategy. At other times, the coach can be facilitative, asking questions that probe and prompt the teacher to make decisions.

Transformational Coaching Model

Crane (2012) in his transformational coaching model defines transformational coaching as "the art of assisting people enhance their effectiveness, in a way they feel helped" (p. 31). Crane (2012) states that a paradigm shift is occurring in the corporate world because the norms and rules have changed. The same shift is necessary in education given all the federal and state mandates and regulations that have been added to the list of tasks and responsibilities with which educators are now charged. To address the paradigm shift, Crane (2012) argues that "[h]igh performance is not an option. It is now a *requirement* for the survival of both individuals and organizations" (p. 18). He divides this coaching model in three phases:

- The Foundation Phase in which you create a coaching relationship (the climate where coaching occurs) and prepare for a particular coaching session;
- The Feedback Loop in which you share behaviorally based feedback and engage in dialogue to learn from the exchange; and
- The Forwarding-the-Action Phase in which you create positive momentum and a commitment for change.



Note. (Bloom et al., 2005).

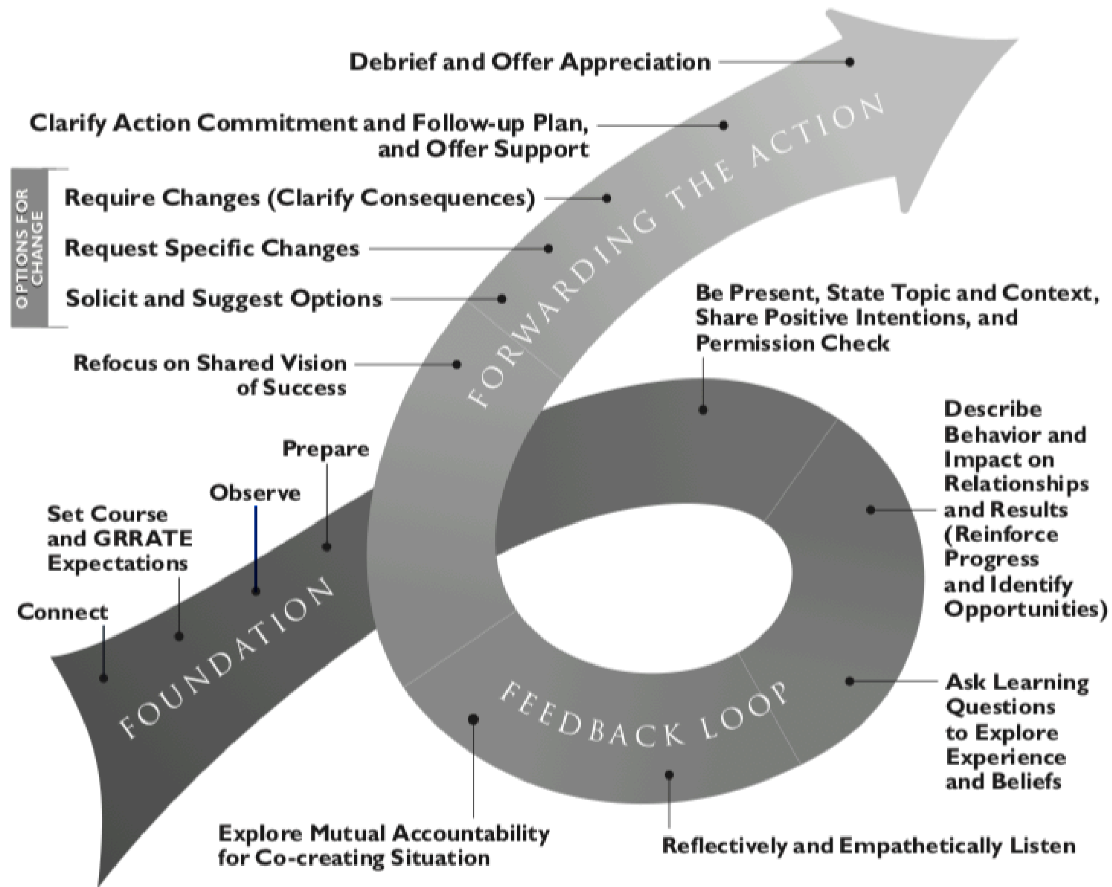
Figure 3. Blended coaching strategies.

Each of these phases contains its own elements as illustrated in Figure 4. Additionally, as part of the transformational coaching model, Crane (2012) represents his Results. Cycle with coaching at the center (see Figure 5). Based this model, coaching is intended to shift beliefs, behaviors, relationships, and results. All the elements in the cycle are interdependent and interconnected.

All coaching implicitly or explicitly aims to address the need to improve or reform teacher practice and student learning. This list of types of coach is not exhaustive, but it is foundational to the extent that current instructional coaching models have characteristics of one or more of these approaches. How does one determine the effectiveness of any coaching in improving teacher practice? What are the defining characteristics of effective coaching? The following section aims to answer these questions.

Features of Effective Coaching Practices

Instructional coaching at its most basic involves a cycle of observation, feedback, and next steps, and the cycle's purpose is to improve or reform instruction. For the iterative cycles to be meaningful, the relationship between the coach and the person being coached needs to be trusting and personal. Grubb and Tredway (2010) posit that "personal relationships are the heartbeat of reform" (p. 147). One of the most prevalent challenges in enhancing teacher capacity to change their practice is that in many cases, reform initiatives are presented to teachers without the appropriate support systems to ensure their implementation in the classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Guskey, 2000). Effective coaching based on "concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection" is required to improve the practice of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). What are the characteristics of an effective instructional coach?



Note. (Crane, 2012).

Figure 4. The Transformational Coaching Model communication process.

Note. (Crane, 2012).

Figure 5. Results Cycle: A feedback map.

Characteristics of Effective Instructional Coaches

MacCrindle and Duginske (2018) present seven qualities of an instructional coach or coaching practice: (1) building relationships; (2) student-focused; (3) data-informed; (4) questioning without judgment; (5) knowledgeable about high impact instructional practices; (6) risk-taking; and (7) aware of current best practices. Shidler (2009) provides four components of effective coaching: "(1) instructing for specific content, (2) modeling techniques and instructional practices, (3) observing teacher practices, and (4) consulting for reflection" (p. 453). An amalgamation of relationship building or relational trust, modeling, and facilitated reflection is present in literature about coaching (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Costa & Garmston, 2002; Knight, 2007; Knight & Cornett, 2008; Lord et al., 2008; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Marzano & Simms, 2013; Poglinco & Bach, 2004; Taylor, 2008).

In the context of effective instructional reforms efforts, Showers (1990) found that "providing opportunities for substantive collegial interaction (i.e. coaching) would increase the thoughtful integration required to use new knowledge, behaviors, and materials and add them to existing repertoires" (p. 36). In Showers' study, after all teachers received professional development training, half were randomly assigned to coaching follow-up training programs while the others served as the control group. She found that "the coached teachers exceeded their uncoached comparison group in implementation of the new strategies in the classroom by a dramatic margin" (Showers, 1990, p. 36). About 80% of the coached teachers transferred the new strategies to their active teaching repertoires compared with only 10% of the uncoached teachers.

Of the three elements of instructional coaching—observation, feedback, and reflection—reflection is perhaps the most important component in the coaching cycle (Mraz et al., 2009).

Effective reflection is the result of effective feedback. However, without effective reflection, there may not be next steps that can lead to a change in practice, which are crucial for the growth and development of the teacher. Galey (2016), citing Gallucci et al. (2010), states that instructional coaching has to be "embedded and situated work that includes observations of classroom teaching, demonstration of model practices, and cycles that include pre- and post-conferences with practitioners" (p. 55).

With all the elements of the instructional coaching cycle in place, how effective is the principal at changing coaching practices and teacher practices?

The Effectiveness of the Principal in Changing Teacher Practice

In the effort to reform and transform instruction, Fullan (1993) argues that we need a fundamental mind shift because progressive change cannot really happen within a conservative system. Therefore, this type of change requires

> the individual as inquirer and learner, mastery and know-how as prime strategies, the leader who expresses but also extends what is valued enabling others to do the same, team work and shared purpose which accepts both individualism and collectivism as essential to organizational learning, and the organization which is dynamically connected to its environment because that is necessary to avoid extinction as environments are always changing. (Fullan, 1993, p. viii)

In other words, changing the system is not possible by existing and operating outside of the system. Fullan (1993) argues that there is a moral imperative, "a moral purpose and change agentry at the heart of productive educational change" (p. 8). Goodlad et al. (1990) identified four moral imperatives of educational change: (1) facilitating critical enculturation; (2) providing access to knowledge; (3) building an effective teacher-student connection; and (4) practicing

good stewardship. Goodlad et al. (1990) describes this moral imperative of building effective teacher-student connection:

> The moral responsibility of educators takes on its most obvious significance where the lives of teachers and their students intersect . . . The epistemology of teaching must encompass a pedagogy that goes far beyond the *mechanics* of teaching. It must combine generalizable principles of teaching, subject-specific instruction, sensitivity to the pervasive human qualities and potentials always involved. (pp. 49–50)

Agency is personal. Yet, Fullan (1993) posits about the intersectionality of the individual and the collective, of the teacher and the student. When every educator strives to be an effective change agent and works individually to that goal, it is inevitable that there will be plenty of intersection of effort. Seeing the work through this lens, the lens of the individual working collectively in a conservative system, how can the school principal effectively support instructional change?

Principals or school leaders must create organizational structures that can actively foster learning and collaboration to address instructional challenges. DuFour (2004) and Supovitz et al. (2009) suggest that key leadership activities of principals is to create a school culture that is conducive to supporting job-embedded professional development, establishing a vision, mission, and goals; building trust and collaboration; actively supporting instruction; creating interaction among teachers around teaching and learning; and developing strong instructional advice networks. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) argue that new policies to support professional development should encourage teachers to model, coach, and assist with professional learning. McFarland (2014) found that "According to Blase and Blase (2000), many formal and informal opportunities exist for principals to provide systems, structures, and expectations for teacher collaboration that can yield positive results" (p. 39). A

positive result of the systems, structures, and expectations for teacher collaboration is presented by Lieberman et al. (2000) as cited by McFarland: “Teachers develop a sense of ownership when their expertise is sought and used in creating professional development plans, which can only work to strengthen their engagement and acceptance of changes” (p. 39). Yet, as Lieberman and colleagues note, and McFarland (2014) cites, given the isolated nature of the teaching profession, engaging teachers in collaborative practice is something that “must be taught, learned, nurtured, and supported until it replaces working privately” (p. 39).

Moss (2015) found in his research that school principals play an important role in teachers’ growth and professional development by establishing a school culture of teacher coaching. Likewise, Hallinger and Heck (1998), through an analysis of 43 studies on principal leadership, found that “the most consistent findings among the studies support the view that principals' involvement in framing, conveying and sustaining the school’s purposes and goals represents an important domain of indirect influence on school outcomes” (p. 171).

In a meta-analysis of 70 studies on principal leadership qualities, Waters et al. (2003) found a substantial connection between principal leadership and student performance. Based on their analysis, the authors developed a balanced leadership framework that outlines what effective leaders need to do as well as when, how, and why to do it. Key leadership actions include the establishing of “challenging goals and effective feedback, safe and orderly environment, [and] collegiality and professionalism” (p. 6). Waters et al. (2003) offer a note of caution: “When leaders concentrate on the wrong school and/or classroom practices or miscalculate the magnitude or "order" of the change they are attempting to implement; they can negatively impact student achievement” (p. 4). Although the links among principal leadership, teacher practices, and student achievement may be indirect, they do exist.

Chapter Summary

This literature review began with the challenges facing students of color, specifically, how Latino and Black students are subjected to traditional modes of teaching intended to serve a White, male, middle-class, traditional culture. The traditional teaching practices exist because of the historical, socio-economic, and political foundations of the country in which the cultural capital dispensed to members of the dominant group gave them the power to make the rules and define knowledge and establish norms in the space in which this knowledge takes place (Mills, 1997). At worst, the teachers who espouse traditional teaching practices want to replace the cultural attributes of students who do not meet the dominant culture's characteristics. At best, they ignore culture and color through a perhaps well-intentioned posture of "color-blindness" or simply because of ignorance about how to incorporate students' backgrounds and experiences into their teaching. Either way, this teaching simply replicates the dominant culture and further subjugates students of color.

No child enters the education system without experience, without perspective, without knowledge, without culture, without an identity. However, in many instances, once they enter the school system, the abilities and assets they possess are erased because they may not conform to the hegemonic attributes of the system, and they find themselves treated as if they are deficient with teachers who operate from that lens. Latino students enter the system already possessing an intricately interwoven link between their language and their culture and a sense of identity (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999) that is compromised, if not surrendered. The surrender happens because the system is a conservative system (Fullan, 1993). The hegemonic influence of English permeates every aspect of daily schooling. The Spanish language and by extension Latino culture and identity assume a different positionality. Despite the existing

paradigm of intrinsic traditional values and practices, the promise of progressive and effective teaching practices rooted in culturally, linguistically, and racially responsive pedagogies and embedded in caring relationships persists. These two frames are intertwined so intimately that there can be no true responsive pedagogies without the existence of caring relationships and vice versa. Duncan-Andrade (2009) argues that effective teaching depends most heavily on one thing: deep and caring relationships. The alignment of what Valenzuela (1999) calls the *Politics of Caring* and its convergence with *Critical Pedagogy* form the perfect amalgamation for the creation of effective and relational learning environments. Changing teacher practice from traditional to critical requires meaningful and sustained investment in teachers' growth and development. This type of teacher investment honors the very people we want to develop (Guajardo et al., 2016).

The second section of the literature review makes the case for how to change traditional teaching practices by reviewing the available research on the coaching models that are present in our classrooms now. Although teachers are trained by university or certification programs to prepare for teaching, the learning can't stop when they receive their certificate. Ongoing coaching and support are essential. Even in the absence of a consensus on the definition of coaching, there are key elements that emerge: teachers helping one another improve their practice through cycles of professional development, observation, feedback, reflection, and next steps. Key in supporting teachers in changing their practice is the principal in his role as the school leader. In the effort to reform and transform instruction, Fullan (1993) argues that we need a fundamental mind shift because progressive change can't really happen within a conservative system. The principal's role is to ensure that the change happens in an environment

that involves teachers in the process for changing their own practice leading to ownership of the instructional change.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXT/SETTING

Gran Vista Elementary School is a Spanish-immersion school in Puerta de Oro Unified School District, a large urban school district in California. The school has served various neighborhoods since the early 1800s and is now located in the Sierra Park neighborhood. The current building, constructed in 1977 at San Junipero Avenue and Radiant Street, originally served mostly White students. It gradually grew more diverse in the 70s and 80s and became a full Spanish immersion school in the early 2000s. Its Latino population increased while its Black and White population decreased. For the last few years, the demographics have remained relatively constant.

The school's average of teacher experience is 10 years. Teachers longevity is varied: one instructional coach has been teaching for 33 years while two other teachers are in their first year, and three are in their second year. The new teachers are learning not only their craft but also how to teach in Spanish given that the mission of the school is to prepare fully bilingual students through its dual immersion program.

The chapter begins with my own story as a language learner. Then, in describing the macro political climate of bilingual education in the United States, I address the meso context by briefly discussing the history of bilingual education in the state of California. These larger contexts had an impact on the micro context and the history of bilingual education in Puerta de Oro Unified School District. I introduce the co-practitioner research team and how my role as a practitioner researcher and principal influenced this study.

My Story as a Language Learner

I was named principal of Pleasant View Elementary in 2014, 30 years after arriving in the United States as an English learner. As a freshman in high school, I was relegated to a side desk

for the last 2 months of the school year and answered questions using a Spanish-English dictionary. I was not eligible for the English as a Second Language (ESL) class because I was classified as Non-English Proficient (NEP). In my sophomore year, I was moved to a room in the back of the classroom along with some freshmen kids, and I was surprised that we were in the same group because I thought they spoke English well. I concluded that their English skills were not good enough to join the ESL class.

Eventually, I was granted access to the ESL class, taught by a Puerto Rican teacher, Mr. Noa, who instilled in me the desire to leave his class as soon as possible. Later that school year, when I told my friends that I was going to move to regular English, they tried to discourage me: "Why would you want to do that? It is so much easier to be in the support class. You get an easy A!" They were right, but I did not want easy. I wanted meaningful, academic training. I told them, "Well, if I don't make it, I can always come back." I never did.

Moving to a regular English class was not easy. With a Spanish-English dictionary in one hand, I tried to make sense of the *Grapes of Wrath*, that epic saga that spoke to me of the tragedy of having to leave your old life behind and seek out a better one. Through persistence, I was able to get into a class called Accelerated English where Shakespeare and Sartre made an impact on my life in more than one way.

As a high school and middle school teacher, some students reminded me of my experiences—struggling to make academic sense of what was before them. Questions gnawed at me: How and why does this happen? How do I help them catch up in 9 months and make up for the lack of progress of so many years? As an elementary school principal, I see this phenomenon from a different vantage point. Our school is a Spanish immersion school with a Latino student majority. Yet, even in Spanish class, our Latino kids are outperformed by their White

counterparts. Though the context has changed from secondary to elementary, the questions remain the same: How and why is this happening? Am I now in a position to arrest this development? How can my experiences as a second language learner help my teachers teach and our students learn?

In participatory action research, the context is the crucible of the research; therefore, the political context, the persons engaged in the study, and my role are all critical factors. To contextualize the school (micro context) in the macro and political history of bilingual education as well as the realities of our district, I introduce the six members of the co-practitioner researcher groups and characterize my role in the study.

Macro Political Environment: Bilingual Education in the United States

In the United States, bilingual education has been a feature in schools since the 1700s; instruction in German, French, Norwegian, Italian, Polish, Czech, Cherokee, and Spanish was common. However, at a certain point, Congress prohibited Native Americans from being taught in their own language (Kim & Winter, 2017), and the ebb and flow of immigration resulted in the federal government implementing policies that support and reject bilingualism. Simultaneously, the government pressured everyone to speak English (Labaree, 2008).

Nevertheless, the need for bilingual education as a support for students learning English is necessary, and federal laws during the last half of the 20th century supported that. In 1968, Congress enacted the first federal law on bilingual education. The Bilingual Education Act mandated that public schools provide students with "limited English-speaking ability" an equal education alongside their fluent peers. It undermined English-only laws in some states (Kim & Winter, 2017). However, the federal action did not guarantee fidelity in its implementation nor provide necessary funding. In 1989, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Teresa P. v.

Berkeley Unified School District that no federal law, including the Bilingual Education Act, mandated that schools offer bilingual programs (Kim & Winter, 2017). In California, the story has not been much different.

California and Bilingual Education

When California became a state in 1850, Spanish was the language of instruction. In a landmark decision, Lau v. Nichols (1974), the U.S. Supreme Court found the San Francisco Unified School District failed in addressing the needs of students who spoke Chinese, deeming the outcome discriminatory (Rothman, 2016). In response to this decision, the state legislature passed the Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976 declaring that bilingual education was a right of English learners. This law expired in 1987, and in 1998 California voters approved a sweeping ballot measure outlawing bilingual education throughout the state (Smith, 2017). Although some districts found ways to maintain, and in some cases enhance, bilingual education programs, most did not. As a result, language minority students were left to sink or swim. Twenty years later in 2016, the state legislature passed the Multilingual Education for a 21st Century Economy Act restoring bilingual education (Kim & Winter, 2017).

Puerta de Oro Unified School District

In 1998, after California voters approved Proposition 227 banning bilingual education, Puerta de Oro Unified School District "grappled with the new law by changing the names of its programs—from 'bilingual' to 'biliterate' or 'dual-language immersion'—and requiring parents to sign waivers for children to enter them" (Smith, 2017, p. 3). Currently, the Puerta de Oro Unified School District offers six pathways: dual language, biliteracy, secondary dual language, newcomer, world language, and English plus. The first school to offer the Spanish immersion

program was Sierra Linda Elementary over more than a quarter of a century ago. Today, 22 elementary schools offer instruction in Spanish in at least one of the pathways.

Gran Vista Elementary School Spanish Immersion Program: Perception v. Reality

A commonly held perception is that Gran Vista Elementary School has a long waiting list for enrollment. In fact, for the last 5 years, our waiting list is no different than other schools. Another perception is that the school instructional strengths. In fact, many of our teachers hold traditional habits of teaching and learning, caused by two factors: (1) some teaching practices do not support what we know about best practices for bilingualism; and (2) teacher turnover is exacerbated by the reduction of bilingual people entering the credential program at local universities. As a result, while teachers may hold beliefs about teaching that are consistent with supporting best practices in bilingual education, new teachers gravitate toward learning from their more experienced colleagues and may not always use best practices.

The student population of Gran Vista Elementary comprises two distinct classes: the working class/low-income Latino community and the more affluent White community. Typically, our efforts at bringing the two communities together meant the Latino community cooked and the White community paid for the ingredients to make the food. This dynamic led to a resentment in the Latino community that has yet to heal completely. Now our [school?] community has further diversified, and families approach educational expectations differently as well: White parents seem more interested in more art, science, and technology, and Latino parents want their children reclassified as fully English proficient.

At the local level, the high demand for bilingual programs has brought tensions to the surface between populations and questions about equitably addressing the needs of the students who have been historically underserved. It is paramount that the teachers working with students

understand that past practices have not adequately met the needs of their students. To address the question of teacher practices and academic outcomes, particularly of the Latino students, we have multiple assets and some challenges. I named some of these in the fishbone of Chapter 1 and briefly introduce the persons involved in the PAR project and study.

Assets and Challenges

We have staff committed to adopting and implementing new teaching practices. First, I introduce people, including all teachers and our diverse study body, as well as the coaches and teachers in the co-practitioner research (CPR) group. The teachers and their coaches provided their students with a learning experience representative of critical pedagogy practices, replacing the traditional teacher-centered practices and incorporating students in their own learning. Then I discuss relevant resource and district support assets (see Figure 6). Finally, I address a limited, but significant number of challenges.

People

Our greatest asset is the CPR group's diverse teaching experience. The range runs the gamut of age, experience (from first-year teachers to 18-year veterans), and ethnicity (White, mixed, Latinx). All of this enriches our team's potential. What makes this CPR even more exciting is the diverse levels of facilitation. Our lead coach, the Instructional Reform Facilitator, has been teaching for 33 years and though this is only his second year as an instructional coach at the school, he brings with him a strong commitment and a resolve to build teacher capacity grounded in best practices. To ensure the effective facilitation, we meet regularly to calibrate and maintain the focus of the work.

Our professional development used to fluctuate among different content areas, creating a lack of continuity and a sense of disconnect among our teachers. Establishing a central focus at

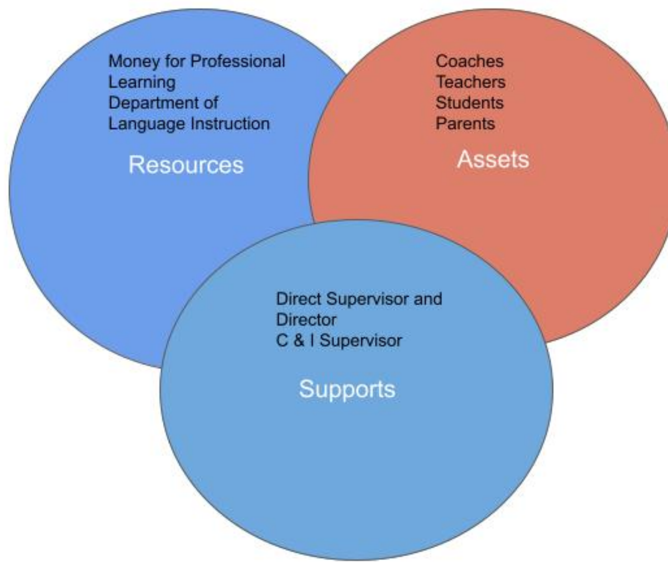


Figure 6. Circles of Equity: Assets, supports, and resources.

the end of last year made professional development consistent. Every first Tuesday of the month, we facilitate the professional development sessions followed by facilitated grade-level collaboration. In additional, individual coaching sessions can expand on the grade- level collaboration GLC meetings or address something of importance to the individual teachers.

The diversity of the students provides an opportunity to learn from one another and their perspectives. The parents' involvement as volunteers in the classrooms has enabled the teachers to expose the students to art projects that are emblematic of other cultures and traditions. The parent teacher association financed the hiring of a library aide, which has allowed our librarian to teach all students weekly. Parents have provided the school with financial resources for other educational initiatives.

In addition to a strong set of teachers and a diverse study population, three coaches also joined the CPR group:

- Robert Henry, the Instructional Reform Facilitator, a White, male teacher with more than 30 years' experience, supports instructional initiatives of the school as determined by the principal. He is in his second year as an instructional coach. He brings a commitment to rigorous instruction and the conviction that every student can learn.
- Alex Salvatore, the Social Emotional Learning Coach, is an 18-year veteran kindergarten and pre-K teacher in her third year as a coach. She is committed to supporting the socio-emotional aspect of the students and wanted to be part of the change. She has supported teachers making more explicit connections between social and emotional and academic learning.

- Violeta Cardenas is the literacy coach with 15 years of teaching experience. She feels very strongly about the need for developing an identity, which marked her life as she was discovering herself as a learner and later as an educator.

The three classroom teachers in the CPR group were:

- Gloria Ramirez started her teaching career at Gran Vista Elementary 7 years ago and teaches third grade. She has a strong commitment to creating a positive learning environment in her classroom and consistently builds strong relationships with the students and their families.
- Isabel Montano is a kindergarten teacher in her second year who comes from a teacher preparation program that emphasizes social justice teaching. She has demonstrated a gift in the manner she delivers instruction and supports her students academically and socio-emotionally.
- Alejandra Perez is a second-year teacher in third grade. Together with Isabel, Alejandra possesses a keen awareness of traditional teaching practices and the need for disrupting them. She has a strong belief in the link between a sense of community and learning and builds their classroom community daily.

Collectively, the coaches have close to 60 years of teaching experience, and one of them has been at Gran Vista Elementary for 20 years providing an invaluable institutional perspective.

Resources

Money is always the scarcest resource of choice. We are not a rich school and have to be strategic in the allocations of our limited funds. To support the professional development of the teachers, I allocate enough funds every year to provide substitutes so that teachers can observe others.

We also allocate funds to enable teachers to participate in extended learning opportunities offered in the district. The department charged with providing a coherent approach to bilingual education implementation hosts the most meaningful existing professional development. We harnessed these resources during this project to enhance the goal of supporting teacher development and providing learning experiences that addressed the needs of the students who have been historically underserved.

Supports

The decision to engage in this project and learn about how to better support our teachers and students would not have been possible without the support of my direct supervisor and the director of the cohort. A key factor in my decision was their continuing being my supervisors. Their support provided stability in the process. Both of them have worked in different positions in Puerta de Oro Unified and offer an important institutional perspective.

The supervisor charged with supporting our school's immersion program was a site administrator at a school with a bilingual strand. Through our collaboration, we have piloted an instructional program that uses original texts written by native Spanish-speaking authors. The language is more authentic, and the stories truly representative of cultures and traditions that could help the Latinx students feel represented.

Challenges

A major challenge is the achievement gap between students of color and our White students. Though this is a general concern in the school district, it is particularly worrisome at our school because our students of color are mostly Latinos and have the advantage of already speaking and understanding Spanish, the language of instruction, when they come to the school.

Nonetheless, they are outperformed by their White counterparts. In addition, African American students are not performing at grade level.

Yet, I feel that the key question is not why the students are not producing at the same level, but why the teachers are not teaching at a higher level. The most prevalent practices at Gran Vista Elementary were those described by Paulo Freire (2011) in his seminal work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; the banking system of education permeates many classrooms, and our aim was to create a different way to coach teachers so that they change their practices.

My Role

When I was in second grade in Mexico, I once stood around my teacher's desk with other kids, waiting to show our teacher the work we had done and eager to get the perfect score of 10 we so desperately sought. My teacher lifted her head from whatever she was reading and asked me to fetch her a spiral notebook. I went to the bookcase behind her and looked and looked for that spiral notebook. The truth is, I had no idea what "spiral" meant, so my search was futile. I scurried back to my desk and pretended to be looking for something in my cubicle. The teacher looked in my direction again asked for her spiral notebook. "I thought Julio was getting it for you," I said. "*Olvídalo*," she said ("Forget it"), and reached back and grabbed it herself. I concluded that the spring on the spine of the notebook was the spiral. At that moment, I decided I was going to be a teacher because I wanted to be as smart as she.

I began my teacher career working with students who had been failed by the system. Each of them provided me with wisdom about relationships. We created an ecology of newly imagined possibilities (Gutiérrez, 2011). Several years later, I went from teaching high school to middle school. The community was mainly Latino and Black kids. We had no built-in collaboration time for teachers in the middle school, so I appealed to the principal to create time

and space for us to meet. She agreed as long as I used the resources available, namely the physical education teacher. She challenged me to convince the PE teacher to take all three classes (sixth, seventh, and eighth grade) once a week and alternate between math and English so we could have the time to collaborate. Because I had developed a mutually supportive relationship with Coach Sinor, he agreed immediately. That was my "first" leadership move at the school, and though important in building relationships with other colleagues and establishing credibility, I had had other opportunities for meaningful leadership before (see Figure 7). The drive behind creating collaboration structures was to align our teacher practice and create coherence and continuity in our implementation of the standards.

I have always believed that my role in creating the collaboration structure led to my selection as a peer coach. The following year, I applied to the Principal Leadership Institute. During the program, I was asked to be a district English Language Development (ELD) coach, which allowed me to polish my skills in working at the elementary level. I was at the central office for only one year. Feeling that I needed to be at a site to effect a more direct change, I applied at the end of that year to become an administrator in POUSD. I found myself somewhere I never imagined—in the principal's chair.

As a principal at Gran Vista Elementary, I am facing a divide that goes beyond the language or racial lines for the first time. It is a class divide. There are clearly demarcated differences: racial, ethnic, and class. I have moved methodically and strategically to begin shifting the way we teach our kids. I know our students of color are not sharing the outcomes of the white students, and I need to work through a political minefield in the Puerta de Oro Unified School District.

I know there are other factors that impact teaching and learning, and I wonder if this

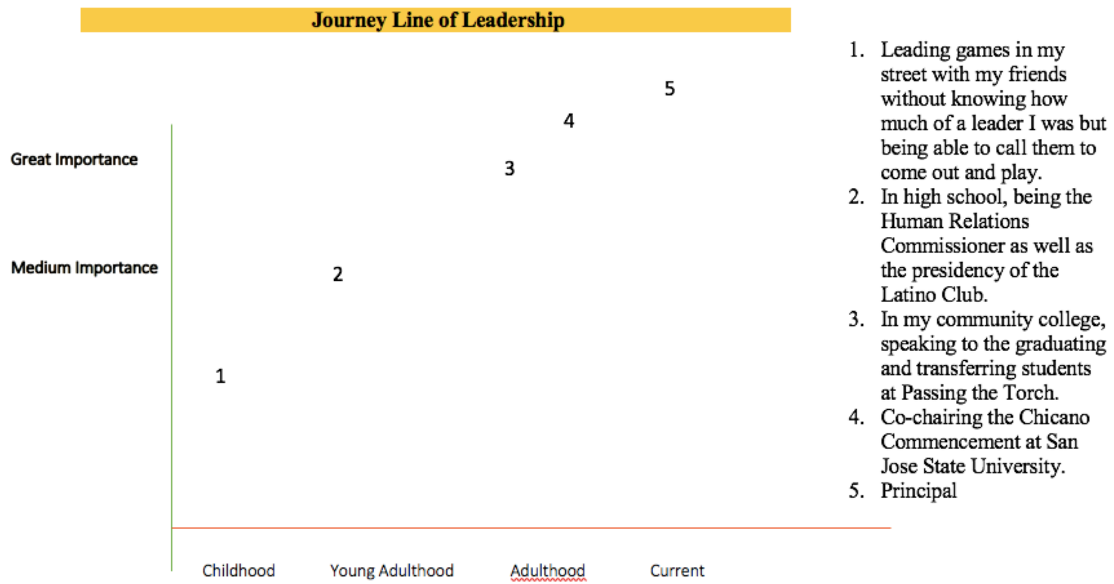


Figure 7. Journey Line of Leadership.

work could be the launch pad to deepen our awareness of implicit/unconscious bias and its impact on our instruction and to begin the work of addressing it.

At the outset of the PAR project and study, several questions emerged: How will I work with the CPR? Will I be able to hold on to what I know and believe is important for this work? How will I be a patient, collaborative leader? When I speak about my role as principal, how will I relate to them and they to me as their supervisor? My work with them was different now as a co-researcher, and I knew that it had to be based on mutual trust and my willingness to be vulnerable. The goal was to collaboratively seek answers to the questions that would help us identify the best way to implement the actions that arise from the answers. As is clear as we moved to the third cycle of inquiry, we could only shift teacher practice by relying on the stories and beliefs that brought us to the work in the first place.

Chapter Summary

Gran Vista Elementary provided the appropriate context for the participatory action research (PAR) project and study. We had the great challenge of addressing the achievement gap of students, but we had important assets in our people and our collective teaching experience. As we used those assets (coaches) to support changing the practices of our other group of assets (teachers), we learned to fortify ourselves with a moral imperative to serve underserved students. In the next chapter, I describe the research design of the project.

CHAPTER 4: ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN

Latino and Black students' academic outcomes are far below those of their White and Asian counterparts as measured by standardized assessments. In response, teachers too often pathologize the students and put the onus on them for their shortcomings. In many instances, students who need the highest quality instruction have teachers who are new to the profession or who use teacher-centered practices and are never challenged to change their routines. Yet, many teachers enter the profession with beliefs about social justice that they do not know how to enact. In our case, many teachers at Gran Vista Elementary are from immigrant, bilingual families and believe in authentic caring for students (Valenzuela, 1999). Unfortunately, being new to the profession, they do not know how to enact their beliefs.

Stagnant teacher practice—what Ladson-Billings (2014) calls "classroom death"— leads to our students dying academically as well. The teachers at Gran Vista Elementary and I are, in large part, products of the normative and traditional learning institutions that were designed for a White, middle-class population (Nasir et al., 2016). Even armed with beliefs about critical pedagogy and social justice teaching, we may teach as we were taught, replicating the grammar of school (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). For students of color, teacher quality is fundamental to their academic success.

I prepared a participatory action research project (PAR) to build teachers' capacity and ability, utilize their professional dispositions to change their practices, and help them see the connection of their practices to Latino and Black student achievement. Three coaches, three teachers, and I formed a co-practitioner researcher (CPR) team and co-investigated how to address teacher learning and classroom practices. The theory of action for this project was rooted in two philosophical approaches to teaching: critical pedagogy (Freire, 2011) and the community

learning exchange axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016). In Freire, we examined two aspects of his approach to learning: abandoning the banking method of education to replace it with dialogical and problem-posing education. In the CLE axioms, we premised our work on the belief that the people closest to the work are best situated to make decisions that benefit the local community. Our theory of action to effect change comprised the following elements:

- If our coaching structure utilizes critical pedagogy tenets as its framework, then teachers will change their teaching practices.
- If teachers practice the tenets of critical pedagogy in adult learning spaces, they will enhance their learning and be more consistent in transferring practices to classrooms.
- If the teachers change their teaching practice utilizing critical pedagogy tenets, then students will co-create knowledge with the teachers.

In addition, we recognized the importance of relational trust as a foundation for all learning (Bryk et al., 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Grubb, 2009). We understood that adult learning needed to parallel student learning so that teachers experienced first what we expected them to practice in classrooms (Mehta & Fine, 2015).

Participatory action research uses qualitative research methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Herr & Anderson, 2015). I extended the action research model to include activist research methodology because social transformation was a vital component of our work to address inequities in instruction and outcomes (hunter et al., 2013). I present the overarching research question and the sub-research questions and describe the criteria for choosing the study participants. In delineating the components of each of three cycles of inquiry, I describe how and to what extent Community Learning Exchange Axioms are embedded in the work of the Co-Practitioner Research group. Then, I discuss the different data collection and analysis methods.

Additionally, I describe the role of reflection in this PAR. Finally, I discuss the limitations, confidentiality, and ethical considerations for the study itself and provide a summary of the chapter.

Research Design: Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The research I embarked on is activist and participatory in nature because we worked directly with a group of individuals in Gran Vista Elementary to improve our teaching and learning with the intent of contributing to the professional development of our teachers (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Hale (2017) says that research can be described as activist when (1) "it helps us better understand root causes"; (2) is accomplished with an "organized group of people who are subject to the conditions"; and (3) is used "to formulate strategies for transforming the conditions" (p. 14). As a co-researcher in the process, I availed myself of established collaborative relationships with the other co-researchers in what Herr and Anderson (2015) term "insider collaboration." The research questions and the sub-research questions that drove the data collection and the selection of the co-participants were formulated with these activist methodologies in mind.

Research Questions

In the participatory action research project, we aimed to answer the following overarching question: How does critical pedagogy inform and support teachers to change classroom practices and improve student learning? As part of this overarching inquiry, the sub-research questions aimed to address the core of the challenges we face in meeting the needs of the Latino and Black students at Gran Vista Elementary. We collected and analyzed data to address these sub-questions:

1. To what extent do coaches and teachers frame and structure professional learning for

teachers by using critical pedagogy?

2. To what extent do teachers modify their practices to incorporate the critical pedagogy in classrooms practices and in collaboration with other teachers?
3. How does leading this PAR project process inform and transform my leadership practice?

Participants

The co-participant researcher (CPR) group in the PAR study consisted of three coaches and three teachers; the coaches are experienced teachers and collectively have more than 60 years of combined teaching experience. One of the coaches has taught at Gran Vista Elementary for 20 years. One of the teachers is considered a teacher leader and is a member of the instructional leadership team (ILT); the two other teachers are new to the profession. The teacher leader and member of the ILT is emblematic of teaching practices that consider the students partners in their learning. The two novice teachers represent the aspiration and hope of the teaching profession. Both of them hold strong beliefs about disrupting inequities that are detrimental to the growth and development of our historically underserved students.

Having a teacher leader and others who are new to the profession provided a representative cross-section of our faculty. In addition, the participation of instructional coaches who hold institutional knowledge provided a perspective of continuity. In recruiting the novice and well-experienced educators, I adhered to the community learning exchange (CLE) axiom that *the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns* (Guajardo et al., 2016). We conducted three iterative cycles of inquiry.

Cycles of Inquiry

In each of the three cycles of inquiry, (see Table 3) we utilized improvement science

inquiry methods, specifically the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycles (Bryk et al., 2015).

PAR Pre-Cycle: Fall 2019

The co-practitioners and I were familiar with our manner of working together; however, in our Pre-Cycle, we established ourselves as a learning community through a circle, a pedagogy of reflection (Guajardo et al., 2016). In this circle members exchanged knowledge and developed an understanding of our collective assets for creating meaningful and sustainable educational change as it pertains to our Latino and Black students. Prior to the study, co-participants signed informed consent forms indicating their voluntary agreement to participate in the research project.

During the Pre-Cycle, we participated in a community learning exchange in which we shared our espoused beliefs and identified the existing assets at our school. The coaches and I held weekly meetings and consulted with the program advisors to operationalize the implementation of the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interaction and problem-posing education. The coaches and I determined the partnerships for the coaching sessions and the approach for framing the sessions with critical pedagogy. We considered how to incorporate our activities as a CPR group with the work in the school to make the work more relevant for the participants and eliminate the perception of it as a burdensome, additional task. We used the CLE axioms to guide the work: "learning and leadership are dynamic social processes"; and (2) "conversations are critical and central pedagogies" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 4). Conversations as critical and central pedagogies were an essential component of our critical pedagogy framework for one of the tenets was dialogic interactions.

PAR Cycle One: Spring 2020

At the start of PAR Cycle One, we held a community learning exchange and

Table 3

Participatory Action Research Cycles of Inquiry

Activities	Key Personnel	Evidence
PAR Pre-Cycle Fall 2019		
• Established critical pedagogy framework • Facilitated Community Learning Exchange • Determined assets and challenges • Collected data on values and beliefs • Observed grade-level collaboration meetings • Analyzed processes with coaches • Reflected on progress and evolution as an educator and administrator • Coded and analyzed data	CPR Group Lead researcher	
PAR Cycle One Spring 2020		
• Facilitated Community Learning Exchange • Observed coaching sessions and grade-level collaboration meetings • Collected data on coaching and collaboration practices • Analyzed processes with coaches • Reflected on progress and evolution as an educator and administrator • Consulted with program advisors • Coded and analyzed data	CPR Group Lead researcher	
PAR Cycle Two Fall 2020		
• Facilitated a Community Learning Exchange • Collected data on coaching and collaboration practices • Participants reflected on implementation of critical pedagogy and next steps • Analyzed processes with coaches • Reflected on progress and evolution as an educator and administrator • Consulted with program advisors • Coded and analyzed data	CPR Group Lead researcher	

operationalized the application of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education. With the plan in place, competing approaches to proceeding emerged from the instructional coaches, and I felt compelled to heed Fullan's (1993) lesson: "The more complex the change, the less you can force it" (p. 21). I did not want to impose change. In the midst of aligning the different approaches, we uncovered interpersonal dynamics in different grade levels that impeded meaningful and productive collaboration among the adults. The COVID-19 pandemic was an additional challenge. For a few weeks, during the transition from brick and mortar to online teaching and learning, we made addressing the socio-emotional needs of the school community our priority. The challenges that emerged disrupted our work, and we had to address a different type of need for the teachers.

PAR Cycle Two: Fall 2020

The final cycle in the fall took place using distance learning. We made changes to the how we implemented the critical pedagogy tenets. We shifted grade-level composition and grade-level collaboration structures, expanding from one specific grade level to a grade level span. During PAR Cycle Two, the participants reflected on the implementation of critical pedagogy tenets and their roles in dismantling the banking system of education teaching practices. Teachers and coaches reflected on their evolution and growth as educators during these three cycles. I reflected as well on the data I collected as they informed my own evolution as an educator and administrator. Finally, I explored the implications of the participatory action research.

Data Collection

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "The data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study; collecting information through unstructured or semi-structured

observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials; as well as establishing the protocol for recording information" (p. 185). The co-practitioner researchers and I used a variety of qualitative methods for collecting data throughout the PAR cycles as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Guajardo et al. (2016). Data included artifacts from CLEs (circles, journey lines), observations, reflective memos, and digital audiovisual materials (see Table 4). For example, "The journey line is designed to help participants tell their stories. Stories are a moving force for change" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 94). These processes helped us establish ourselves as a community of learners, find commonality in the work we do, and explore teacher identities by sharing our motivations for our being educators.

Observations of meetings, coaching sessions, and classrooms were the most prevalent data collection tool in the PAR project. Coaches worked with teachers using critical pedagogy tenets as the framework and facilitated grade-level collaboration meetings spanning several grades. I observed and participated in the grade-level collaboration meetings and documented the process. I observed teachers in their online classrooms as they grappled with how to dismantle the banking system of education at our school as well as teaching in a virtual setting. The process of observation was iterative in the different cycles of inquiry given that each informed the next one and provided data that helped us adapt and respond to the needs of our teachers. The observations allowed me to see the progress in the development of the teachers and coaches and my own.

I wrote reflective memos throughout the entire process to capture my actions and reactions as well as my learning journey. The memos provided additional context and explanation for the different activities and processes we engaged in and the challenges that surfaced and offered a source for triangulating the evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Table 4

Research Questions and Data Collection

Research Question (sub-questions)	Data Source (Metrics)	Triangulated With
How does critical pedagogy inform and support teachers to change classroom practices and improve student learning?	Observations Artifacts Audio/Video Recordings Reflections	Reflective Memos
1. To what extent do coaches and teachers frame and structure professional learning for teachers by using critical pedagogy?	Observations Artifacts Audio/Video Recordings Reflections	Reflective Memos
2. To what extent do teachers modify their practices to incorporate critical pedagogy in classrooms practices and in collaboration with other teachers?	Observations Artifacts Audio/Video Recordings Reflections	Reflective Memos
3. How does leading this PAR project process inform and transform my leadership practice?	Observations Artifacts Audio/Video Recordings Reflections	Reflective Memos

An additional method of data collection was video and audio recording of coaching sessions and coaches meetings. Conversations are fluid, and we shared thoughts and perspectives that I wanted to record for analysis and reflection. Capturing these conversations in video and/or audio provided for a more complete understanding of the perspectives shared by participants and allowed for a more accurate transcription and coding of the data.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), data analysis involves simultaneous procedures. For example, while one observation or interview is planned or taking place, I was analyzing another observation or interview (or another form of data). In this way, in participatory action research, we have iterative evidence to make a diagnosis and design next steps (Spillane, 2013). As I winnowed the data, I was able to narrow the focus to the most relevant and coded the data to identify patterns and themes (Saldaña, 2016). Qualitative data analysis is "a process that requires sequential steps to be followed, from the specific to the general, and involve[s] multiple levels of analysis" (p. 193). To determine codes, I used what Saldaña (2016) refers to as first cycle coding methods, "processes that happen during the initial coding of data" (p. 68), and axial coding, which "extends the analytic work from initial coding" into categories (p. 244). Table 2 illustrates the link between the research and sub-research questions, the data source, and how the data were triangulated.

Role of Reflection/Praxis

A key component of PAR was reflection, or *praxis*, which is defined by Freire (2011) as action and reflection. Throughout the three cycles, we were engaged in praxis; its major manifestation occurred during Cycle One when we reflected about the challenges that emerged. During that process, we could then collectively determine what was impeding the

implementation of the critical pedagogy tenets as originally intended. We were then able to act on the findings by changing the approach and the structures. In consistent ways, *praxis*—our ability to reflect on our principles of social justice to then act on our critical pedagogy beliefs—was a driver in the project.

Each of the inquiry cycles was both an extension and an expansion of the first reflection as well as an opportunity for progressing and advancing from the baseline set of beliefs and the steps in the process of changing teaching practices to meet the academic needs of our Latino and Black students. Each cycle was itself a mirror of practice; like an actor or a singer or any human being getting ready to face something, looking at oneself in the mirror injects the observer with the valor required to face fears or anxieties. This mirror was our reflection. The reflection was our mirror.

Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality of participants and the security of data are important considerations in this study. Therefore, I provided each of the participants as well as the school and district with pseudonyms to protect their privacy. I made sure that all documents, materials, and other types of data are stored securely in a locked file cabinet in my office. I also considered the ethical aspect relevant to this project.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state:

> Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied (p. 8).

As the principal of the school, I was fully aware of my positional authority and needed to maintain that awareness throughout the project to ensure that any potential bias of mine was kept in check and that there were sufficient safeguards for the participants to withdraw if they so desired.

I knew that I had some researcher bias; I believed that our students of color were not being sufficiently challenged because the teachers did not hold high expectations of them and relied too often on teacher-directed practices. However, I relied on CPR groups members to provide checks to ensure that this bias did not inject itself in a manner that could derail the study. The special, honest, and open relationship I have with two of the coaches helped me maintain a perspective of growth and progress even when the obstacles appeared. They challenged and pushed back on some of my ideas, especially when those ideas had not been developed fully.

Study Limitations

There were inherent limitations in the study due to the qualitative nature of the data collection methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, within the framework of ethical considerations, my positionality could have influenced the way in which the other participants engaged in the study. Therefore, it was essential that we established participation norms and that I provided sufficient safeguards for the participants so they could freely express their opinions and perspectives throughout the process.

Another potential limitation was what Lincoln and Guba (1985) term *trustworthiness*, by which they mean credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Our study aimed to study teacher practice and how coaching using critical pedagogy tenets as the framework shaped practice to improve Latino and Black student academic outcomes. An additional consideration is validity of the study. Because this is activist research, the standard of validity

was the usefulness to the participants, to the persons closest to the work, who were enacting their espoused values of social justice. We responded to Hale's (2017) essential question about validating results: "Has the research produced knowledge that helps to resolve the problem, to guide some transformation, which formed part of the research objective from the start? Is the knowledge useful?" (p. 17). While the results may not be generalizable even to contexts similar to ours, the process of participatory action research can be scaled, using the adaptation model of scaling (Morel et al., 2019).

Chapter Summary

I used participatory action research as a methodology using qualitative research methods because that action research extended by activist research was most useful for investigating a local school issue that involved inequities for Latino and Black students. In delineating the overarching and sub-research questions, I concentrated on activities and evidence that would iteratively inform our cycles of inquiry so we could, as Hale (2017) says, get to the root cause of why our students were not achieving and why teachers who professed to believe in social justice and critical pedagogy were not fully enacting it in classrooms and in adult learning spaces. As we proceeded, relying on the improvement science, the Community Learning Exchange axioms, and the tenets of dialogic education, we as a CPR group were fully embedded in the work. That ability to use evidence to make decisions about how to proceed is the bread and butter of participatory action and activist research. As we implemented the cycles of inquiry, we discovered unexpected challenges and, by PAR Cycle Three, were able to see a stronger way forward. I discuss the emerging categories and analysis from Action Research Pre-Cycle in Chapter 5; the themes and analysis from Action Research Cycle One in Chapter 6; the findings

and analysis from Action Research Cycle Two in Chapter 7; and a discussion of findings, recommendations, and implications in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5: PAR PRE-CYCLE

In Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, persons in the immediate context worked together to address the challenges to successful outcomes (Guajardo et al., 2016; hunter et al. 2013). The setting for the PAR is a Spanish-language immersion urban elementary school. I worked with three coaches and three teachers to examine how coaching, framed by critical pedagogy tenets, induced changes in teaching practices (Freire, 2011). We aimed to improve teacher practice in the areas of equitable access and deepen academic rigor for Latinx and Black students through supporting coaches to work with teachers in these two areas of instruction. Specifically, we hoped to change teacher-directed practices that too often utilized the "banking" method of instruction (Freire, 2011), relegating students to the role of passive learners, empty vessels to be filled by their teachers. We were especially concerned that English language learners, who comprise 48% of our school, did not equitably participate in academic discourse in class and had inadequate opportunities to increase their language skills, both of which are fundamental to student success (Darling-Hammond, 12010; Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Haberman, 1991; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2007, 2009, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999).

The chapter covers a short cycle of inquiry that took place in the fall of 2019, termed a PAR pre-cycle. During the pre-cycle, I collected preliminary data, coded and analyzed the data, determined emerging categories, and decided on the implications for the next cycle. While the pre-cycle set the stage for deeper work in PAR Cycle One, I was able to establish emerging categories on the analysis of evidence from activities that took place during the pre-cycle.

PAR Pre-Cycle One Process

During the pre-cycle process, I felt compelled to be transparent and share the rationale for

the project with the school community. I establish the connection between the PAR and the district braver norms introduced by the school district in July 2019 and discuss the principles that guided the pre-cycle work. Then, I detail the activities we carried out, describe the challenges we encountered, and share the initial coding of the available data as well as the categories that emerged in the pre-cycle.

During the discussions about the need for transparency in the school community, I was learning about the process of participatory action research and was not quite sure of myself or the process. Thus, as the principal, I did not immediately provide a rationale to the school community for why I was engaging in the research project. I began the doctoral program in the summer of 2018, and I was reluctant to share anything with the school community because I was concerned that the staff might view that I was doing a research project, instead of working for schoolwide improvement. However, I needed to involve others in the project. Therefore, in the August 2019 preservice day for the faculty, I shared with them my observations and reflections regarding the experience of our students, particularly our Latinx and Black students, and what we hoped to do during the next school year. I said that I had been inspired to implement a different approach to meeting student needs through critical pedagogy.

Guiding the Pre-Cycle Work

Two elements guided the pre-cycle and the creation of a co-practitioner research group: (1) connection to district principles and (2) Community Learning Exchange axioms. The district unveiled a new set of guidelines— keeping liberation for the oppressed at the center; being part of the solution, towards liberation; being present and comfortable in discomfort— called "braver norms" at the Administrators' Institute in July 2019. The braver norms were consistent with the PAR and with Freire's (2011) call for liberatory education with centrality of community voices

as essential to any endeavor. The week after I shared the project with the faculty, I met with the three instructional coaches to begin the conversation of the alignment of the braver norms with critical pedagogy. I shared Chapters 2 and 3 of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to refamiliarize them with the Freirean framework, and we discussed these chapters at subsequent meetings**.**

Secondly, I formalized the co-practitioner research (CPR) group, which included three teachers, three coaches, and myself as the school principal. We used the required braver norms from the district and from the CLE axioms to ground our collaboration. Since part of the pre-cycle involved understanding who we are as persons, educators, and agents of change, we established ourselves as a learning community through a circle, a pedagogy of reflection (Guajardo et al., 2016). In the circle, we exchanged knowledge and experiences and developed an understanding of our collective assets for creating meaningful and sustainable educational change for Latino and Black students. The CPR group worked to embody the first two of the Community Learning Exchange axioms: “Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes” and “Conversations are critical and central pedagogies” (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 4). Learning and leadership as dynamic social processes require transparency and vulnerability, both critical elements for developing trust in relationships. What started as a personal project aimed at finding a way to support teacher practice became a collective endeavor. The collective journey began with a conversation at the start of the school year, which in turn led to more conversations that informed the steps we took. The two axioms, learning and leadership as dynamic processes, and conversations as critical and central pedagogies became part of the iterative process of our learning through activities in the pre-cycle.

Activities in the Pre-Cycle

The pre-cycle comprised four key activities: (1) critical conversations; (2) reflective

memo-ing; (3) applications of theory to classroom practices; and (4) a community learning exchange with the CPR group. I documented and coded the activities in the pre-cycle and began to understand and appreciate the coding of qualitative evidence as iterative guidance for improvement. I describe each of these activities and the evidence that resulted (see Table 5).

Critical Conversations: Critical Pedagogy in Context

The coaches and I had discussions to better understand critical pedagogy in our context. For years, the coaches and I had observed teaching practices that replicated the roles of the teacher as the provider of all knowledge and the students as passive recipients waiting to be filled, and we had struggled to find an approach to change that dynamic. While each of us individually understood critical pedagogy to be a guide, we had to find a tangible way to apply it to our context. To establish the connection between critical pedagogy and practical teaching practices, we needed to contextualize our understandings of critical pedagogy. Freire (1970) conceptualized critical pedagogy as "a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed" (p. 48).

The key element is co-construction of knowledge and ensuring that learning is a dynamic process in which the teacher becomes the student, and the student becomes the teacher. Further expounding on the idea of *with*, not *for*, Freire (1970) posits "dialoguing with the people about their actions" as a requirement for the praxis, that is, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). Freire (1970) explained that in an oppressive world, the oppressed "must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle" (p. 51).

Therefore,

> We had to acquire a critical awareness of oppression through our work to apply critical pedagogy at our school. The work required the CPR team developing "their power to

Table 5

Fall 2019: Pre-Cycle Activities

Date	Activity	Purpose
August 13	In-service Day One for Teachers	Be transparent about the work I am doing and why
August 16	Initial Coaching Meeting (three coaches and principal)	Share the tenets of Critical Pedagogy as the framework for the PAR by the CPR Group. This was more an introduction to the challenge that the banking system of education poses to our students and how dialogic interactions and problem-posing education can change the learning experience of our students.
August 24	Memo #1	Establish a plan of action, addressing hopes and fears
September 29	Memo #2	Reflect on issues of equity in my school community and how to use my core values to address these issues
October 13	Memo #3	Explore the intricacies of being both a practitioner and researcher in my community
October 22	Coaching Meeting with Lynda	Develop a common understanding among the coaching staff of what it means to have Dialogic Interactions and problem-posing education with the teachers
October 27	Memo #4	Reflect on the language of praxis, the action of doing, and the existence or lack of quality assurance measures
November 3	Memo #5	Reflect on my capacity as a leader within my school
November 12	Meeting with Coaching Team	Align our understanding of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education in our own realms
December 9	CLE: The Power of Place	Bring the CPR group together to discover the power of place

perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 83). We had to make dialogic interactions and problem posing education more practical and meaningful, a more actionable enacting of our espoused values (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Critical Conversations: Tethering Critical Pedagogy to Our Work

Contextualizing critical pedagogy required tethering it to our daily work. During the pre-cycle, Lynda Tredway, a doctoral advisor, met with the instructional coaches and me to help us anchor our work in critical pedagogy as the moral compass and enact critical pedagogy as classroom practice. Violeta, the literacy coach, shared her experience as a new teacher working with migrant students when "teachers were passionate about the work" (V. Cardenas, meeting notes, October 22, 2019). We established a common understanding of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education to help teachers translate their values to practice. A key question emerged in our coaches meeting: "What are the discourse moves to see in the classrooms through the lenses of literacy, math, and social-emotional learning that represent the reality of dialogic learning?" (L. Tredway, meeting notes, October 22, 2019). For example, dialogic learning had to be more than the rote and ubiquitous "turn and talk." We needed better processes that fully engaged students in meaningful talk. If we wanted to have meaningful dialogic interactions in the classrooms, then "stronger use of questioning [was] a preamble to dialogic interactions" (L. Tredway, meeting notes, October 22, 2019). The meeting set the stage for a more robust meeting with the coaches in November in which we aimed to answer the question: What do dialogic interactions and problem-posing education look like in the classrooms at Gran Vista Elementary?

Critical Conversations: Coaching Perspectives

To apply our conceptual and contextual understanding of critical pedagogy to the daily work of coaching teachers, we needed to develop a common vision of its application**.** In a meeting with the coaching team on November 12, 2019, we explored the meaning of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education as understood and practiced by the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) coach, the math coach, and the literacy coach. We discussed the difference between dialogue and one-directional conversations and the importance of that difference. One-directional conversations represent the traditional exchange of the teacher dispensing knowledge and the student receiving it. We discussed learning environments and their influence on what we do and how we do it, including the difference between aesthetic caring and authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999). Aesthetic caring, for example, includes providing directions for tasks and waiting for the students to show what they know, but authentic caring considers the lived experiences of students as they progress through the learning process in a culture of trust. Alex, the SEL Coach, asked: "Are we creating professional learning spaces in which people feel safe taking risks . . . like, really create a trusting safe space in which people can show authentically and share? What are the conditions that we need to do that?" (A. Salvatore, meeting notes, November 12, 2019). The conversation was a crucial point that kept us focused on how to create learning environments for the teachers to disrupt the status quo and empower them to change classroom practices. The question before us was key: How can we change our coaching practices so that teachers feel safe to take risks to change teaching practices? I engaged the CPR team in a community learning exchange to better understand our school context.

Reflective Memoing

Memo-ing was a valuable process for reflecting on the work. I coded five memos (see Table 4) from the pre-cycle. Memo #4 captured the challenge of balancing school, work, and life, and how work demands encroached on the focus of the PAR. During the coaching meetings, as part of the commitment we made to keeping student learning at the center of our work, we began every session with a question: How are the children? We would provide an update on the work we had done that aligned with our focus on student learning and then proceed with the instructional plan. The anchoring question of "how are the children" was always used except when it was not. (L. Rodriguez, reflective memo, October 27, 2019). However, we remained student focused.

Community Learning Exchange

During our first community learning exchange (CLE) (see Figure 8), the CPR group members identified the assets of our school and considered how to use these assets to implement critical pedagogical practices in our classrooms. We identified physical spaces in the school that represented the best of Gran Vista Elementary and analyzed how the different places were connected and how each of them was an asset. Each CPR member selected one picture that illustrated a school asset and captioned that picture. The CPR members' comments connecting the elements they showed reflected a sense of identity and pride in the school. The selected pictures spoke of a sense of community, a connection to this place and its people, and a sense of belonging. The members of the CPR group found in the pictures a common joy in learning and comfort in being who we are. The pictures transmitted a shared sense of trust in relationships and safety both inside and outside the classrooms.

Figure 8. CPR group members at Community Learning Exchange.

We followed this activity with a debrief in which we discussed the process for deciding on the pictures they selected and how they arrived at the captions of the pictures. We addressed what they learned in this activity, including how the power of place is critical to our work and how we might transfer that knowledge to the coaching sessions and the classrooms. How, we asked, in our own roles as coaches and teachers, could we utilize the power of belonging and connection to effect change in teaching and learning?

Coding Process

My analysis of the data collected from the activities during the pre-cycle, yielded baseline evidence of our understanding of critical pedagogy, its tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education, and the ways it might be implemented at our school. I started the research process by coding five memos; four of the memos were prepared at various moments during the semester and involved my reflections about this project. A fifth memo was specifically about the November 12 meeting with the coaching team, part of the CPR group, to co-construct the definition for dialogic interactions and problem-posing education as they apply to our different realms and responsibilities and to examine how to implement them at our school. The activities in conjunction with the Power of Place CLE, the pictures and captioning, and the debrief provided a solid base of codes.

From the initial analysis of the data from the CLE, I could observe what the CPR group saw as important about our school and what we could derive from the strong feelings they had about school pride. Our school, as interpreted by our CPR group, provided the space for multiple student and teacher actions and behaviors, their interactions and what those interactions demonstrated. The analysis of the codes revealed that students trusted their teachers, and that the

trust was developed through vulnerability, authenticity and consistency in a way that allowed the participants to feel authentically seen and heard. The coding process revealed key and foundational needs that should direct future actions:

- co-construction of authentic relationships through a kind of dialogue that elicits the thinking of the student through the teacher's effective questioning and the thinking of the teacher through the coach's questions;
- the importance of co-constructing the spaces where trust is built as a culture founded in authentic caring and relationships;
- the vital through-line between students and teachers and coaches and leadership, and vice versa; and
- addressing existing tensions between students and the school system where student passivity and obedience are seen by some teachers as model behaviors.

Participants' dialogue emerged as an important relational building block in the co-construction of meaning in the learning spaces (see Table 6).

My engaging in the collection of data required vulnerability from me and transparency with my school community. I presented myself as a learner and trusted my school community to understand how my role as a doctoral student intersected with my role as principal. Working with the coaches enabled us to coalesce around a common process to accomplish the work. The teachers provided feedback about our coaching and instructional work from their perspectives. We collectively established a baseline of knowledge and experience to serve as parameters for the implementation of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education at Gran Vista Elementary.

Table 6

PAR Pre-Cycle Codes and Frequency

Emerging Category	Codes	Frequency
Belonging	Pride in School	8
	Power of Place	8
	Commonality	4
	Feeling of Unity	2
	Reciprocity	1
	Community of Learners	1
	Space to Think as a Team	1
	Authentic Caring	2
	Authentically Vulnerable	1
	Trust in Relationships	9
	Care and Empathy	1
	Safe Environment for Risk Taking	6
	Feeling Connected	10
	Feeling Comfortable	9
	Showing up/Being Present	7
Learning Conditions	Power Through Dialogue	5
	Feeling Safe in Community	5
	Sense of Comfort (Students and Adults)	3
	Infused with Respect for Self and Others	1
	Authentically Vulnerable	5
	Space to Think as a Team	1
	Authentic Space for Feedback	1
	Safe Environment for Risk Taking	9
	Being Reflective	9
	Consistency (Showing up/Being Present)	7
	Trust in Relationships	9

Belonging and Learning Conditions: Place and Space

Based on an analysis of the evidence from the pre-cycle, I describe two emerging categories from the initial data collection and analysis: belonging and learning conditions. We understood *belonging* as feeling connected, feeling comfortable, having trust in relationships, a sense of pride in the school, and the power derived from a place. The emergent category of *necessary elements for learning* encompasses safe environment for risk taking, t being reflective, rust in relationships, and consistency.

Belonging

As an emergent category, *belonging* is informed by several codes that convey Valenzuela's (1999) concept of authentic caring, which is caring based on trust, safety, and connections. I describe the codes that constitute the category of belonging: feeling connected/feeling comfortable, trust in relationships, a sense of pride in the school, and the power derived from a place.

Feeling Connected and Comfortable

The feelings of connection and comfort emerged from what the CPR group members observed in the interactions between teachers and students and among students. Combined, the two codes appear 19 times and reflect teachers' demonstrations that they "authentically and openly and caringly" see and hear the students (A. Salvatore, meeting notes, November 12, 2019. Connectedness and comfort in the learning environment allow the teachers and the students to take risks and alternate between the expected roles of the teacher imparting knowledge and the student receiving it and explore the possibilities of the student "being the student-teacher and the teacher letting go of the power in class" (A. Perez, CLE, December 9, 2019). The connectedness and comfort felt in the learning environment echoes what Duncan-Andrade (2009) discusses as

Socratic hope, the type of hope that "requires both teachers and students to painfully examine [their] lives and actions within an unjust society and to share the sensibility that pain may pave the path to justice" (p. 188). He argues further that students do not want to hear a sermon; they want to see examples of what is possible. The feelings of connectedness and comfort at Gran Vista are a manifestation of the sermon seen, not just heard. They are the expression of the authentic, humanizing care (Freire, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999) that is crucial to an empowering learning environment.

Trust in Relationships

Trust is an abstract resource in a school that is co-created; it cannot be bought and is only possible when all individuals invest themselves in its co-creation (Grubb, 2009). Trust in relationships showed up nine times in the category, and the teachers and coaches describe trust as critical to their work with each other. Teachers and students at Gran Vista experience an iterative trust in their classrooms. The dialogic exchanges and verbal and non-verbal interactions between students and teachers create "a classroom culture of trust that is facilitated and brought together by the teacher" (R. Henry, meeting notes, November 12, 2019). The co-creation of trust that Grubb (2009) discusses has to become ingrained in all the participants. As part of the analysis of an artifact during the community learning exchange, one teacher described how D, a student with severe behavioral challenges, received one-on-one academic support from a colleague, another member of the CPR group: "It is apparent that that student trusts the teacher and is willing to take risks with her" (G. Ramirez, CLE, December 9, 2019). D had been manifesting difficult behaviors since the beginning of the school year. Her response to the intervention was often unpredictable, yet she always allowed an opening for adults to help out. Although the teacher was creating a general culture of trust in the classroom, the teacher was more intentionally

focused on strengthening that trust with D. The trust in the relationship between the teacher and the student took time. Understanding the difficult learning dynamics in the classroom, the socio-emotional learning coach remarked: “Through human connections, that is how you build trust; that is how you build relationships” (A. Salvatore, CLE, December 9, 2019). Human connections are the bricks in the building of trust, and consistent, authentic, daily interactions are the cement.

Pride in School/Power of Place

Merriam-Webster defines *pride* as “delight or elation arising from some act, possession, or relationship” and power as “ability to act or produce an effect.” The two definitions are interconnected and inform the emergent category of belonging. The codes *pride in school* and the *power of place* had 16 instances in the data set. However, pride in school emerged as a code initially as something that was missing in the teaching practice. Violeta, the literacy coach, shared that she observed pride absent in the classrooms. Pride in the classrooms was more evident in her initial experience as a teacher (V. Cardenas, meeting notes, October 20, 2019). In the analysis of artifacts during one of two community learning exchanges, the CPR group could identify evidence of collective pride in large and small ways. For example, as a school, we participated in a civic protest against the caging of children at the US/Mexico. We witnessed an outpouring of school pride at this event that lingered during the year.

Pride was present in smaller, more personal ways. J, a student who had struggled with behaviors that impeded his full participation in class activities and many times chose to separate himself from the whole group, one day decided that “he wanted to read a book by himself with high frequency words” (V. Cardenas, CLE, December 9, 2019). The act of J reading created elation in the student and the coach as well.

Teachers demonstrated pride, especially the teachers working with students with significant behavioral challenges. During coaching sessions after acknowledging the difficulty of the task of teaching, the teachers spoke with pride of the mini successes they had had with students. Though the collective pride of a special unifying event is important, the personal, daily acts of the students and the teachers are more sustainable. Pride is a source of unity (as member of a community), identity (as a reader), and commitment (teacher-student). The sense of pride in the school transcends the walls of the classroom. Pride in the school can transform into power, the power of place.

Every place holds meaning and its own power. In December 2019, the CPR group participated in the first Community Learning Exchange (CLE). We identified spaces in the school that captured the power of place from the perspective of the CPR members. Two examples of the power of our school were clear: a place of people and a place of language.

The fact that we, as a school engage in activism suggests an activist school community with students and teachers ready to take to the streets to protest the caging of immigrant children at the U.S. border (L. Rodriguez, Personal Correspondence, September 16, 2019). The power of our school as a place included a committed people connected by a sense of community based on an identity forged in the image of an activist. The power of a place emanates from the people who inhabit it. “The power of place is connection” (A. Salvatore, CLE, December 2019).

Belonging, by which we mean developing a close or intimate relationship with a community, does not happen automatically. It is an iterative process built on the daily, trusting interactions of the members in the community. The interactions that take place must be driven by a sense of connection and comfort among the members of said community. The sense of connection and comfort are themselves elements of the pride and power of the school.

The sense of belonging at Gran Vista Elementary is sustained by the continuous and explicit actions and interactions between and among the different members of the school community. Gran Vista Elementary provides an explicit sense of identity for the teachers that motivates them to create communities that trust and help strengthen the resilience of students like J and D who, though they struggled through challenges, persisted and took risks to achieve their goals and proudly shared their accomplishments with others. Students like J and D would have had a more difficult time if they had not felt like they belonged to such community.

Learning Conditions

For students to be successful, they need learning conditions that are conducive to positive outcomes. First, I discuss the need for a safe environment for risk-taking. Secondly, I describe how trust in relationships related to learning, the role that reflection plays in the overall learning experience, and the importance of consistency of teacher actions in the learning space.

Safe Environment for Risk-Taking

Typically, human growth and development require an environment safe enough for taking risks. As the students enter a new environment, they encounter a new person who guides them as they learn in a new grade level and space. A teacher's actions determine if the student lets go of the objects they hold on to for safety—namely, the perceived apathy or disinterest in all things academic. An environment that is safe for students to feel comfortable takings risks is an environment built on trust, a mutual trust between teacher and students, an environment where the teacher shows up "authentically and openly and caringly to actually hear and listen" (A. Salvatore, meeting notes November 12, 2019). In a safe environment, students can take risks because teachers demonstrate empathy toward the students and do not "relegate them to the

lower end of their education possibilities" (R. Henry, meeting notes, November 12, 2019). The key elements for risk-taking are authentic interactions and consistency.

Students respond to authentic interactions between adults and students. J shared his reading challenges, and D reflected and shared why she climbed on the tables and attempted to jump from one to the other because the teacher had taken the time to build the trust between the two of them. Through authentic interactions between the teacher and the student, where the student was included as an agent in the process, the teachers were able to establish a sense of trust and safety in the classroom.

Another example speaks to how to teachers learn about a student, so they develop an authentic relationship that is caring and consistent. E. was a student in third grade with severe behavioral challenges and an Individualized Educational Plan, or IEP. Having transferred from a different school, our school presented several "firsts" for him. His teacher, Grecia, a member of the CPR group, with the rest of her third-grade team, developed a set of interview questions to help them learn about their students. The questionnaire provided Grecia with the opportunity to learn how to better serve E's needs without singling him out. Establishing a learning environment safe for risk-taking is no place for the "*pobrecito* syndrome"—or pitying children and justifying low expectations for them. Despite the challenges E had faced, Grecia established a relationship with him that enabled her to identify strategies that allowed E to participate more, be part of his learning, and make his learning more meaningful. "What I found from E is that he can express himself through sketches really well. Therefore, we created really visual graphic organizers together" (G. Ramirez, personal correspondence, October 2020). E's challenges were ever present, yet the teacher remained consistent in her approach. The safe environment for risk-

taking does not happen in a vacuum; it is built consistently through the actions and interactions between teachers and students.

Trust in Relationships

A crucial building block of an environment that is safe for risk-taking is trust in relationships. In a school that values critical pedagogy, and with trust in place, students assume the responsibility of becoming the teachers, and the teachers relinquish that role and become the learners, a co-constructed learning experience for both the students and the teachers (Freire, 2011). When a student displays challenging behaviors, the student must be able “to trust [her] teacher and [be] willing to take risks with her” (G. Garcia, CLE December 2019).

The trust necessary to creating a learning environment conducive to growth and development has to be co-created in the daily interactions between teachers and students. Isabel, the first-year kindergarten teacher who worked with D, a student in her class with behavioral challenges who would as easily hit a student or climb on tables and jump from one to the next, understood that “It takes a lot from the adult and the child to build that [trust] because it needs to be consistent; it doesn’t just happen” (I. Montano, CLE December 9, 2019).

At the most basic level, E became the agent of his own learning by trusting his teacher enough to share what worked for him and where he struggled academically. Gloria is a teacher who has made social-emotional learning a key component of her academic teaching. Therefore, when Gloria asked her students to share information through an interview document (see Appendix C) that would give her an insight into understanding them better, the trust was already in place. Her actions to personalize their learning also humanized it (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Freire, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). In the absence of such trust, “students

are not only reduced to the level of objects, they may be diverted from learning the skills necessary for mastering their academic and social environment (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 62).

One key aspect of critical pedagogy is the co-construction of a new paradigm with teachers-as-students-as-teachers. Such co-construction of the new paradigm cannot happen without the trust in the relationships. Students trust when teachers have demonstrated that they can be trusted. The trust in the relationship is built by consistent approaches to building it.

Being Reflective

Duncan-Andrade and Morell (2008) describe critical praxis as involving “continued action for social justice [and] continued reflection on the actions necessary to deal effectively with the problems that have been identified” (p. 13). Argyris and Schön (1978) identify reflection as the difference between “single-loop” and “double-loop” learning. Being reflective appeared as a code in *learning conditions.* Without being reflective, I risked “falling into a type of complacency that is detrimental to the learning of our students” (L. Rodriguez, reflective memo, September 2019). Reflection can be intentional and explicit, with a specific goal or idea to reflect about as in the case of critical praxis. In other instances, reflection is an ongoing, consistent habit. I engaged in both.

In the first community learning exchange at Gran Vista Elementary, the CPR group members were asked to share their thoughts about the process. Isabel, the kindergarten teacher, stated: “It was very reflective for me to think about why was it that I didn’t pick the other pictures that did have students in them” (I. Montano, meeting notes, December 9, 2019). Though the pictures she took did not have any students in them, during the activity, she reflected about what that meant.

Self-reflection is key to our understanding of why we do certain things in certain spaces. As an element of learning conditions, self-reflection needs to be-explicit and constant. "[Self-reflection] is thinking and being aware, being reflective, and being aware of the impact, our own impact" (A. Perez, CLE, December 9, 2019). In helping D reflect about why her actions were unsafe, the teacher modeled reflection as a learning condition. What leads to the development of reflection as habit is our ability to understand the principle of interdependency—in short, that both pain and healing are transferable from person to person inside the classroom (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Although some students may not understand interdependency conceptually, they do understand it experientially through the consistent presence of their teacher.

Consistency

Merriam-Webster define consistency as "harmony of conduct or practice in profession." Grecia showed consistency in her belief in the children's abilities and potential to improve. Grecia learned from another teacher of an incident that involved three of her students while in their separate ELD class. She met and spoke with them about the incident: "We discussed it privately and came up with a plan to make it right with Isaac" (G. Ramirez, personal correspondence, November 1, 2020). The students were expected to uphold certain behaviors regardless of the place. Grecia showed consistency in her belief in her students' abilities and potential to correct mistakes.

Consistency in teacher actions and approach to educating the students demonstrate to the students the teachers' commitment to their growth and development. During the first CLE in December, Isabel, the kindergarten teacher, referred to one of the artifacts: a picture of her working one on one with D. Isabel shared that two minutes before the picture of them working was taken, D was having a really hard time in the classroom. Isabel stated, "I think of how can I

be present and consistent and show up for whom I need to show up and to show up for myself too [because] this can be very draining to always be present but not to be present for yourself. . . I think about consistency" (I. Montano, CLE December 2019). Delpit (2012) states that as the "teacher expresses a belief in a child's ability to do better, that is a message that many children are eager to hear, regardless of the medium" (p. 81).

The interconnectedness of belonging and learning conditions is evident in the codes that appear in each of the categories. Feeling connected, feeling comfortable, creating trust in relationships, inspiring a sense of pride in the school, and understanding the power derived from a place create a sense of belonging. Learning conditions are enhanced by having a safe environment for risk taking, developing trust in relationships, being reflective, and consistency. The two categories are interconnected but important to distinguish the nuances of how they are different. Having explored the emergent categories, what are the implications for the future work?

Implications

In describing how the emerging categories intersect with the focus of practice and the research questions, I explain how the assets and challenges identified in the fishbone surfaced in the process and presented new questions. After discussing the implications for my leadership as presented in the sub-research questions, I relate the implications as they relate to the next cycle.

Implications for the PAR Focus of Practice and Research Questions

The focus of practice and overarching research question for the project are based on a new coaching structure that is framed by the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education as a process for changing teacher practice. The coaches and teachers had different levels of knowledge about the instructional approach and the theoretical

foundations of the approach. Thus, the instructional coaches and I needed to honor the learning space and attend to how we consistently humanize the spaces and our relationships. Critical pedagogy after all is a humanizing pedagogy, and Alex, the social emotional learning coach, posited the need to tether critical pedagogy to the "the dignity of adult learners." She further asked, "How do we notice the teachers? How do we humanize our work?" (A. Salvatore, meeting notes, October 22, 2019).

In response to the patterns of teachers and coaches going through the motions during grade level collaboration meetings, I had questions because we were not paying attention to instruction, and the meetings were too technical. Teachers would arrive at the expected time, sit down, follow an agenda, fill in the template, and depart instead of engaging in questioning, listening, committing to trying a different approach, and discussing the successes or challenges of the approach. Therefore, the coaches and I needed a deeper understanding of the teachers as learners. The coaches needed to identify the source of the mechanical approach of the teachers' approach to their collaboration in grade level meetings and shift their practices as facilitators and coaches.

Improving teacher practice is the driver of the research project, and the existing data indicate a nascent connection between the two. In the following section, I describe how the emerging categories of belonging and learning conditions intersect with the focus of practice and the research questions.

Discovering the Intersection of Belonging and Learning Conditions

The three coaches and I, utilizing a collaborative coaching framework based on critical pedagogy, supported teachers to improve teaching practices that improved equitable and rigorous learning by Latino and Black students. The data informed our theory of action: If we use a

collaborative coaching framework based on critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education to change teachers' practice, then teachers will improve teaching practices that will lead to equitable and rigorous learning by Latino and Black students. As described in the emerging categories section, sense of belonging and learning conditions interact and provide the foundation of teaching environments in which authentic care and trust in relationships are reciprocal between teachers and students.

Trust in relationships, pride, comfort, connectedness, power of place, safe space for risk-taking, consistency, and self-reflection were key elements that led to *belonging* and *learning conditions* as emerging categories. These are the "ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges" that Freire (2011) describes as generative themes (p. 101). These generative ideas could transform the existing reality of the educational experience of the Latino and Black students at Gran Vista Elementary.

The original research question broached how using critical pedagogy tenets as an innovative approach to coaching teachers would change their teaching practice. Freire (2011) states: "Authentic education is not carried on by 'A' *for* 'B' or by 'A' *about* 'B,' but rather by 'A' *with* 'B' (p. 93). Collaborating with the teachers and the coaches, I am understanding that the coaching structure adhered more closely to the axiom that "the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 25).

The tenet of a co-constructed learning environment for adults emerged early on in the project. Through dialogue, the coaches and I began to wonder if we were creating the safe learning spaces for adults to take risks.

Using the Assets and Addressing the Challenges

The assets and challenges identified at the micro level in the fishbone are present in the PAR. One asset identified in the fishbone is the youth and dedication of our staff. Two of the CPR members were in the 1st year of teaching, and the third teacher member was in her 6th year when the project started. Their youth and early experience in the profession provide an opportunity to co-construct a culture of collaboration and teaching practices that support the students to reach their fullest potential. The coaches are assets because of their openness to changing the learning experience of the Latino and Black students at Gran Vista Elementary.

The same attributes that make the teachers assets are challenges. New teachers need to meet administrative requirements to obtain their unconditional teaching credentials. The additional paperwork and meetings with induction coaches increased the responsibilities and expectations. Similarly, the work to understand and support teacher development has to be done through dialogue between principal and coaches and between coaches and teachers. "Conversations are critical and central pedagogical practices" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 24). Developing and sustaining effective teaching practices require the conversations to be constant and consistent, and time for the kind of conversations necessary to improve practice is always scarce.

Implications for Leadership

The co-construction of authentic learning spaces utilizing the existing assets to address the challenges has leadership implications for me. These included the need for a steady flexibility, continuous reflection, and consistency.

What Does Steady Flexibility Mean for Leadership?

Leading an organization requires that we remain steady on the expected outcome and allow for flexibility in the process. Considering that the collaborative coaching framework proposed for the PAR project is based on two tenets of critical pedagogy—dialogic interactions and problem-posing education—we constructed a practical application of the two tenets that could be observed in the classroom. Simultaneously, acknowledging that critical pedagogy may not be a familiar approach and that their implementation might require a shift in perspective and practice, Alex, the socio-emotional learning coach, asked: "Are we creating professional learning spaces in which people feel safe taking risks?" (A. Salvatore, meeting notes, November 12, 2019). Her question helped me realize that our approach would require flexibility on my part to allow for the incremental changes and the potential resistance to implementing the changes. Improving teacher practice required flexibility from me while maintaining a steady focus on our goal.

Continuous Reflection

My leadership and professional capacities cannot improve unless I am able to continuously reflect on the actions taken toward the implementation of any initiative and to make adjustments based on an evaluation of what worked and did not work, modeling the double-loop learning offered by Argyris and Schön (1978). The question Alex posed made sense. However, before I arrived at this realization, I felt that my leadership growth in relation to the PAR was in crisis. I was feeling that "informing, learning, and building my capacity as a leader within my school" was not happening. Thoughtful reflection indicated that my sense of failure was connected to "wanting to go from forming my CPR group to changing teacher practice at Gran Vista Elementary in three cycles" (L. Rodriguez, reflective memo, November 3, 2019). Constant

reflection helped me acquire a different perspective. Changing teacher practice was the destination, and the journey required the steps of creating awareness and keeping that awareness alive consistently.

Consistency

Merriam-Webster defines consistency as "harmony of conduct or practice." Just as Isabel, the kindergarten teacher, made reference to the need for consistency in her approach to working with her students, my consistency in the implementation of the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interaction and problem-posing at Gran Vista was an essential element of the paradigm shift. Isabel reminded me of the need for consistency and for staying the course while remaining flexible as a leader to ensure that we remained focused on the work of changing teacher practice while attending to the other responsibilities of running of a school. In terms of my own leadership, I value and appreciate having flexibility. I must look at the change we aim for as the destination and the processes of constant reflection and consistency of actions as the journey.

Implications for PAR Cycle One

In the pre-cycle, we generated evidence that illustrates two emerging categories: belonging and learning conditions as necessary prerequisites for change. With the full CPR group now in place, I felt confident that I could drive the work in the school while remaining inclusive of other points of view. However, I needed to continue to explore the elements we needed to create the space for the coaches to immerse themselves in the ideas and promises of critical pedagogy. I needed to ensure that, within the collaborative coaching structure, I worked with them to continue co-constructing the implementation of dialogic interactions and problem posing; in other words, we needed to make our theory match our practices and be tangible and

actionable. Equally important, we needed to work on improving the coaching structures to co-create with the teachers learning spaces that are safe for them to take professional risks and be vulnerable in their growth and development.

CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE ONE

In the participatory action research (PAR) project, the Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) team and I aimed to implement a common goal and vision school-wide and then study how they could support teacher practice. We based the coaching structure on two tenets of critical pedagogy: dialogic interactions and problem posing. We used these tenets in our conversations with teachers and with each other in our coaching meetings and continued to observe how teachers used the tenets to frame instructional practices. We discovered in this cycle of inquiry that the missing puzzle piece was not in the individual coaching sessions or in classroom practices; rather, teachers failed to use these tenets with each other in their weekly grade-level collaboration meetings.

We had hypothesized that by using the Freire (2011) tenets to humanize learning, the teachers would become more active agents of their learning and that they would then practice those tenets with their elementary students. While that theory of action played out in classroom practice and individual coaching sessions, we did not observe transfer to grade-level meetings. In fact, we saw examples of adult interactions that were detrimental to their collaboration. This chapter tells that story and outlines the remedy we institute when organizing the last cycle of inquiry.

In describing the activities in which the CPR group engaged, I analyze the evidence from the activities and identify the emerging themes from the research. I discuss the ways the COVID-19 pandemic impacted PAR Cycle One. Finally, using an organizational theory to analyze the emerging themes, I describe how that context influenced the PAR. To conclude the chapter, I discuss the implications for the PAR research questions, for my leadership, and for potential revisions for the next cycle.

PAR Cycle One Process

The PAR began with several activities and the evidence from those activities. We had a community learning exchange (CLE) on January 8, 2020, and instructional rounds on January 23, 2020, that helped concretize the implementation of dialogic interactions and problem-posing in the context of our school. In the regular coaching meetings, we operationalized the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education within the instructional work at the school by providing a collective vision and focus of dismantling the banking system of education. The coaches had individual sessions with teachers to transfer instructional agreements to the classroom and facilitated some of the grade-level collaboration meetings. I engaged in reflective memo-ing throughout the process. I derived codes, categories, and an emerging theme from five activities: a community learning exchange, instructional rounds, coach meetings, observations, and reflective memos (see Table 7).

Community Learning Exchange

In the January 2020 CLE, we focused on how the CPR members could "espouse and clarify their core values and apply those values to enact equitable discourse in Dolores Huerta classrooms, examine protocols for equitable access and rigor in Dolores Huerta classrooms, and plan to enact practices that reflect core values" (L. Tredway, CLE meeting agenda, January 8, 2020). The CLE outcomes aligned with the district's central leadership's proposed "braver" meeting norms. The new norms included keeping liberation for the oppressed at the center, being part of the solution towards liberation, and being present and comfortable in discomfort. However, translating the theory to practice continued to be at the forefront of our discussions.

During the CLE, we identified concrete classroom applications of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education as well as what we needed to do to ensure more consistent

Table 7

Spring 2020: PAR Cycle One Activities

Date	Activity	Purpose
January 8	Community Learning Exchange	Operationalize dialogic interactions and problem- posing education
January 9	Third Grade GLC Meeting	Establish agreement on writing instruction
January 16	Kindergarten GLC Meeting	Establish collaboration norms
January 23	Instructional Rounds with the instructional leadership team	Identify tasks that give access to content standards
January 24	Memo #1	Reflect on leadership move
January 31	Memo #2	Reflect on coaches' roles in influencing teacher behavior
February 3	Coaches Meeting	Discuss implementation of next steps from instructional rounds
February 6	Teacher Coaching Session	Observe discussion of accorded application of CP tenets
February 6	Memo #3	Reflect on potential system to prevent teacher burnout
February 10	Coaches Meeting	Discuss feasibility of teacher support system
February 11	Teacher Coaching Session	Observe discussion of application of CP tenets
February 15	Memo #4	Reflect on time management practices
February 23	Memo #5	Reflect on coordination and alignment of GLCs and ILT
February 24	Teacher Coaching Session	Observe discussion of application of CP tenets

Table 7 (continued)

Date	Activity	Purpose
February 28	Memo #6	Reflect on appropriateness of focus of practice
March 13	Memo #7	Reflect on school closures and impact and meaning
March 23	Memo #8	Reflect on focus of distance learning
April 22	Coaches Meeting	Discuss teacher self-accountability

implementation. While Guajardo et al. (2016) state that “conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes” (p. 24), classroom conversations often do not support student learning. For example, when students have not yet developed the art of dialogue, the ubiquitous “turn and talk” becomes nothing more than pro-forma, automated recitation of something the students may feel the teacher wants to hear, maintaining the banking system of education (Freire, 2011). Thus, we reached the consensus that meaningful relationships are the first step in generating authentic dialogic interactions (CLE, meeting notes, January 8, 2020). For meaningful relationships to exist, learning conditions need to include “safety, trust, and care; [otherwise,] students will not be open to take risks. Students will be afraid to make mistakes and share their ideas” (G. Ramirez, meeting notes, January 8, 2020). Our dialogue helped us conclude that, for the students to engage in dialogic interactions and problem-posing education, we as teachers, coaches, and leaders had to establish the classroom conditions of meaningful dialogue and then try out things together with the students (CLE, meeting notes, January 8, 2020).

In the CLE, the teacher participants in the CPR group shared personal and professional values rooted in social emotional foundations. “Social-emotional learning is what guides my work as an educator” (G. Ramirez, meeting notes, January 8, 2020). Alejandra expressed her personal and professional belief that social emotional learning is to be “instilling, promoting, and nurturing self-worth” (A. Perez, CLE, January 8, 2020). Isabel described her professional value as “providing a safe, loving space” (I. Montano, meeting notes, January 8, 2020). The three teachers’ espoused values on student discourse aligned almost perfectly. All three expressed the need for a classroom environment conducive for students to take risks and “not be afraid of making mistakes and sharing their ideas” (G. Ramirez, CLE, January 8, 2020). Similarly, the coaches emphasized authentic relationships, personal connections, and resilience in adversity.

They expressed their belief that student discourse needs to lead to new understandings and deeper connections through “active and playful (flexible) co-constructed, interactive grappling” (A. Salvatore, CLE, January 8, 2020). A work plan emerged from the CLE that placed priority on relationships and joint experimentation and included concrete ways to conduct observations and conversations with teachers.

Instructional Rounds

I aligned the PAR project work and focus to coincide with instructional rounds, a process in which district supervisors, teachers, coaches, and administrators visit classrooms and confer about the classroom assets and challenges. Drawing on our CLE agreements, the focus question for the instructional rounds in January 2020 was: “What are the tasks that create access through questioning and conversations that help students master the content standards?” (L. Rodriguez, meeting agenda, Instructional Rounds, January 23, 2020).

During math instruction, we found that in most instances students did not have math manipulatives to help them make sense of the concepts they were asked to explore. When they were provided with manipulatives, the students did not seem to know how to use them (G. Ramirez, instructional rounds notes, January 23, 2020). Additionally, we observed that the level of questions in most instances was confined to recalling basic facts (L. Rodriguez, instructional rounds notes, January 23, 2020). The instructional rounds confirmed the widespread instructional challenges facing our students. During our post-observation conversations, we considered how to support systematic and meaningful peer observations and concluded that time to reflect on our findings was essential for the future of our work.

Coaching Sessions for Teachers

Although the coaches had ideas from the instructional rounds about how to work with

teachers, some obstacles to coaching surfaced. Because two teachers on the CPR team were new to the profession, they had specific credentialing requirements that dictated the focus and approach of the individual coaching sessions. Their needs were practical and necessary for them to meet the daily requirements of their profession. The coaches adjusted to the needs of the teachers and provided support and a safe space for teachers to address the challenges of being a new teacher. That meant that the implementation of our theory became secondary.

The coaches had two types of meetings—individual coaching sessions with teachers and facilitated grade-level collaboration (GLC) meetings in which a group of teachers met weekly to discuss concerns with peers. The coaches facilitated GLC meetings only on alternate weeks, using a common agenda format. As principal, I attended some meetings and took notes. However, upon reviewing the evidence from several of the coaching sessions, we saw that our theory of action was not successfully transferring to the GLC meetings because the practical needs of the group were the focus.

Reflective Memoing

Finally, I continued memo-ing, which helped me traverse the different stages of change. I had the opportunity to pause and reflect more carefully about the interpersonal dynamics of a particular grade level, relationships with coaches, and my leadership. I particularly thought about the challenge of implementing critical pedagogy as a tool for change. The theory and its translation to classroom practice made sense to me, but the change agents—in this case the three coaches and three teachers—did not always find the theory tangible or discernable, even after the CLE where we practiced specific observation tools that would help us operationalize the theory. I found myself second-guessing the focus of practice and the instruments. Memo-ing provided the space to process the thoughts and understand the steps involved in “becoming. Freire (2011)

stated that "education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to *be*, it must *become*" (p. 84). Memo-ing helped me capture my thoughts on how liberatory education could take place at Dolores Huerta by undergoing the process of becoming such a place where our practice matched our beliefs.

A Barrier to Dialogic Interactions and Problem-Posing Education

In this section, I describe how the evidence from the PAR Cycle One activities supported an additional category: barriers to teacher collaboration. Secondly, I use the evidence from the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One to identify an emerging theme for this cycle: A key barrier to teacher collaboration was the inability to form trusting relationships that support them in enacting their espoused values.

From the observations and coding of grade level meetings as well as debriefing with coaches and writing reflective memos, I identified an impediment to our full implementation of the tenets of critical pedagogy: teacher collaboration barriers (see Table 8). The category is supported by codes from the evidence from GLC meetings and responses from coaches. The codes were (1) pedagogical and interpersonal differences among teachers, (2) inconsistent

Collaboration Challenges

Collaboration structures, and (3) a misunderstanding about the role of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), a schoolwide team that meets with the principal regularly and whose members are in the grade level collaboration (GLC) teams that meet weekly and include all teachers on a grade level and the coach.

Pedagogical and Interpersonal Differences

The most prevalent code to describe teacher collaboration barriers was pedagogical and interpersonal differences. The pedagogical differences included differences between teachers,

Table 8

Cycle One Codes and Frequency

Category	Codes	Frequency
Barriers to Teacher Collaboration	Pedagogical/ Interpersonal Differences	11
	Inconsistent Collaboration Structures	12
	Misunderstanding Between GLC and ILT	3
	Need for Authentic Space for Feedback	1

difficulties at the grade level collaboration (GLC) meetings, and differing ideas about appropriate practices. However, the interpersonal differences as well as coaches' misunderstandings about how to effectively proceed often exacerbated the pedagogical differences.

In one grade level collaboration meeting, the attendees were two teachers from the CPR group—one new and one experienced—and a third teacher visiting from another country, plus the coach, Robert. The interpersonal difficulties were evident between the visiting teacher and an experienced, local teacher who was a grade level member of the school's instructional leadership team (ILT), Gloria also a member of the CPR group. The firm ideas of the visiting teacher, who was experienced but had a teacher-directed approach to teaching, became a point of contention between him and Gloria and the point of contention created a wall among the GLC members. The differences became a wedge as the visiting teacher had a difficult time adapting to a non-banking method of education and taking on practices that responded to the tenets of dialogic learning and problem-posing that we had agreed to use.

The third-grade team may have been experiencing what they viewed as contrived collegiality at their meetings because they ignored the norms and were dismissive of each other (Hargreaves, 1994). The inability of the third-grade team to work more collaboratively led Gloria to ask Robert "to help them develop collaboration norms because they were not working well together" (L. Rodriguez, Reflective Memo, January 31, 2020). I asked Robert to support the grade level arrive at the solution they needed to be able to work together. Robert helped them work through the challenges impacting their work together and the team made collaboration agreements (see Figure 9). They decided that "to work at their best" they would "plan for the next week (all subjects) with an eye towards innovation and future goals; collaborate effectively

by valuing each person's input; openly communicate [their] thoughts and ask questions until something makes sense; treat each other with kindness, empathy, and patience; and notice the group's patterns of participation" (Third grade meeting notes, February 20, 2020). However well-intentioned the effort of creating norms, the interpersonal issues intersected with pedagogical differences and remained through the remainder of the school year despite having established guidelines for collaborative planning.

The GLC meetings, in general, were examples of a mismatched effort. The coach and the teachers were supposed to alternate facilitation at the grade level collaboration meetings because the coaches attended on alternate weeks. However, only the coaches actually used facilitation skills in the meeting. Even with facilitation, the teachers would meet with the coach and "go through" the planning agenda in a rote way. In other words, at the most basic level, we were not effectively modeling the tenets of critical pedagogy. When the GLC met alone without a coach, they had even more difficulty coalescing around a common approach, and the meeting agenda wandered without much productive interaction or decisions. With the reports from coaches about the challenges in different grade levels, on January 9, I met with third grade [something missing here] to address the concerns. While I was able to broker a compromise on the approach to teaching writing, the pedagogical and interpersonal challenges remained.

Inconsistent Collaboration Structures and Group Processes

Inconsistency in collaboration structures and group processes manifested in a number of ways: patterns of participation; missing norms; ignoring the speaker; and lack of self-accountability. In two examples from kindergarten and a grade level meeting, the participants established but ignored norms and structures. For example, on January 16 Alex (coach) and I met with the kindergarten team to help them develop collaboration norms. Despite the establishment

Third Grade Guidelines for Collaborative Planning
Pautas para la planificación colaborativa

To work at our best and with support from the coaching team, we will:
Para trabajar de la mejor manera y con el apoyo del equipo de coaching, haremos lo siguiente:

- **Plan for the next week (all subjects) with an eye towards innovation and future goals**
  Planificar para la próxima semana (todas las asignaturas) con miras a la innovación y los objetivos futuros
- **Collaborate effectively by valuing each person's input**
  Colaborar de manera efectiva valorando las aportaciones de cada persona
- **Openly communicate our thoughts and ask questions until something makes sense**
  Comunicar abiertamente nuestros pensamientos y hacer preguntas hasta que algo tenga sentido
- **Treat each other with kindness, empathy, and patience**
  Tratar a los demás con amabilidad, empatía y paciencia.

  Notice your and the group's patterns of participation.
  Observar tus patrones de participación y los del grupo.

  Be aware of your intentions and consider their impact.
  Tener en cuenta tus intenciones y considerar su impacto.

Figure 9. Third grade collaboration agreements.

of such norms and agreements, the teachers continued to do what they thought was best for them. In one instance, one of the kindergarten teachers would ask the students to remove their shoes when inside the classroom or would add activities that were not part of the curriculum. The teachers committed to follow agreements such as “trust in the ability of the members to know how to plan instruction” and “clear and direct communication” (A. Salvatore, GLC meeting notes, January 16, 2020). We supported the teachers to produce the final agreement document (see Figure 10), which captured the expectations expressed by the teachers. However, although the grade level collaboration meetings occurred as scheduled with agendas, the teachers ignored the new norms.

Difficult group dynamics of the third grade GLC continued to occur. In one instance, while Gloria was discussing a point on the agenda, Alejandra and a colleague were not paying attention to her. Alejandra had her laptop open and was glued to the screen. Alejandra interjected with a question based on what she was reading but unrelated to what Gloria was saying. Gloria continued with her statement. Robert pointed out that Alejandra was asking a question; Gloria acknowledged it but did not cede the space and continued making her point (GLC observation, January 30, 2020). Then they would meet and not have the evidence they promised. One of the coaches reported: “They would then arrive to the next GLC and simply state ‘Oh, I didn’t get a chance to do that.’ That’s what we’re fighting with, [lack of] accountability” (V. Cardenas, meeting notes, February 3, 2020). Teachers at the GLC meeting simply followed the agenda template, went through the motions of a discussion, and checked the boxes. This approach was more noticeable when the teachers met independently. The kindergarten work plan showed a misaligned approach to instruction. They were at different parts of the curriculum, working individualistically in contrast to their espoused values (see Appendix B). With basic group

Kinder

COMMUNICATION

comunicacion

We value clear, direct communication. We agree on the importance of asking questions, sharing ideas and resources.

FLEXIBILIDAD

flexibility

Valoramos empatia y comprensión ... tolerancia y adaptación hacia uno mismo y hacia el otro/a. ¡Probar cosas nuevas!

RESPONSABILIDAD

Be present with our work here and follow through with agreement.

Figure 10. Kindergarten team collaboration norms/agreements.

dynamics compromised, we were a long way from enacting our espoused beliefs in dialogue and problem-posing.

Finally, the ILT member of the group almost always had the final say on the decisions. One of our coaches expressed concern about the impact of this dynamic on the overall grade level collaboration. “Human beings assign status, categories, to things. There is an idea that the ILT member is the queen or king of instruction, and they approve or disapprove by assigning competency” (R. Henry, coaches meeting notes April 22, 2020). The perception by the non-ILT grade level members of an apparent status of the ILT representatives impacted the way the non-ILT GLC members related to and collaborated in the groups. “New teachers feel that their ideas are not valued because they don’t have the status or the title” of being the ILT representative (R. Henry, Coaches Meeting Notes, April 2020).

Emerging Theme

The data we collected from PAR Cycle One support this emerging theme: A key barrier to teacher collaboration is forming trusting relationships that support them in enacting their espoused values (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2010). Relationships are an abstract resource that constitute a necessary pre-condition for school improvement of any kind (Grubb, 2009). While the teachers were successful in building relationships in the classroom—as I identified in the pre-cycle and through individual conversations with coaches—some GLC teams never achieved a good working relationship. They were unable to foster the kind of collaboration that they said they valued, and this disconnect between their values and actions compromised the ability of grade level teams to collaborate effectively.

During the community learning exchange, the teachers expressed their values about how important relationships with between their coaches and them were to their work: “Relationships

as a large determinant in the comfort levels for taking risks as a teacher" (I. Montano, CLE meeting notes, January 8, 2020). Gloria expressed the importance of relationships with coaches because she had the need to "see what my coaches notice about the way I teach" (G. Ramirez, CLE meeting notes, January 8, 2020) and without established relationships, honest feedback might not take place. And Violeta expressed that "having a positive relationship with teachers helps us have conversations with teachers" (V. Cardenas, CLE meeting notes, January 8, 2020).

Concurrently, the relationships between coaches and teachers allowed for vulnerability by the teachers to express their concerns and doubts. In a coaching session, one of the CPR group members, new to the profession, shared her experience in a professional development session she had with other teachers from the district. "I was able to share something. It was very cool. I felt like I actually had something to say. This year I haven't felt like I have much to contribute" (I. Montana, coaching session, February 6, 2020). The trust in the relationship between the coach and the teacher extended beyond the intellectual exchange. Just as with students, the coach created space in the learning process for the emotions involved in teaching. During a coaching session, a kindergarten teacher recalled an instance in which she had to rely on a student to lead the line during a transition from the classroom to another building so that she could attend to another student with behavior challenges. The teacher shared her emotions about the students' reality. "That is really cool to see because I can trust them to follow along when I need them. Yeah. A little sad though. Sorry, it's really hard (begins to cry). I am kind of sad that I put that on him sometimes" (I. Montano, coaching session, February 13, 2020).

Coaches modeled the ways in which adults form relationships and collaborate. They were able to support kindergarten and third grade teachers' espoused beliefs about the importance of relationships in learning spaces through collaboration norms and expectations. The kindergarten

teaching team expressed empathy and understanding with one another as part of their norm of flexibility (see Figure 10). Third grade team members committed to "treat one another with kindness, empathy, and patience" as part of their collaboration norms.

As we were about to tackle the issues of adult learning spaces, COVID-19 upended the process. While we confronted the exigencies that were the result of school closings in March of PAR Cycle One, I could see that we needed a deeper understanding of why contrived collegiality was more prominent than any authentic collaboration. For us to build on their beliefs, we would need to develop structures that would better promote trust and understanding. Teachers were capable of creating spaces where learning conditions were conducive to students developing a sense of belonging. While COVID-19 upset instructional plans and the direct implementation of the critical pedagogy tenets we had adopted, the interruption brought into sharp relief the importance of relationships in our learning. We used that insight as the direction for PAR Cycle Two.

However, barriers to teacher collaboration remained. The teachers possessed the skills to create such environments, and they showed vulnerability in individual coaching sessions; yet they seemed unable to apply the skills in the adult learning and collaboration spaces. Freire (2011) describes generative themes as "the concrete representation of many ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanization" (p. 101). Yet, we were not yet able to put that theory into practice. The pedagogical differences on grade level teams impacted the interpersonal relationships between and among teachers. Without a sense of belonging or community in their adult learning spaces, they ignored established group processes.

While we believed that the ways we had organized grade level meetings and coaching

could lead to school coherence, we may have been unwittingly contributing to the problem. Despite our efforts, the barriers to teacher collaboration remained. Teachers moving politely through the motions at grade level collaboration meetings did not support growth and development. The teachers may have perceived that our attempts to force collaboration did not have the foundational elements of collaboration in place. Some teams exhibited characteristics of contrived rather than a more authentic collaborative culture:

- Working together did not evolve spontaneously but resulted from administrative regulation.
- Teachers were required to work together and meet at particular times and use particular formats.
- Control over purposes and regulation of time were designed to produce highly predictable outcomes (Hargreaves, 1994).

As a result, the coaches and I decided to take a step back and challenge ourselves to see how we could better support authentic collaboration. We needed to heed the advice of Hargreaves (1994) about collaborative culture: the teachers needed to experience that collaboration was organic and that working together can be productive and enjoyable.

Analysis of Emerging Themes Using Organizational Theory

Any given organization has multiple cultures existing concurrently, whether defined or undefined, formal or informal. Since teacher practice can be viewed as a culture, Martin's (2002) single theories of culture provide a useful analytical tool for understanding the context of our school, specifically his discussion of the differences of perspectives of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. Although we were reaching toward an integration perspective, the evidence points to key differences that caused fragmentation.

Martin (2002) states that the integration perspective "focuses on those manifestations of a culture that have mutually consistent interpretations. . . . From the integration perspective, culture is that which is clear; ambiguity is excluded" (p. 94). The focus of practice aimed to create a culture of effective teacher practice at Dolores Huerta "like a solid monolith that is seen the same way by most people, no matter from which angle they view it" (Martin, 2002, p. 94). The key issue in achieving integration is coming to consensus; however, consensus may not mean full participation in an organization. In our case, we had an espoused set of values that we were unable to enact or fully integrate in the ways adults interacted and learned (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

"The differentiation perspective focuses on cultural manifestations that have inconsistent interpretations" (Martin, 2002 p. 94). Under this perspective, consensus exists in the subcultures of the organization. These subcultures in turn, "may exist in harmony, independently, or in conflict with each other" (Martin, 2002, p. 94). In an organization like our school, teachers had demonstrated the capacity to create positive learning environments for the students. They worked in harmony independently as subcultures in the school. The cultures of coaching and teaching, though not existing in conflict with one another, existed within an uneasy tension. We lacked a clear process for what we were trying to accomplish in the adult learning spaces; while we did not lack for intent, we faltered in the enactment.

According to Martin (2002) "the fragmentation perspective conceptualizes the relationship among cultural manifestations as neither clearly consistent nor clearly inconsistent. In the fragmentation view, consensus is transient and issue specific" (p. 94). When the instructional leadership team adopted an instructional initiative, consensus was in place. When we discussed its application in the classroom at the grade level meeting, the consensus

fragmented, and the interpretation varied depending on who the adults and the students were. The subculture of teachers often was fragmented by grade level and further by individual teachers within that grade level. "Fragmentation focuses on multiplicities of interpretation that do not coalesce into the collectivity-wide consensus characteristic of an integration view and that do not create the subcultural consensus that is the focus of the differentiation perspective" (Martin, 2002, p. 107). The most evident fragmentation is what we observed in how the coaches and teachers responded to each other in the grade level meetings.

The focus of practice (FoP) was predicated on teachers' capacity to change their practices in classrooms and with each other. The FoP anchored the work of transforming teaching to elements of critical pedagogy theory. Practitioners of critical pedagogy theory challenge students to examine the structures of power. In the Freirean tradition, the use of critical pedagogy disrupts the banking system of education where the students are seen as empty vessels and the teacher the only source of capital, making deposits of knowledge to be withdrawn at a future date. Critical pedagogy challenges the structural status quo and creates the conditions for the co-construction of knowledge whereby the teacher-becomes-the-student-becomes-the-teacher (Freire, 2011). However, even when teachers espouse the values of critical pedagogy, they may have no clear idea about how to use it. Without tools that support them to change in a collaborative culture in which they feel connected to and trust their colleagues, enacting critical pedagogy is complicated and easily fragments relationships as well as curricular and instructional efforts.

By challenging the educational orthodoxy of the banking method, we rely on teachers collaborating to challenge the usual ways of teaching and to know and trust each other enough to make mistakes, share those in grade level meetings, and work together to more authentically enact the tenets of critical pedagogy.

The focus of practice, when fully implemented, aligns perfectly with the *integration perspective of culture.* Martin (2002) quoting Schein (1991) states, "only what is shared is, by definition, cultural" (p. 97). In utilizing the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education to disrupt the status quo of the banking system of education (Freire, 2011), teachers-as-students-as-teachers could create a common culture of effective teaching practices, "a solid monolith that is seen the same way by most people, no matter from which angle they view it" (p. 94). Yet, to paraphrase Isabel, a member of the CPR group, the realization of such culture co-constructed by the students as teachers and the teachers as students will take time. It will not just happen.

Implications

The overarching research question of the PAR project is: How does a collaborative coaching framework based on critical pedagogy theory support changing teaching practices to produce equitable and rigorous learning experiences for Latino and Black students? I found that teachers possess assets that support creating a sense of belonging for the students through constructive learning conditions. Yet, I also found that these assets do not transfer to other spaces where they gather as learners, namely the grade level collaboration meetings. Certain barriers exist, and they get in the way of the teachers developing trust in their professional relationships that would enable them to be vulnerable and open themselves to further growth and development. In examining the implications emerging from the research as they relate to the research questions, I analyze my leadership development and describe how the implications informed the final research cycle.

Therefore, the main implication for implementing dialogic interactions and problem-posing education was the establishing of conditions in the adult learning spaces to engage in

discourse to develop a common, co-constructed understanding of the best way to grow professionally and advance collectively.

While critical pedagogy as a value and theory still seemed important to our work, implementing it fully remained complex. Critical pedagogy is the struggle "for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons" (Freire, 2011, p. 44). My work with the coaches through problem-posing education was to support them in supporting the teachers "to develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves: they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 2011, p. 83). However sure we were of our values, I continued to evolve in my perspective of how those values fitted with our current reality.

The work required that the administrators continued to grow and develop their own dialogic interactions and engage in problem-posing education with the coaches. Freire (2011) states that "Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. . .. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical" (p. 89). The implication for my leadership was to continue the dialogue with the coaches and the teachers so we could arrive at a common understanding of the best way to co-create a learning space that humanized those within. I needed to internalize the fact that it would take time to change the existing teaching culture.

As a result of this PAR cycle and changes in the school, the data collection for next cycle shifted slightly. One of the coaches was on leave of absence until November 2020. Although her absence impacted the composition of the CPR, it provided an opportunity for a more refined focus. The next cycle provided the opportunity to ask questions, listen more carefully, and assess the information to arrive at a common understanding. Therefore, the data collection cycle focused on the extent to which the teachers could sustain the learning conditions evidenced so far

and how the coaches could sustain the collaboration in the grade level meetings while attending to the socio-emotional needs of the teachers as well.

Chapter Summary

The focus of practice of the PAR was to improve teacher practices using collaborative coaching structures based on two central tenets of critical pedagogy: dialogic interactions and problem-posing education. The initial conversations with the coaching team elucidated the importance of understanding what the two tenets meant in our context to concretize and operationalize them. The idea of a co-constructed educational experience that challenged the banking system of education (Freire, 2011) seemed the best approach to changing teacher practices and changing the learning experience of the Latino and Black students at Gran Vista Elementary. The initial pondering about how to best embed the two tenets in our work helped us identify dialogic interactions as human connections.

The subsequent preliminary research cycle demonstrated that there are teachers who expressed espoused beliefs and some who enacted them to contribute to the development of learning conditions that create a sense of belonging for their students. Learning conditions are based on mutual trust in relationships supported by the teachers' consistent practices. The trust in relationships allowed for the students to feel comfortable and connected to a community. The sense of comfort and connection helped the students develop a sense of belonging manifested in proud behaviors, both personal and collective. But the lack of trust caused fragmentation, and this required us in essence to "go back to the drawing board."

Spillane (2013) speaks of the importance of iterative cycles of diagnosis and design, and we certainly have uncovered some key barriers in this cycle that require a re-design. That is the essence of participatory action research; as we move through the plan-do-study-act (PDSA)

cycles of inquiry, we learn from the planning and doing and studying the evidence what works and what does not (Bryk et al., 2015). According to the fail-safe research on systems change, what we tried in this cycle was a probe (Riddell & Moore, 2015; Snowden & Boone, 2007). While the probe did not work as we projected because of a number of factors we have discussed in this chapter, we now have a road map for PAR Cycle Two.

The evidence demonstrated the absence of the practices on which we had consensus as beliefs but did not observe in adult learning spaces. I realized that although the CPR members are familiar with the work we are doing, the entire school needs to become aware of the aim of the project and what prompted the decision to embark on it. To paraphrase Martin (2002), only by sharing the literature and discussing it to allow it to permeate our thoughts and actions (praxis) will we create the culture to facilitate changing the banking system of education. The change will not happen immediately. Yet, unless we begin to dialogue about the world we live in, we will not create the culture of a liberatory education at Gran Vista Elementary.

CHAPTER 7: PAR CYCLE TWO

As a key part of the PAR project, we had aimed to understand how coaching and teacher practice could incorporate tenets of critical pedagogy theory as anchors in the change process; in particular, we were examining dialogic interactions and problem-posing education that remedied the typical banking method of instruction. After the analysis of the Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One, we determined that teachers were implementing some tenets of critical pedagogy in instructional practices in classrooms with children; however, in adult interactions, they were often unfocused except in well-facilitated situations like the Community Learning Exchange. In addition, we were especially concerned about how to navigate the continuing pandemic requirements of virtual learning and how that might influence our attempts to bolster adult-adult and adult-student relationships and learning.

An emergent theme from PAR Cycle One was barriers to teacher collaboration. Several factors influenced the flow and collaboration of the grade level collaboration (GLC) meetings, which were sometimes facilitated by coaches and at other times self-facilitated by teachers. The teachers espoused beliefs in collaboration and community and enacted those beliefs in their classrooms (Argyris & Schön, 1974), but those practices did not transfer to adult learning spaces—specifically the regular GLC meetings. Teachers with interpersonal differences sometimes derailed the productivity of the meetings. We observed that teachers participated in GLCs but often half-heartedly; that is, they would "go over" the agenda and proceed through the process but not fully engage. In some instances, some teachers even ignored one another during the meetings or simply acquiesced, agreeing to do something they had no intention of carrying out. The collaboration norms were either missing or ignored in the adult learning spaces, and teachers did not always honor commitments made.

Yet, we understood that we were, to some degree, responsible. Perhaps we were promoting what Hargreaves (1994) identified as "contrived collegiality" among participants. Six factors of contrived collegiality were noticeably at work; the GLC meetings were administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in space and time, and predictable. The teachers were responding as teachers often do in micropolitical situations when they feel disempowered: they just go through the motions. As Ball (1987) indicates, meetings purport to be places of dialogue and exchange, but often they silence participants:

> School meetings signify a degree of openness and involvement [but] …the appearance of openness is in effect a moment of closure. The degree of formality which surrounds these events, the situational constraints entered in, and the ritual re-enactments of hierarchy they display normally provide for pre-emption of available forms and topics of talk (p. 238).

Perhaps the GLC structures were simply *pro forma,* and teachers were responding to those structures in a form of passive resistance or at best disregard. Perhaps we were not living our values of dialogic interactions in the design of agendas and expectations of adult discourse. While we believed that adult and student experiences and learning needed to be parallel (Mehta & Fine, 2015), perhaps we principals and coaches were doing the same thing that teachers do when students do not participate—putting too much responsibility on the teachers instead of rethinking how we were organizing and facilitating without including teacher voice. As we realized at a coaches' meeting at the end of the PAR Cycle One, the teachers' inability to collaborate more effectively was problematic (V. Cardenas, coaches meeting, April 22, 2020). Compounding the challenge, the coaches and I had different perspectives on the best coaching stance to encourage teachers to collaborate more effectively because some teachers needed a

facilitated approach while the new teachers needed more direction (Glickman, 2004). We needed a different approach to address the complexities we were observing that still employed the critical tenet pedagogies.

In describing the PAR Cycle Two process, I report and represent the data from the activities in this cycle and incorporate the data in the previous emergent themes. In changing our approach in the coaches' meeting, I now saw how we needed to address and fully incorporate teachers' moral imperatives as a key component of ongoing adult learning so that they would enact their espoused values in classrooms and in adult learning spaces.

PAR Cycle Two Activities

We co-designed several activities in the final cycle of inquiry to address the issues of adult collaboration. While we naturally were still concerned about classroom instruction and how it played out in a virtual learning context, our main aim was to see how adults interacted. The coaches meetings included discussions of how to include critical pedagogy in grade-level coaching collaboration as well as regular instructional issues. But to address teacher voice and bolster teachers' enactment of their perceived values, we changed the grade-level collaboration (GLC) meetings, from coaches facilitating on alternating weeks to facilitating weekly. We delved more deeply into the critical pedagogy theory that underpinned our belief in the importance of dismantling of the banking system of education. One coach and two teachers participated in the coaching sessions.

Thus, the coaching sessions of GLCs provided an opportunity to see what was working and what wasn't. I also observed teachers in virtual classroom settings with the same aim. The CPR group members reflected on the progress of our work and our adherence to the goals. I engaged in reflective memo-ing and derived codes and themes from six activities: coaches

meetings, grade-level collaboration meetings, coaching sessions, classroom observations, CPR group member reflections, and reflective memos (see Table 9).

We made two critical changes. We reconfigured the grade-level teams to partially address the GLC collaboration issues; we believed that re-organizing some of the GLCs and working with the visiting teachers separately to orient them to our processes might alleviate some of the interpersonal issues on GLC teams. Secondly, the coaches and I were proactive about professional development and adult learning. In planning the August professional learning, we decided to involve the entire faculty in a discussion of common beliefs and vision as a leverage point for shifting adult relationships and classroom practices. We had the advantage of re-configured grade teams given that some teachers had left the school and others had changed grade levels.

In July, the superintendent introduced an initiative to implement anti-racist practices for the year 2020-2021 that supported the direction we had chosen and provided us with an opportunity. Focusing on the dismantling of the banking system of education through the implementation of the critical pedagogy tenets of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education at the GLCs and staff meeting matched the district agenda, and the district agenda provided some leverage for our decision. Through engaging the entire school, the coaches and I attempted to create an adult learning space in which teacher agency was present and meaningful.

Coaching for Grade Level Collaboration Meetings

We took a different approach to grade-level collaboration meetings. Given the challenges to the collaboration of grade levels in the last cycle, we decided that the coaches would attend all GLC meetings and guide the teachers to better define the belief system and theory and then to apply that belief system with each other and in classrooms. To accomplish this, we moved

Table 9

Fall 2020: PAR Cycle Two Activities

Date	Activity	Purpose
August 3	Coaches Meeting	Determine the focus of the first staff meeting
August 11	Whole Staff Meeting	Discuss banking system of education as a whole staff
August 20	Grade Level Collaboration (GLC)	Establish the process and focus of the grade level meetings
August 25	CPR Group Reflection	Reflect on the project, challenges, and possibilities
August 27	GLC Meeting	Delve deeper into Freire and banking system of education
August 31	Coaches Meeting	Maintain the focus on the goal despite the distance learning challenges
September 1	Coaching Session Third Grade	Connect and support
September 3	GLC Meeting	Analyze banking system teaching practices and identify counter examples
September 17	GLC Meeting	Co-design lesson that enhances student agency
September 21	Coaches Meeting	Check in on grade level collaborations
September 21	Classroom Observation	Observe teacher practice
September 23	Classroom Observation	Observe teacher practice
September 24	GLC Meeting	Reflect on practice on humanizing learning and learning spaces
October 1	GLC Meeting	Reflect on practice on creating space for productive struggle
October 15	Classroom Observation	Observe teacher practice

Table 9 (continued)

Date	Activity	Purpose
October 19	Coaches meeting	Discuss progress and challenges of coaching structure
October 20	Classroom Observation (K)	Observe teacher practice
October 20	Classroom Observation (3rd)	Observe teacher practice
October 31	CPR Member Journey Line Reflection	Reflect on their journey through the PAR project

meetings to grade-level spans (K–1, 2–3, 4–5). However, we also needed to be careful not to unwittingly send a message of control to the teachers; we needed to assure teachers by our actions that we were relying on the reservoir of teacher beliefs and their deep commitment to students. In so doing, we changed from seeing teaching as a product-process activity toward build their conceptions of teaching and learning through co-creation of knowledge in more authentic communities of practice (Russ et al., 2017). We knew they had positive intent to interrupt the banking concept of education (Freire, 2011), but they needed regular reinforcement to enact what they believed. The coaches asked the teachers to analyze the practices, to focus on one change effort, and to use these prescriptions as guides (see Figure 11). In the grade level collaboration meetings, the teachers had the opportunity to focus on specific banking system practices, and they had the space to develop a common approach to shifting them.

For example, kindergarten and first-grade teachers engaged in the work of changing the banking system teaching practice of "the teacher acts, and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher" (Freire, 2011, p. 73). Thus, teachers shortened their time talking and invited more student participation. The teachers also promoted students to sit in appropriate levels of discomfort when struggling with explaining their thinking as opposed to intervening and guiding them to provide the "correct" answer. In addition, teachers invited students to share their struggles and use their native tongue to gain vocabulary and structures in the target language, based on what we know about the emerging research on translanguaging (Martínez et al., 2019). The teachers modeled processing errors to teach the students how to take risks in participation and strived to prioritize the thinking process rather than eliciting a concrete, correct answer (A. Salvatore, GLC meeting notes, October 1, 2020).

In the second- and third-grade collaboration meetings, the teachers worked in mixed

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
(d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
(j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

Figure 11. Teaching practices in the banking system of education.

grade partnerships and focused on specific approaches. To address what Freire (2011) calls "humanizing learning," the teachers allocated time "for students to share personal feelings, plans, joys, thoughts. Similar to a community circle we see in class. When in gallery view [on Zoom], just go in the order of the frames you see (Community Square!!)" (A. Perez, GLC meeting notes, September 24, 2020). A second pair of teachers addressed equitable student participation. They implemented two similar systems to call on students: "equity sticks" and "wheel of names." The important distinction was the use of intentional wait time or think time for the students to prepare to share and or listen to what was being shared (G. Ramirez, GLC meeting notes, September 24, 2020). The remaining two teachers thought about how to center learning on the students. Their approach was to "gamify" learning using instructional games as a brain break. One of the CPR members confirmed that the GLC meetings were different:

> I appreciated having the opportunity to talk about this work during GLCs because it gave me the chance to explore different ideas and learn from other points of view as I shared with colleagues who had not been at the CPR meetings. (I. Montano, reflection on GLCs, November 10, 2020)

By taking a different approach to organizing grade-level collaboration meetings, we had more voices at the table. Because the coaches facilitated all meetings and devoted sections of those meetings to unpacking beliefs about teaching, we had more coherence across the school. The structure and the approach provided an opportunity for the teachers to find community in putting their new consensus about appropriate teaching practice into concrete form.

Classroom Observations

I conducted virtual classroom observations regularly and conducted two rounds of intensive observations in September and October. I observed eight classrooms in 2-day spans. I

observed teacher-student interactions that were evidence of the non-banking-method classrooms in which committed and dedicated teachers made connections with their students and checked on their students' socio-emotional well-being. I witnessed students feeling comfortable enough to share openly that they were not feeling well emotionally. Other teachers were intentional about ensuring student participation through systems that prevented one voice from dominating the others. They used humor, laughing at their own mistakes, and engaging the students online.

However, I also observed the existing tension between aspirations and the current conditions. The students and teachers were still "in class," and teachers tended to use familiar structures to teach students ways in which they could manage emotions like frustration. Some practices replicated the traditional teacher-centered approach in which teachers prescribe acceptable behaviors and academic writing practices In a kindergarten class, the teacher praised the students for engaging in mindfulness to process the challenging start to the day and told them that she would be needed their help throughout the day. She then proceeded to remind the students of the expectations, among which they were expected to silence their mics and raise their hand if they want to share (I. Montano, online classroom observation, October 20, 2020). The teacher was replicating brick and mortar teacher-centered practices in distance learning.

Reflections: CPR Group and Leader Memos

The CPR group, which met in August and November, engaged in two reflection activities. They first reflected on the banking system of education and its practices; they analyzed how dismantling it aligned with our work of implementing dialogic interactions and problem-posing education. Their responses demonstrated introspection on their teaching and critique of the school system and our roles in it as well as the challenging task of changing established

patterns. The second reflection included their thoughts about the journey they had endured in the PAR project and specific events that fomented their growth and development.

One CPR group member reflected on our work of implementing critical pedagogy in our classrooms: “I think that the reflections centered around students and questioning if we are doing our best to provide spaces in which they are represented, feel safe, and are seen and heard” (I. Montano, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020). Alejandra added that “the work we have committed to doing in noting the dialogic interactions in our classrooms [is] to break the cycle” of narration sickness (A. Perez, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020). Further, Gloria, in her reflection about the link between dismantling the banking system of education and the implementation of dialogic interactions and problem-posing education at our school, remarked:

> I think they're tied together. At the end of the day, we want students to feel comfortable in the classroom, to take risks, and therefore be open to having these rich conversations with their peers. We want students to feel free to discuss without the worry of feeling scared or intimidated. I also think when students feel safe, they will succeed. (G. Ramirez, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020)

Interpreting their reflections, I note the premium they placed as educators on ensuring that their students are represented and fully considered as an antecedent to their success.

However, the CPR group members acknowledged the difficult task of changing the system given how engrained “is the idea of teacher authority, both personal and professional and this concept [of the] teacher as ‘subject’ of the learning process and students as ‘objects’” (R. Henry, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020). Alejandra shared the following:

> I think one of the hardest components to change of the system that is in place is the mentality of its inhabitants. We are all part of this oppressive society and have accepted the passive roles imposed on us. I think the most difficult part would be the unlearning of these passive roles in order to achieve self-enlightenment that will lead to collective liberation. (A. Perez, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020)

We are part of the system. We grew up and came of age in it. The practices of the banking system of education are engrained in us and teachers replicate them as Alejandra shared: "Of course it is not always purposefully, but perhaps because there is not enough space and time to allow for self-reflection and reflection as a collective" (A. Perez, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020). Hence, together with the acknowledgment of a challenge, a teacher proposes a possibility for change: space and time for individual and collective reflection.

For their second reflection, the CPR group members engaged in a journey line of growth and development as a reflection of their experiences. A majority of the CPR members specifically recognized the CLE and GLC meetings as significant opportunities to learn in community.

> It has been so encouraging to enter the GLC space and debrief with my colleagues in such a deep way that I had not experienced before. I strongly believe that the work we do as educators is only sustainable if it's done in community, alongside people who support and care for one another. (I. Montano, CPR group member reflection, November 10, 2020)

"I think this jump-started my drive to allow my students to feel like they too can contribute to class ideas and discussion" (G. Ramirez, CPR group member reflection, November 13, 2020).

Similarly, Alejandra shared that the CLEs were significant for her growth and development because "there [was] a sense of commonality from all members when it comes to our values in education, so discussing topics such as the dismantling of the education system is productive" (A. Perez, CPR group member reflection, November 13, 2020). The sense of a collective purpose and focus, a willingness to learn more to teach better, comes through in the members reflections.

My reflections became an ingrained part of the process of my growth and development as an administrator. Through personal reflection, I maintained a flexible consistency through the challenge of the pandemic, reassessing and responding to the changing needs of our school community. The expression of the need for human connections and human contact reinforced the initial emergent theme of the importance of belonging to a community, and the data in the PAR Cycle Two were indicative of those themes.

PAR Cycle Two: Data and Themes

In PAR Cycle Two, we had two purposes: (1) to examine how a collective approach to dismantling the banking system of education facilitated the implementation of critical pedagogy; and (2) to improve how the coaches facilitated the meetings and maintained cohesion by being more inclusive of participant voices and needs and by fostering more authentic collegiality instead of the contrived type we saw in PAR Cycle One (Hargreaves, 1994). In analyzing the evidence from the PAR Cycle Two activities, I describe the three themes that emerged: (1) relationships as a force for humanizing learning; (2) coaches' and teachers' use of *praxis* as reflective practitioners; and (3) issues that surfaced within a prescriptive and resistant system (see Table 10).

Relationships as a Force for Humanizing Learning

Humanizing learning results from the critical study of the environment in which one

Table 10

PAR Cycle Two Themes, Codes and Frequency

Theme	Codes	Frequency
Relationships as a Force for Humanizing Learning	Creating Safe and Comfortable Learning Spaces	13
	Valuing Student Choice, Student Discourse, and Agency in?	25
	Teacher-Student Connections	18
Praxis: Coaches and Teachers as Reflective Practitioners	A Different Approach to Teaching	24
	Space for Collective Reflection	24
	Self-Care to Sustain the Work	8
Issues that Surfaced with a Prescriptive and Resistant System	The System is Prescriptive	22
	Participating in the System Difficult to Change Produces Guilt	7
	Nature of Teachers as Subjects, Students as Objects	21

lives, the conditions that led to that environment, and most important, the commitment to changing the environment in community. Humanizing learning abolishes the role of the students as objects. In humanizing learning,

> Teachers and students, co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of recreating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. (Freire, 2011, p. 69)

I coded the observations and determined frequency of codes in classroom observation (see Table 8). Three critical elements demonstrated how building and sustaining relationships led to humanizing learning experiences for teachers and children (Bryk et al., 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2002): creating safe and comfortable learning spaces; valuing student choice, student discourse, and agency; and sustaining teacher-student connections.

Creating Safe and Comfortable Learning Spaces

Teacher commitment to creating safe spaces for the students was evident even in virtual environments. The teachers dedicated time at the start of the instructional day to see and listen to their students and assess their emotional—and sometimes physical—readiness for the day. The students responded by participating in the check-in question or prompt; in some instances, they chose to participate by stating that they were "feeling bad," and the teacher and the other students respected the student's space and time (Online class observation, September 21, 2020). In another instance, the teacher was dealing with unforeseen technological challenges but engaged the students in breathing exercises and a quick physical activity to help them focus on the day (Online class observation, October 20, 2020). Throughout the observations, the teachers

worked at providing the students with a learning experience that was based primarily on the community norms and agreements they had made with their students.

Valuing Student Choice, Discourse, and Agency

By valuing student choice and student discourse, the teachers demonstrated that they were implementing a critical characteristic of problem-posing education: enabling "teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process" (Freire, 2011, p. 86). When discussing the end of a writing activity and getting it ready for "publishing," the teacher told the students to "focus on choosing one narrative for the publishing party" (A. Perez, online class observation, October 20, 2020). With the simple act of giving students the choice of a narrative to focus on, students became the protagonists in the process—agents of their own learning. Teachers valued students' knowledge and curiosity by giving students a choice about what to read. Before they started to read, the teacher asked them: "What do you know about pandas, and what questions do you have about them" (G. Ramirez, online class observation, October 15, 2020). The students shared their knowledge and questions about pandas. By posing the questions to the teacher and the group, the students established the focus for the reading and the expected outcome, that is, the answers to their questions.

Sometimes the teachers showed they valued their students' voices and participation by not simply accepting a partial answer but pushing the students to go deeper in their thinking—by being "warm demanders" who have relationships with students but then use the relationships to voice expectations (Bondy & Ross, 2008). In a fourth-grade class, during a math lesson on rounding, a student was reticent to explain how to solve a problem. After a few seconds of thinking time and encouragement from the teacher, the student offered an answer. The teacher thanked the student and praised her first step. The teacher then asked the student what she

thought the next step would be. The student then provided the rest of the answer (L. Rodriguez, online class observation, September 28, 2020).

Most teachers accepted and valued students' contributions and ideas during class discussions. In a kindergarten class, the discussion revolved around words with the |y| sound. A student shared *yega* and the teacher validated the sound of the first letter and offered the correct spelling (*llega*). Others would value and use students' contributions to teach a specific concept. In a fifth-grade class, the teacher presented an image and asked the students to draw it on a piece of paper. She then asked them to share their drawings by putting them up to the camera. Many students drew it, but they all left out some details. She asked them to share what the drawing had to do with perspectives. Some students shared something related to Halloween. Others ventured that different students drew it as they saw it; and that different people observed different things on the same object (L. Rodriguez, online class observation, September 21, 2020).

The teachers worked intentionally on creating the space in their classrooms—physical and virtual—where the students had more agency in their learning, and that agency started with their participation. By valuing student discourse, teachers indicated to students that their voices mattered. Some teachers implemented systems to ensure that the students who typically did not say much did participate in class discussions or provide answers to questions or ideas for discussion. When some students would try to monopolize the conversation, the teacher thanked them and asked them to share their stories during their recess (I. Montano, online class observation, October 20, 2020). Yet, other teachers shifted the meaning of participation from answering questions to asking them, "You have to ask questions if you want to learn. It is not enough with telling me you are confused" (G. Ramirez, online class observation, October 15, 2020).

Student agency can be interpreted as the students being the subjects, the protagonists of their own learning. In a kindergarten class, students used their molding clay to create something that expressed how they felt that particular day. Different students made different objects. Some made what they called animals, and they shared what it was and what emotion that object expressed. Through this activity, the students had ultimate control of what to make and the meaning they assigned (L. Rodriguez, online class observation, August 25, 2020).

In other instances, student agency took the form of assertiveness and bravery. In a fourth-grade class, the teacher (White male) made a mistake on a problem they were working on, and one student (female, Afro-Latina) corrected him and explained where she thought he had made a mistake. When I followed up with the teacher, he replied that he had made it clear from week one that we all make mistakes, even adults and teachers, and that in life we never stop learning, especially from one another. And that we welcomed students' support (L. Rodriguez, online class observation, September 29, 2020).

In another example in a fifth-grade class, a student demonstrated increased agency by choosing how to be addressed. Two students had the same first name. One of them asked the teacher to address him by his middle name to avoid confusion. The teacher happily agreed, and in one of the observations of his class, the teacher shared with me how proud he was of the student for taking the initiative to offer a solution in this situation.

Through both minor and significant examples, the teachers showed their students that they valued their choices, their contributions to discussion, and their agency in their learning environments. Through the conscious emphasis on relationships and key factors of dialogic education, teachers humanized the learning spaces by establishing and sustaining teacher-student connections.

Impact of Teacher-Student Connections

The backdrop to teacher-student connections was distance learning. We were concerned about the impact because "students had autonomy to do as they wished as students. They could choose to pay attention or not" (A. Perez, coaching session, November 3, 2020). That level of concern was more acute in fifth grade because the students were older and a bit more independent. However, our fears did not come to pass. Out of 78 days of school, 23 fifth-grade students had perfect attendance; 24 students attended between 70 and 78 days; only three of a total of 50 fifth-grade students had fewer than 70 days present. The fifth-grade students "attended" class at a higher rate than we expected because the teachers established connections with them.

Through their connections with the students, teachers challenged the established dichotomy of the roles of the teacher and student in the banking system of education. Their dedication to their students showed in building community and in students' willingness to take risks, participate in class discussions, and share the most personal and humanizing experience. Even in the time of distance learning, the teachers often shifted their roles.-They established and sustained connections with their students that created a sense of belonging to a larger community, and students demonstrated a stronger connection to teachers.

The teachers focused their connections with students in two ways: in one fourth-grade class, the new teacher established connections through an indigenous Mayan philosophy, Lak'Ech (see Figure 12), putting the teacher and the students at the same level with the same rights and responsibilities. The teacher used this to establish community agreements. They reviewed it every day as part of their classroom culture, their connection between teacher and students, and to one another (L. Rodriguez, online class observation, August 24, 2020).

IN LAK'ECH

Filosofía maya

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

Figure 12. In Lak'ech.

In the kindergarten classrooms, the teachers focused more intentionally on building community and establishing connections with their students. The students shared their experiences and allowed their teachers to learn about them and their personalities. “They want to share things. I am comfortable with knowledge of my students. Can be difficult to know at times, but in terms of their personalities, I understand their humor and personalities. Feel very connected and attached to them” (I. Montano, coaching session notes, November 2, 2020). The sense of community the teachers created allowed a student to take the risk to participate in academic discourse in a language that was difficult for her.

The connections the teachers established with their students led the students to take risks in the classrooms. In a fourth-grade class, the teacher respecting a student’s culture and language pushed the student to take a risk; in other words, the teacher could be a warm demander because of their connection (Bondy & Ross, 2008). The teacher demonstrated the connection with a student by expressing the belief that the students could rise to the challenge and go beyond the safety of a first step and actually solve the problem.

In one fifth-grade class, the teacher asked a student to answer a question. Because the student had been in the United States for a little over a year, she naturally wanted to answer in Spanish, her native language. The teacher encouraged her to explain her thinking in English, and though she was apprehensive at first, she did it. When she finished her explanation, the teacher asked her if she wanted to do it in Spanish. She declined the opportunity because she had taken the risk to express herself in a challenging language and had succeeded in doing it.

We started to observe the emerging efforts of students who demonstrated the connections to the teachers by sharing extremely personal endeavors and difficult journeys.

Some of our students have seen and experienced things beyond our imagination. For

example, I have a student this year that wrote about his experience crossing two international borders. When my student was reflecting on this experience, it felt like an adult was speaking because there was maturity beyond his years. Like someone who has lived it and learned from it" (G. Ramirez, CPR group member reflection, November 13, 2020).

The teachers established connections that put the pieces of the relationships puzzle in place. Some impacts are measurable (e.g., attendance). Other impacts are felt (e.g., sense of community, self-esteem for doing something challenging).

As a result of teacher effort in forming and sustaining relationships, humanizing learning through relationships was present in many classrooms and was a regular practice of many teachers at Dolores Huerta. Humanizing learning was an iterative process of reflective teachers, an outcome of their desire to do things differently and of their reflection about their practice. It was praxis: action and reflection.

Praxis: Coaches and Teachers as Reflective Practitioners

At the core of problem-posing education is *praxis*, which Freire (2011) defined as action and reflection. At the core of the practice of *praxis* is "speaking a true word to transform the world" (p. 75); the dialogue that happens in these reflective spaces is dialogical and pertinent to deeper change in the systems of oppression that manifest in the daily interactions and teacher-dominated instruction in many classrooms. Through the coding and analysis of grade-level collaboration meetings notes, coaches meetings, and CPR member reflections, teachers and coaches at Dolores Huerta demonstrated being and becoming better reflective practitioners.

I identified three elements that demonstrate *praxis*: a different approach to teaching, space for collective reflection, and self-care to sustain the work. The coaches created the space

for teachers to imagine a new way of teaching, practiced it, and reflected collectively on their practice, creating an "epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some [teachers] do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (Schön, 1983, p. 49). Teachers practiced self-care, unburdening themselves of the emotional weight that sometimes results from teaching by disconnecting from the work or by feeling heard and seen in a safe space. As Aguilar (2018) cautions us, we take care of ourselves so that we have the energy and the courage to heal and transform the world.

A Different Approach to Teaching

The start of the school year afforded us with an opportunity to include the entire school in changing the teaching practices at Dolores Huerta. Every grade level engaged in dismantling the banking system of education one practice at a time (see Figure 13). To allow for more continuous coaching, we concluded the best way was to have grade-level spans (K/–1, 2–3, 4–5), and each coach worked with one grade level span every week.

With the entire faculty engaged in changing the practices of the banking system of education, the coaches remained focused on supporting the teachers to find their own approaches to teaching differently so the teachers could enact their espoused values of critical pedagogy that disrupted the banking system. The grade levels had flexibility for teacher choice about how they would work. Some grade-level spans decided to work as a unit; others decided to split the grade and focus on different things. In other words, second and third grade formed pairs, and one teacher from second and one from third selected a common approach. They collectively focused on humanizing learning, equity of participation, and student-centered learning.

Because of the choice, teachers changed how they constructed and taught lessons. One teacher decided to shift the delivery of the lessons, ensuring that they were condensed and

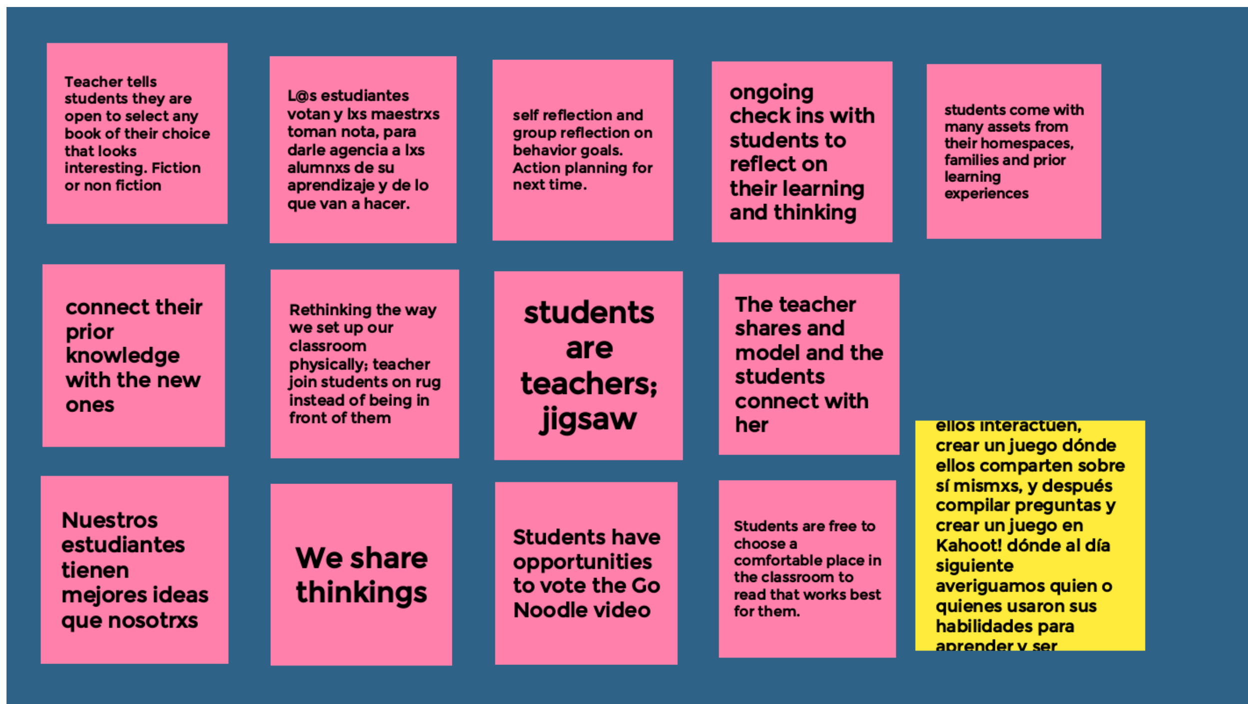


Figure 13. Different approach to teaching.

specific. She slowed down the pace of instruction and checked in with the students more regularly to assess their understanding. "My teaching was more to the point" (G. Ramirez, GLC meeting, September 24, 2020). Other teachers ensured that they took the students' learning more holistically and instead of focusing on one particular subject, they inquired about the students' learning throughout the day by implementing exit slips. One teacher suggested that daily exit slips were a good opportunity for all students to participate and that the exit slips could be turned in at the end of the day and in the form of a drawing if they preferred (L. Rodriguez, GLC meeting notes, September 24, 2020). The teachers demonstrated flexibility in accepting different ways for the students to show their understanding of the content.

Space for Collective Reflection

The teachers had shown a commitment to doing the work, and they approached it from different angles but with the same aim: to change the way they teach, and the way students learn. What supported the work was having the time and space for the teachers to reflect, collectively, about the application of their approach. Though they valued the opportunity for both self-reflection and collective reflection, they expressed the need for more opportunities to reflect in community. A prevalent need for many of them was "space for reflection" (2nd/3rd GLC meeting notes, October 15, 2020). As a result, grade level collaboration meetings, through the coaches' consistent approach to facilitating, provided the space for teachers to share their progress on their efforts to dismantle the banking system of education. One teacher shared that she would regularly have "an internal dialogue about both the process and also about my own practice, asking myself if I needed to ask them, checking for understanding" (G. Ramirez, GLC meeting notes, September 24, 2020). These areas of facilitation supported reflection: a collective focus

and purpose; mindfulness at the start of the meetings; and teachers' proactive stances in their different approaches to teaching.

Through the support and guidance of the instructional coaches, teachers wanted to go deeper on learning how to dismantle the banking system of education. "This is a great thing because our teachers are wondering and asking themselves these questions: 'Why am I doing this this way?' The questions are coming up" (A. Salvatore, coaches meeting notes, October 21, 2020). Teachers in the kindergarten/first-grade span GLC exercised the practice of reflection to ponder the most beneficial way to teach their students, wondering, "How do we create the space to see where the students are challenged? How do we slow down to see how we teach in a manner that benefits students?" (I. Montano, GLC meeting notes, October 1, 2020).

Although I observed most of the teacher reflection in the grade-level collaboration meetings, I did observe in a classroom one occurrence of transference by a teacher who used reflection with her students, hopefully a harbinger of more to come. The teacher introduced the practice of reflection in her third-grade classroom to demonstrate to the students to think more deeply about what they were engaged in. In a lesson about making connections, teacher asked the students to make connections between the comments their classmates made and their own. The teacher showed hand motions to mimic making connections and told them that they had to "reflect," and she pointed to her head when she said that to show the students that she was thinking (A. Perez, online class observation, August 25, 2020). It was a promising start to a more collective approach to reflecting about teaching and learning, a difficult endeavor.

Self-Care to Sustain the Work

To do the work consistently, commitment to self-care was equally important. The airline message to put on the oxygen mask first before assisting someone else is a fitting metaphor for

how teachers need to practice self-care while also teaching students to do so as well. Sometimes the teachers disconnected fully from work. Other times, self-care involved simply a safe space to share frustrations and disappointments.

The energy in sustaining the students' attention through a screen, juggling the content, the technology, and students' needs took a toll. Because distance learning impacted teachers emotionally as well, the teachers needed a different kind of support. During a coaching session, one of the CPR group members expressed her relief at being able to work at a remote site. "Good mentally to step out of the house" (I. Montano, coaching session, September 21, 2020). Sometimes, just stepping out of the house did not fully alleviate the emotional toll. The need to for self-care required to disconnect from work completely. "Road trip to Palm Springs. Disconnected from work" (I. Montano, coaching session, November 2, 2020). At times, self-care took the form of a lesson, particularly when the day presented challenges.

During one classroom observation, the teacher was supporting a district examiner assessing the students for a state test. The teacher was having technical difficulties and was appealing to the students for patience while trying to communicate with the families of the students who were being assessed. At one point, once the first student began the test, she convened the other students and, after thanking them for being so kind, asked them to engage in breathing exercises. She guided their mindfulness session for two minutes (I. Montano, online class observation, October 20, 2020).

For some teachers, self-care for sustainability did not involve taking road trips to disconnect from work or deep-breathing exercises. Instead, simply the opportunity to share with colleagues a common purpose and mission made the work sustainable. "The first thing that comes to mind about sustainability in my role as a practitioner is the opportunity to dialogue with

other educators" (A. Perez, journey line reflection, November 15, 2020). Self-care for a majority of the teachers consisted of simply disconnecting intellectually from work. Watching television or streaming videos and enjoying meals and drinks helped them cope with the demand of teaching through a screen and attempting to make teaching and learning relatable (Teachers, GLC sounding board, September 24, 2020). One teacher summarized it well: "I thought about how important balance is in doing this work … making sure we are critical and honest while also gentle and kind to ourselves so it can be sustainable" (I. Montano, CPR member reflection, August 25, 2020).

The teachers and coaches demonstrated what is possible through their commitment to dismantling the banking system of education and to making the work sustainable. The system has endured this long because it is prescriptive and resistant. We felt as a team that some of the changes we implemented reduced the factors of contrived collegiality and better supported adult learning. We energized the meeting structure by shifting the composition, and teachers exhibited more energy when they had choices about with whom to work and what to do (Drago-Severson, 2012; Knowles, 1980).

Issues that Surfaced With a Prescriptive and Resistant System

The banking system of education, traditional teaching practices that are teacher-centered and where student voice and choice are not considered, has been the mode of education for generations. Dewey (1938) defined traditional education: "The subject matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation" (p. 17). Many theorists and researchers have advocated for changing the paradigm of traditional education toward one more student-centered (Boykin & Noguera, 2010; Delpit, 2012; Freire 2011; Ladson-Billings,

2009; Noguera, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Yet, as we discovered in PAR Cycle Two, implementing meaningful change in the system is challenging: the system is prescriptive; participating in the system produces a sense of guilt; and it sustains the nature of teachers as subjects and students as objects.

The System is Prescriptive

With little variance, school district systems are prescriptive in the implementation of standards the students need to master, the curriculum used to meet those standards, and how they are assessed; teachers are expected to follow a "suggested" scope and sequence that dictates x number of days spent on one concept. While our school district gave us leverage in Fall 2020 to promote anti-racist education, at the same time, the district also prescribed the common core standards students were expected to acquire. The system prescribed what the students need to know, how the teachers are supposed to assess that knowledge, and assigned meaning and value to the resulting data. After 2 weeks of instruction on distance learning, a teacher expressed she was "not sure how to assess what students [were] actually learning. Possibly do not know how to use Google Classroom" (A. Perez, coaching session notes, September 1, 2020). The district suspended the traditional assessments for the fall semester without which the teachers were unsure how to evaluate the students.

In particular, with respect to scope and sequence, the curriculum and instruction department in the school district developed our math curriculum, and the teachers received binders with the units and lesson plans. The teachers were expected to teach it following a specific content and pacing with specific indications of how long to spend on any part of the unit before moving on to the next section as prescribed. During distance learning, curriculum binders

gave way to a slide deck. When discussing lesson planning, the teachers spoke of "being" on slide x or y, in referencing math concepts and ideas.

In one online classroom observation, a fourth-grade teacher had finished a section, and after an informal assessment, it was evident that the students still struggled with the concept. Nonetheless, the teacher moved on as prescribed by the scope and sequence (L. Rodriguez, online class observation, September 28, 2020). One coach observed that the teachers felt pressure from the district to stick to the curriculum (L. Rodriguez, coaches meeting notes, September 21, 2020). Though the teachers developed an awareness of the need to change, the prescriptive nature of the system has made change difficult, and the tension between knowing what to do and still participating in the system created a sense of guilt.

Participating in the System: Change Is Difficult

The prescriptive nature of the system is so pervasive that it was difficult for the teachers to avoid replicating some practices they were intent on dismantling. The teachers felt guilty that they were not following their beliefs. In a third-grade class, the teacher told the students that their conclusion had to have a BAM! As she described it. She proceeded to describe the BAM! characteristics, prescribing the three and only elements the students could choose from (A. Perez, online class observation, October 20, 2020). The teachers developed awareness of the oppressive nature of the system and acknowledged the challenges involved in changing it. "Although most of us understand and agree with the concept, we still partake in instructional practices that mirror the banking system" (A. Perez, CPR members reflection, August 25, 2020).

As educators, we were formed by the traditional practices in our educational upbringing, and we have adopted many of those engrained practices even when we do not believe in them. In the push and pull of the implementation of the critical pedagogy tenets of

dialogic interactions and problem-posing education, our teachers simultaneously engaged in some prescriptive, teacher-centered practices. To illustrate the struggle, the same teacher who questioned "the way we commend 'calm' bodies and 'quiet' voices and how this stems from an ableist point of view" was the same teacher who reminded her students of the expectations of "silent mic and raising hands" during instruction (I. Montano, CPR member reflection August 25, 2020; online class observation, October 20, 2020).

The teachers and coaches experienced the tension between challenging the system while being part of the system. Although the teachers and coaches engaged in more intentional and focused work, one coach felt that "we are replicating the practices from when we were in the building. We need to break the practices" (R. Henry, coaches meeting notes, September 21, 2020). Breaking the practices was precisely the focus of the PAR project, and we engaged in it knowing that "many of these practices stem from very deeply rooted beliefs about schooling and therefore can be difficult to resist and change" (I. Montano, CPR member reflection, August 25, 2020).

Working to change the system while participating in it created a sense of guilt for some teachers, particularly the ones who had already developed an awareness of the need for change. "The guilt stems from being an active participant in the 'banking system' of education. The guilt I feel is not doing a better job at disturbing the teacher-student contradiction" (A. Perez, CPR member reflection, August 25, 2020). Participating in system was unavoidable because we faced practices that formed our own learning and permeated our apprenticeship as teachers and educators. However, the awareness demonstrated by our teachers about their practice and commitment to doing more is promising.

The Nature of Teachers as Subjects and Students as Objects

Teachers and students replicate their roles as objects; those roles are cemented into the ways we work. Visible and hidden forces outside the control of teachers tend to determine what happens to us and how we react (Ingersoll, 2003); the “hallmarks of a bureaucratic organization” include standards, employee job descriptions, and operating procedures, but there are other mechanisms of control that are less direct and visible “embedded in the informal, or social organization, of a work setting” (p. 97). While we have supported teachers in our school to interrogate the way we work, we are all still subject to the district and to the ways that bureaucracies replicate themselves. The coaches and I are caught in this web. Thus, freeing ourselves to become agents in our setting is complex.

The teachers at our school acknowledged the need to change the existing roles of teachers and students; yet they enacted the roles they did not wish to assume in their classrooms. The teacher-student contradiction surfaced from the roles of the adults (teachers) as the ones with authority and the children (students) as the ones expected to obey and respect that authority as established by the system. Freire (2011) described the role of the teacher as the subject and the student as the object: “A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)” (p. 71).

While the teachers and students sometimes replicated and maintained the established roles under the guise of order and structure, teachers felt uneasy about the existing practices at Dolores Huerta, questioning them and yet maintaining them. “I feel an urge to revisit the practice of having students kneel after the whistle blows when recess is over, the emphasis on ‘good’ or ‘perfect’ lines when walking from point A to point B” (I. Montano, CPR group

member reflection, August 25, 2020). The teachers' reflection about the value and worth assigned to the words "good" and "perfect" were an implicit evaluation of the skills and competence of the teacher in their classroom management abilities since classroom management is typically viewed through the lens of authority and control. "For many of us (me included), there is some predisposition to believe in teacher authority as key to classroom management, and when challenged it can feel uncomfortable and personal. It is an intensely personal journey" (R. Henry, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020).

We teachers and coaches implemented a common vision and teaching culture at our school knowing that we are part of the system. By openly discussing the challenges and exploring possibilities, we created a critical mass. We now are more aware, and as one teacher reflected, "We must take responsibility for the ways in which we perpetuate it and also allow ourselves to heal" (I. Montano, CPR member reflection, August 25, 2020). The teachers and coaches demonstrated their commitment to breaking the cycle of traditional teaching. Through incremental changes, they chipped away at existing practices. Alejandra summarized the most concrete next steps to sustain the work: "In order to shift the culture of our complicit teaching, there is internal work to be done, but it must be done collectively" (A. Perez, CPR group member reflection, August 25, 2020).

Through reflections, class observations, coaches and grade-level collaboration meetings, I was able to identify themes that reflected the work our teachers are doing in their classrooms to create learning environments that are safe and welcoming. They managed to enact some of their beliefs by establishing and sustaining connections with their students that allowed the students to take risks and assume the role of a subject instead of a passive object. Additionally, we identified the challenges that remain in implementing a truly liberatory education at Dolores Huerta

because the system is resistant. We created a collective awareness of the need to change, and we identified more teachers committed to doing the work collectively. In the next section, I describe the findings and conclude the chapter.

Findings

The participatory action research project aimed to answer the following overarching question: How does an emphasis on critical pedagogy support changing teaching practices to address more equitable learning experiences for students? Two findings from the research are critical: (1) Focusing on our beliefs provided a platform that was critical to changing practices; and (2) Using the tenets of critical pedagogy requires that all school constituents (teachers, coaches, and the principal) have roles in ensuring that the adult relationships are trusting and that the group productivity is useful to the teachers and to student learning. In Table 11, I chart the course from the categories, to emergent themes, and from themes to findings.

Beliefs Lead to Practice

When we met for the first CLE in December 2019, teachers, coaches, and I were all committed in principle to disrupting the status quo of the banking system of education (Freire, 2011) with its established prescriptive norms and teacher and student roles. However, throughout the project we were often pulled back to enacting practices we were working hard to abolish. The CPR group members expressed their espoused beliefs about creating spaces where both the students and the teachers felt comfortable and connected. They spoke of the importance of trusting in relationships, feeling a sense of pride, and understanding the power of place as critical in the development of a sense of belonging for students and teachers. We understand that the sense of belonging as an iterative process had to be built on consistent trust in their interactions.

Table 11

Pre-Cycle Through Cycle Two Categories/Themes and Evidence

Pre-Cycle Category	Evidence	Cycle One Category	Evidence	Cycle Two Category/Theme	Evidence
Belonging	Feeling Connected & Comfortable	Barriers to Teacher Collaboration	Pedagogical/ Interpersonal Differences	Relationships as a Force for Humanizing Learning	Creating Safe and Comfortable Learning Spaces
	Trust in Relationships		Ignored Collaboration Structures		Valuing Student Choice, Student Discourse, and Agency
	Pride in School		Misunderstanding Between GLC and ILT		Impact of Teacher-Student Connections
	Power of Place		Need for Authentic Space for Feedback	Praxis: Coaches and Teachers as Reflective Practitioners	A Different Approach to Teaching
Learning Conditions	Safe Environment for Risk Taking				Creating the Space for Collective Reflection
	Trust in Relationships				Self-Care to Sustain the Work
	Being Reflective			The System is Prescriptive and Resistant	The System is Prescriptive and Difficult to Change
	Consistency				Sense of Guilt for Perpetuating the System

We noted that the learning conditions needed to be safe for risk-taking. Trust in relationships emerged as a key component in all cycles of inquiry and as a key component for the theme of relationships as a force to humanize learning in PAR Cycle Two (see Table 9). The teachers implemented in their classrooms practices that were an expression of the authentic, humanizing care (Freire, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999) crucial to an empowering learning environment.

Yet, however committed and consistent the teachers were to change the existing practices, challenges emerged in the form of barriers to teacher collaboration in Cycle One and the difficulty of changing a prescriptive and persistent system as evidenced in Cycle Two (see Table 9). The assets the teachers demonstrated in the Pre-Cycle, especially their ability to develop a sense of belonging and creating learning conditions conducive to the growth and development of the students, did not initially transfer to their interactions in the adult learning spaces. In Par Cycle One, the teachers had pedagogical differences that interrupted their ability to work collaboratively. This challenge led to inconsistent collaboration structures and misunderstandings among the different members in the grade levels, and evidence suggests that teachers engaged in contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994)—the practice of working together in a given place, time, and manner because that is what is expected.

Perhaps the contrived collegiality described by Hargreaves was a vestige of the persistent and prescriptive nature of the banking system of education. Teachers expressed commitments to creating a learning environment framed by dialogic interactions and problem-posing education that allowed "the teachers and the students to take risks and alternate between the expected roles of the teacher imparting knowledge and the student receiving it and explore the possibilities of the student 'being the student-teacher and the teacher letting go of the power in class'" (A. Perez,

CLE, December 9, 2019). But they struggled with the pull of the established system. Perhaps their inability to transfer beliefs to collaboration practice in PAR Cycle One was unwittingly a manifestation of the ways the coaches and I organized meeting structures and expectations.

However, by PAR Cycle Two, beliefs and practices began to converge; what emerged was that beliefs guided our practices. Elmore (2002) has exhorted us to "grab people by their practice, and their hearts and minds will follow" (p. 3). In our case and in our context, hearts and minds and practice go hand in hand. However, the teachers needed regular opportunities to reaffirm their beliefs so they could enact what they believed. We had to consistently fortify our belief system to drive our practices with students and with each other. The evidence in PAR Cycle Two demonstrates that by having regular conversations about the moral imperative, we were better able to address the challenges facing us. When we tried in PAR Cycle One to adopt practices too quickly, our attempt did not work. Instead, reaching into our belief system helped us recalibrate the next step and act on our beliefs more systematically, what Schön (1983) calls "reflecting in action" and Freire (2011) names *praxis.*

We found that change is hard, a slow-moving tug of war between beliefs and practice. External factors made teachers unable to remain true to their beliefs; yet we also found that by approaching the obstacles collectively, we incrementally moved towards more consistent practices. Paraphrasing what Isabel, a CPR group member, stated at our first community learning exchange, it takes a lot to create change; we need to be consistent. It does not just happen. (I. Montano, meeting notes, December 9, 2019). I would simply add that we need to demonstrate "steady flexibility" to adapt the process without compromising the outcome. As Freire (2011) says in *The Pedagogy of the Heart*: "I must not reduce my instructional practice to the sole teaching of technique or content, leaving untouched the exercise of the critical understanding of

reality" (p. 44). Thus, leading with practice without concurrent understanding of why we do what we do is what is motivating us to coalesce as a school community and learn and do, do and learn together.

Adult-Adult Relationships

The importance of adult-to-adult relationships became evident in the Pre-Cycle as a precursor for taking risks, to creating a sense of belonging, to supporting growth and development. Humanizing relationships are central to critical pedagogy (Freire, 2011), but our set of beliefs about liberatory education did not quite match the experience in some of the grade levels. Challenging adult relationships became a barrier for the implementation of critical pedagogy in adult learning spaces.

As evidenced in the Pre-Cycle and Cycle One (see Table 9), the teachers had strong convictions about the importance of community and sense of belonging, and for the most part they applied those convictions in their classrooms. Yet, our research in PAR Cycle One revealed that the adult relationships were fractured and impeded genuine collaboration. The challenges of the adult relationships we uncovered seemed to reinforce what Elmore (2002) calls the ethic of atomized teaching, that is, "teachers practicing as individuals with individual styles" (p. 3). The teachers met in their grade-level collaboration meetings and demonstrated what Hargreaves (1994) called contrived collegiality. That seemed to work for a short time, but the consequences of the superficial collaboration emerged soon after.

The evidence from PAR Cycle One revealed how pedagogical differences led to interpersonal challenges that impeded the productivity of the grade-level collaboration. In one grade level, one teacher continually went to a coach to express her concern that their team was not working well. Though they would meet and work through the agenda, collaboration

agreements were not respected, and they would return to their classrooms and continue on different paths. Several factors influenced the inter-relationship dynamics that impeded the teachers' ability to establish and sustain interpersonal relationships, which Grubb and Tredway (2010) state "are the heartbeat of reform" (p. 147). Trust was absent from the relationships among the teachers in the different grade levels. Hallam et al. (2015) in a study about trust and collaboration in PLC teams discovered that "trust within the teams was developed when team members fulfilled their personal responsibilities and assignments and when team members shared personal information with one another" (p. 203). Though the teachers in the grade levels facing challenges seemed to manage the situation on their own for a while, they ultimately realized they needed support from their coaches. The coaches and I intervened to support them in developing collaboration agreements (see Figure 9 and 10), which, absent the foundation of trusting relationships, did not fully change the collaboration dynamics.

PAR Cycle One evidence confirmed the importance of the administration's and coaches' attentiveness to the teachers' needs. We supported the teachers when they requested support. An earlier proactive approach from the coaches and administrator might have more successfully supported the teachers in cementing productive interpersonal relationships. However, by the conclusion of PAR Cycle Two, we did see new possibilities by reiterating our beliefs and building internal coherence among the grade levels.

Chapter Summary

The participatory action research project aimed to answer the following overarching question: How can we adopt a liberatory pedagogy at Dolores Huerta Elementary to support a learning process for teachers that changes their practice to improve the way students learn? Collectively, the categories and themes from the three cycles provided the foundation for the two

findings I presented: (1) Focusing on our beliefs provided a platform that was critical to changing practices; and (2) Using the tenets of critical pedagogy requires that all school constituents (teachers, coaches, and the principal) have roles in ensuring that the adult relationships are trusting, and the group productivity is useful to the teachers and to student learning.

The findings are illustrative of the continuous struggle to change the system comprehensively. As I considered these findings, I was reminded of a story by Loren Eiseley (1969) of a boy who is throwing dying starfish back into the ocean after the tide beached them. A man tells the boy that throwing them back in the water will not make a big difference since there must be thousands of them. The boy picks another one and while throwing it back in the water tells the man, "It made a difference for that one." Yes, changing engrained practices is hard, and much harder yet it is to dismantle the banking system of education. One teacher may have co-created resilient cultural ecologies in their classroom independently by understanding their students' cultures and identities. By providing a common vision and focus for the entire school, we created a sense of common purpose that facilitated the conversations and the dialogic interactions that prompted questions from the teachers about the status quo, enacting their own problem-posing education. We have not been able to fully dismantle the banking system during this PAR project, but collectively we are putting our starfish in the ocean of knowledge.

In the next chapter, I discuss the findings in relation to literature, the research questions, and a potential new theory or framework. I also discuss my leadership development in the context of the implications for practice, policy, and research.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

When I was in second grade in Mexico, my teacher asked me to fetch her spiral notebook. I did not know what she meant by that, so I pretended to busy myself at my desk. She asked me for it again, and I mumbled something about how I thought someone else had gotten it for her. She said, "Never mind" and I saw her reach behind her desk and grab the spiral notebook. At that moment, I knew I wanted to become a teacher because I wanted to be as smart as she was. Life's meandering ways brought me to the United States when I was 15 years old. I entered the education system as a freshman in high school and was relegated to a side desk for the last two months of my freshman year. My command of the language was so minimal that I was not eligible for the English as a Second Language (ESL) class. The students in the ESL class were mostly Latin Americans who had grown up in the country and whose oral English I found to be flawless. Mr. Noa, a Puerto Rican teacher, taught the class. He delivered his daily lecture while sitting at his desk, reading to his students from a book while many of them appeared to long to be anywhere else but there. Their lively interactions ceased as soon as they crossed the threshold. When I was finally able to join the class, I fell into the same pattern that I had seen among the other students: we were doing without knowing why.

Later that school year, at the end of my 10th grade, I told my friends that I was going to move to regular English. They tried to discourage me: "Why would you want to do that? It is so much easier to be in the ESL class. You get an easy A!" They were right, but I did not want easy. I wanted to learn and master the language. I wanted to be able to speak English as well as the other students. I wanted the freedom to express myself fluently. I told them, "If I don't make it, I can always come back." I never did.

As a senior in high school, I decided to take two math classes to improve my chances of getting into a four-year college. The demand became too much, and I had to drop one and was struggling in the other. I had a D- in my first quarter. I went to my teacher, Ms. Paulus, an older white woman. I told her I wanted to drop the class. When she asked me why, I told her I did not understand and did not want to fail the class. She looked at me and said: "If you want to drop the class, you can. If you want to learn and understand, I can help you during lunch and after school." The decision was mine. She gave me agency. I joined her during lunch and after school for several sessions until the concepts and patterns made sense. I excelled in that class to the point that I became a peer tutor to my classmates.

I experienced all the oppressive practices of the banking system of education in my education as well as occasional glimmers of what I would come to know as critical pedagogy. As a result, when I became a teacher myself, I wanted to harness the laughter and the energy of youth so their voices would not evaporate as soon as they entered my classroom. Through my experience with my math teacher in high school, I learned the importance of asking the right questions to arrive at the appropriate answer. I carried these practices with me as I became a middle school teacher and strove to create a space for students to find agency and exercise it. As a school administrator, my belief in the possibility of change converged with the need to create change.

The focus of practice (FoP) was predicated on teachers' capacity to change their practices and the coaches' and my abilities to support them to do so. The persistent performance gap between our Latino and Black students and our White and Asian students underscored the rationale for the project. Our school is a Spanish-immersion school with Latinos constituted 70% of the student population. Yet, even in Spanish their White Spanish-learning classmates out-

perform them. This is what prompted me to use critical pedagogy as the framework for working with coaches and teachers to shift practices. However, as the study developed over three iterative cycles of inquiry, we saw more clearly that changed practices for student and adult practices depended on a fortified belief system among both students and teachers.

Practitioners of critical pedagogy challenge the structural norms of the status quo and create learning conditions that support teachers and students as equals in the learning process. They co-construct knowledge, and through the co-construction the teacher becomes the student as the student becomes the teacher (Freire, 2011). The co-practitioner researcher team and I anchored the work of transforming teacher practice in two tenets of critical pedagogy: dialogic interactions and problem-posing education. Three coaches, three teachers, and I engaged in three PAR Cycles that produced data on the sense of belonging, learning conditions, and challenges experienced in teacher collaboration meetings. The teachers worked to humanize learning and become reflective practitioners with their coaches. Yet, we all had to acknowledge that the system is prescriptive; unless we are hyper-vigilant, we are all prone to reproduce systems of oppression with which we disagree in principle.

I discuss the findings in relation to extant literature. I respond to the research questions. Additionally, I address the implications as they relate to practice, policy, and research. Finally, as a result of developing wider lenses on how to work with teachers and coaches, I use important quotes from *Peripheral Visions: Learning Along the Way* (Bateson, 1994). The book and Bateson's writing helped me to see and learn differently.

Key Findings

Based on the data from multiple sources in the pre-cycle and two cycles of inquiry, we have data to support two findings about how espoused beliefs translate to actions and how both

student-teacher and adult peer relationships are central to student learning. Our overarching query in this project was: How does critical pedagogy inform and support teachers to change classroom practices and improve student learning? We addressed the conundrum of whether beliefs or practices change teaching and concluded that both were necessary in the setting in which we undertook our efforts.

From Espoused to Enacted Beliefs

> *Children learn skills and information in school. . . They learn how society is organized and where they fit into that organization. They learn notions of authority and truth and the limits to creativity* (Bateson, 1994, p. 68).

Balancing espoused beliefs with enacting them in classroom practices is a constant, if subconscious, struggle that requires a collective effort (Argyris, 1980; Argyris et al., 1985; Argyris & Schön, 1974). Even the most committed teachers could not avoid replicating the practices we were trying to dismantle as they attempted to enact a different way of teaching children. Liberatory work is a constant dance; the teacher practicing critical pedagogy and the coaches and the principal supporting their efforts have to maintain the rhythm of change and manage an ever-changing number of partners a dance floor that may be uneven. In situations where the beliefs and practices are simultaneously supported and challenged, progress is measured in small increments.

All the teachers espoused beliefs about what the children's school experience should be; they believe that children should have voice and agency and that the banking system of education is not useful for learning. They believe in constructivism and exploratory learning (Bruner, 1960; Vygotsky, 1978); however, they are conditioned by curricular and pedagogical practices to reproduce methods of teaching that do not foster curiosity and co-construction. We tapped into their moral imperative of what needed to change to remedy the historical and societal

injustices still present in our education system, but the road to change was bumpy. In presenting the teachers with the challenge and a way to address it, we had to trust them as learners. In trusting the teachers to be creative in how they are dismantling the banking system of education, we had to take heed of Dewey's (1938) admonition to more experienced educators: "There is no point in his being more mature if, instead of using his greater insight to help organize the conditions of the experience, he throws away his insight" (p. 38). Many of our teachers are novices, and our responsibility as coaches and leaders—as the more mature adults—was consistently and continually to assess the experiences of the adult learners in their quest to enact their values of critical pedagogy.

Teachers largely enacted their espoused beliefs in classrooms but experienced difficulties in enacting them in adult collaboration. During PAR Cycle One, teachers were often "going through the motions" of collaboration, but their participation was not authentic. In fact, at times they openly ignored their colleagues. At that juncture, we engaged in soul-searching as a leadership group. As a result, by absorbing the lessons of qualitative evidence in PAR Cycle One, the coaches and I made structural changes and re-engaged the teachers in spiritual work by confirming our values of justice. Love (2019) argues that to be fully active as agents of social justice, we must interrogate the habits and practices that protect the systems that maintain what we do not believe; however, we best do that by fostering the "interior work of silence, meditation, inner wisdom, and deep joy that is inextricably linked to the outer work of social change" (p. 118). Therefore, as school leaders, we were conscious of the structures that might be inhibiting teachers and the need to re-focus on dialogue as a key component of meetings. We changed the grade-level team structures and collaboration processes, and we reinstituted regular dialogue on readings from critical pedagogy. To support teachers to enact their beliefs, we, as the

coaches and the principal, needed to frame and structure professional learning experiences in critical pedagogy. We and the teachers needed a regular dose of beliefs because they provided a platform that was crucial in to changing our practices

Student-Teacher and Adults Relationships: Central to Student Learning

"The gift of personhood is potentially present in every human interaction, every time we touch or speak or call one another by name; yet denial can be very subtle too, inflicted in the failure to listen, to empathize, to attend" (Bateson, 1994, p. 62).

The teachers believed in creating spaces for students where they felt safe and connected. They believed students were capable of making meaning of their learning, a tenet of constructivist critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). The teachers clearly articulated espoused beliefs, and they were implementing those beliefs in their classrooms. The teachers ensured that their students could enact the personhoods in the classrooms as full, participating members of their community. As Bateson (1994) reminds us: "Membership in a human family or community is an artifact, something that has to be made, not a biological given" (p. 62). The teachers believed in creating community in their classrooms and they did. The teachers believed that the change was a declaration of their sense of solidarity and a testament to their roles as social justice educators in changing the world (Oakes & Lipton, 1998). We tapped into their sense of social justice, and once we named and reiterated the principles for the entire school staff, they saw the project as promoting socially just and equitable outcomes for the students (Rigby, 2014; Theoharis, 2007).

However, the iterative process of building community through relationships demanded a constant and consistent approach to maintaining that sense of community. What surfaced was the tug of war between exercising co-constructed, liberatory education (Freire, 2011) by providing full outward freedom (Dewey, 1938) and full participatory democracy (Shor, 1992) on the one

hand and the unavoidable replication of the banking system of education through traditional teaching practices on the other (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 2011). The teachers worked consistently to establish relationships of trust with the students that enabled them to create a community of learners, manifesting what Valenzuela (1999) calls authentic caring. At times, however, the teachers' practices were not aligned with tenets of critical pedagogy and drifted to teacher-dominated lessons with repetition instead of meaning-making. The forces of pacing guides and curricular materials that push for coverage instead of learning confounded the most dedicated teachers, and because in PAR Cycle One the grade-level meetings were not always productive places of adult learning, the teachers sometimes faltered in their espoused common purpose.

The sense of community did not transfer to the adult learning spaces until we, coaches and leaders, shifted the grade-level experiences in the last cycle of inquiry. The evidence from Spring 2020 cycle of inquiry indicated that all school constituents (teachers, coaches, and the principal) have roles in ensuring that the adult relationships are trusting, and the group's work is useful to the teachers and to student learning (see Chapter 7). Teachers have skills and assets that contributed to learning communities in their classrooms, and they inspired and encouraged students to do their best; yet, when these same teachers encountered each other for adult learning, they displayed contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994). Many collaboration meetings became *pro-forma* gatherings in which teachers and coaches went through the agenda and, when finished, went about their business as usual. Thus, we needed to ensure that the adult and student experiences were parallel (Mehta & Fine, 2015). Without adults experiencing critical pedagogy in their professional learning, we could not expect them to enact it fully in classrooms.

Change is complex exacerbated by an equally complex context of challenging adult dynamics. The differences among colleagues fractured the teacher collaboration and challenged

our assumption that we had created a culture that welcomed change. Snowden and Boone (2007) posit that leaders, faced with challenges in a complex change environment, “of primary concern is the temptation to fall back into traditional command-and-control management styles” (p. 5). Faced with the complex challenges of faulty interpersonal relationships impacting the complex structure of grade-level collaboration, we realized we had to do something different. Stacey (1992) posits that change in dynamic situations is non-linear. Therefore, Fullan (1993) states that the “goal then is to get into the habit of experiencing and thinking about educational change processes as an overlapping series of dynamically complex phenomena” (p. 21). We could not force relationships by edict, yet we could manage the factors to facilitate new opportunities for new relationships to emerge because we realized that change does not happen without relationships. As Woulfin and Weiner (2017) declare, “Relationship and team building [are] stepping stones to improving instruction and raising achievement” (p. 17). Thus, the evidence from the last cycle of inquiry indicates that as with strong participatory action research that rests on the principles of activist research, the iterative cycles we undertook in the formal study time frame are completed, but our work is not. We continue to use what we learned about beliefs and practices and the parallel experiences of adults and students to inform our espoused values and future practices. We cannot forget to take time for the intricacies and necessities of adult relationships and adults reaffirming their moral imperatives. In doing so, we heed Love’s (2019) advice to do the interior work so we can do the outer work of social justice. Aguilar (2018) sums this up in two of the 10 principles of the Resilience Manifesto: “Resilience is cultivated through daily habits and thoughts that strengthen dispositions. We cultivate our resilience and become stronger so that we can help others become stronger; we cultivate our resilience so that we have energy to heal and transform the world” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 19). Thus, in responding to the second

research question about how teachers modified their practices to support student learning, we have pockets of success—both in classrooms and in the restructured adult learning spaces—and useful examples for learning from each other, but we intend to continue our quest to live our values. The key validity of activist research is how useful the results are to the participants (Hale, 2008). In this case, the last cycle of inquiry tells us that we now have the right balance between focusing on beliefs and attending to our practices.

Implications

"To repeat what appears to be the same action over and over attentively, mindfully, in a way that makes possible a gradual – almost imperceptible at times – process of change. Practice …refutes the notion of learning as a single, one-way transfer of useful knowledge,… and communities of practice blur the line between aspirants and adepts because both are still developing" (Bateson, 1994, p. 115).

We are all—aspirants and adepts—still learners, always in the process of becoming better. The reaches of our knowledge, skills, and dispositions in practice, policy, and research, informed on the ground by the iterative, messy work of practitioners, offers lessons for many communities of practice about what changes are necessary (hunter et al., 2013**).** In the following sections, I address the implications for local practice and policy as well as wider implications for others who undertake social justice values in their educational work and state and national policy. Additionally, I discuss the implications for research, including the PAR research process and research recommendations, specifically in the convergence of culture and the process of schooling in the Latino community.

Implications for Practice

The agreements we made in our PAR Pre-Cycle did not materialize fully into practice as we had hoped initially. Through the research in PAR Cycle One, we found that we needed to

consistently remind ourselves of our beliefs as the critical platform to change our practice. The PAR project shed light on how the teachers needed to have a collective mission that allowed them to espouse beliefs and work at enacting them in community. In that process, as they engage in praxis—action and reflection—to interrogate how their practices match their beliefs, they need support from more experienced adult practitioners, namely coaches and the school leader.

The teachers held strong beliefs that influenced their work, but in the absence of a strong adult community of practice, good work is often accomplished in isolation divorced from a unifying mission and purpose. The teachers expressed a desire to reflect collectively with colleagues about their practice within the context of the specific goal (e.g., dismantling the banking system of education). Dialogue is a powerful tool for change (Freire, 2011), and providing the regular space for the teachers to channel those beliefs into actual change of practices is crucial for the collective improvement of student learning. In fact, that space offers a way forward to co-create the illusive internal coherence of school reform (Elmore, 2004). However, their practice recommendations omit the emphasis on the moral imperatives that undergird social justice leadership and the kind of adult learning and adult communities that supply that regular support (Theoharis, 2010; Tredway et al., forthcoming).

Having learned of the challenges to teacher collaboration from our research in PAR Cycle One, we shifted the approach and practiced what Dewey (1938) called "outward freedom." We tapped into the moral convictions of the teachers and created the opportunity for their active participation in the process of changing student learning. The collective and democratic participation of the teachers provided purpose and meaning to the work. Administrators and instructional coaches provided a great service to teachers by exercising outward freedom, for as Dewey (1938) states,

> Without its existence it is practically impossible for a teacher to gain knowledge of the individual with whom he is concerned. Enforced quiet and acquiescence prevent pupils from disclosing their real natures. They enforce artificial uniformity. They put seeming before being. (p. 62)

As we examined the challenges to teacher collaboration, we unearthed precisely how teachers simply present a façade of collaboration and collegiality instead of fully engaging in the work. In shifting our approach, we enacted a fundamental tenet of critical pedagogy: the co-construction of learning and practice among teachers through the regular practice of reaffirming values so that we transfer those to practice.

Policy Implications: Micro and Meso

"Each person is calibrated by experience, almost like a measuring instrument for difference, so discomfort is informative and offers a starting point for new understanding"
(Bateson, 1994, p. 17).

As the school leader and lead researcher, I needed to understand how the teachers' assets and experiences are key to supporting their growth and development more comprehensively and collaboratively. Aligning the teachers' beliefs and values with the focus and purpose of the school and the district's priorities helped the teachers accept more readily the opportunity for collaboration and professional development, especially for teachers with more experience, who are often more resistant to change (Hargreaves, 2005; Huberman, 1993; Little, 2006). Therefore, any initiative must have a clear and meaningful purpose, and the participants, to the greatest extent possible, need to be afforded an opportunity to co-construct it (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 2011; Shor, 1992). Leaders at the district level should engage the site administrators to understand their beliefs and values when it comes to professional development and the feasibility of enacting the change initiative purposefully and meaningfully. "What goes around comes around" is an old

adage. As we contend in our findings, adult learning experiences need to be parallel to how they are expected to perform; from the superintendent's office to the district meetings to the site level professional meetings, if we want teachers to enact practices in classrooms, we must practice them in adult learning spaces.

Policy Implications: Macro

"A philosophy of education, like any theory, has to be stated in words, in symbols. But so far as it is more than verbal, it is a plan for conducting education. Like any plan, it must be framed with reference to what is to be done and how it is to be done. . . a philosophy of education based upon a philosophy of experience" (Dewey 1938, pp. 28–29).

The implications of the study findings at the macro level involve the teacher preparation programs in universities. Though many universities may prepare teachers using a social justice lens, university administrators should ensure that the schools where teaching candidates do their practicum align with the teaching candidates' values and social priorities; after all, as Shor (1992) posits, "education is politics" (p. 11). Teacher preparation programs need to prepare teaching candidates with the understanding that teaching is political and that they must resist forces that promote social inequality within schools (Cooper, 2003). Within the frame of education as politics, learning institutions need to foster environments that support what Freire (2011) calls generative themes. These are issues that unfold in practice, are studied by the persons closest to the work, and unearth ways of solving problems by the persons who are in the context and unified by the common purpose of creating a more equitable learning experience for those involved (Guajardo et al., 2016; hunter et al., 2013). The results must be useful to the participants, and that standard of validity for practice research is critical (Hale, 2008). Because of the unfolding nature of generative themes, there are research implications for all researchers but particularly those engaging in research that is "close to the bone" of authentic practice.

Implications for Research

From the start of our PAR project, we realized that our CPR group members held strong values and beliefs. At first, we were following Elmore's (2002) edict to "grab people by their practice, and their hearts and minds will follow" (p. 3). However, we learned from the first PAR cycle that our teachers' values and beliefs strongly influenced how they saw themselves as practitioners and that simply focusing on their practice divested them of their collective identity.

We learned we had to adapt and apply "steady flexibility," that is, observing and understanding the vicissitudes of life and make the necessary structural changes without changing the overall objective. The most important implication for research is to understand one's context to determine whether rigid or steady flexibility is called for. Bateson (1994) posits that "[g]iven a choice, as we are later in life, most people choose not to learn and therefore not to change except in superficial ways" (p. 68). The banking system of education (Freire, 2011) established that the teacher is the holder of all knowledge and the one who dispenses it to the students. The fear of appearing inept or incompetent when learning something is camouflaged with rejection and false bravado. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers create, to the extent possible, a common approach that creates a sense of security in numbers, that is, confidence that everyone one else is on board, as well as a sense of community with similarly oriented colleagues.

Research Recommendations

Educational theorists have written about the convergence of culture and schooling. Valdés (1996) in her seminal work, *Con Respeto*, elucidates the power of *educación* as a concept that goes beyond mere schooling; *educación* is a multifaceted development process imbued with culture, language, tradition, and gender and age roles. It is a holistic approach done in family and

community. Similarly, Bateson (1994) posits, "The models for a more responsive sense of self might be borrowed across lines of culture and gender or be treasured from an undamaged childhood" (p. 74).

A Quandary: What's Culture Got to Do With It?

The importance of relationships became evident in the Pre-cycle as a precursor for taking risks, to feeling a sense of belonging, to supporting and enticing student attendance as well as taking risks in PAR Cycle Two. Humanizing relationships are central to critical pedagogy (Freire, 2011), but our set of beliefs about liberatory education did not quite match the family belief systems about education. Because many teachers themselves had been raised in families with a different belief system, they were conflicted. While we are not clear yet on the full picture of how culture may be a factor in our journey toward a school that focuses on critical pedagogy, some complexity of cultural factors emerged. And, because participatory action research as a practice in our school does not end with the dissertation, we will be examining these concerns in the future.

In general, our families have traditional ideas about the role of the teachers and students, and this did not necessarily match the beliefs we were espousing. The family belief systems about school influenced the relationships of students (70% Latinx in our school) to teachers (90% second language learners from Latinx families). Dewey (1938) posited:

> Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. . . . Teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced. (p. 18)

The families sending their children to schools in a system permeated with traditional teaching practices and the teachers instructing those children are all products of the same system and agents of perpetuating them. The schooling experience of the parents becomes interwoven with their familial and cultural expectations, which give rise to a belief system perpetuated and sustained with supports outside of school. As we saw how students reacted, we began to see a larger need to work with families in the process of co-developing a belief system that could better serve their children.

Valdés (1996) documents the intersectionality of *respeto*, (respect) and *educación* (schooling). Someone who shows respect is *educado*, meaning properly raised, well-spoken, attentive, or hospitable. A *mal educado* is someone with poor manners, boorish or disrespectful, whose behavior reflects badly on the parents. Valdés (1996) writes: "*Respeto* in its broadest sense is a set of attitudes toward individuals and/or the roles that they occupy. . . Comments such as '*Los hijos tienen que obedecer'* (Children have to be obedient) reflect a set of rules that were accepted as governing the behavior of individuals occupying particular roles" (p. 130).

Besides the obvious influence of the banking system of education on established teacher and student roles, culture played an intricate role in building and sustaining relationships. Most classroom teachers and students at our school are Latino/a. The students often come to the school conditioned to listen passively to show how *bien educados* they are. With few exceptions, the Black and Asian students at our school share with Latinos the cultural expectations of listening to and doing what the adults (teachers) ask them to do. Therefore, just as relationships form the backbone of learning, they form the backbone of cultural identities of the adults. The teachers must understand the cultural expectations and yet work with the students to become agents of their learning. The teachers need to support the co-creation of cultural and educational ecologies

that offer “a radical shift in our views of learning and in our perceptions of youth from non-dominant communities so that they can become agents of newly imagined futures” (Gutiérrez, 2011, p. 187). The newly informed futures Gutierrez refers to is a future in which we respect culture but shift power dynamics to be critical educators, teachers, and learners. We see this conundrum on the horizon as an asset and an implication for further research.

Leadership Development

“*The business of human community includes the shared construction and conservation of meaning and compassion that exist only as they are lived*” (Bateson 1994, p. 63).

To paraphrase, the business of leadership includes the shared construction and conservation of meaning and compassion that exist only as they are lived. Leadership is the spiral binding together the pages of different lives, all sharing a place in time. In this section, I discuss the symbolism of the spiral, and the spiral notebook, to my development. I discuss the early learning at home as the foundation for my schooling and the seedling of my values and beliefs. I provide examples of the practical application of those values and beliefs in my practice and present the importance of building relationships or coalitions as I delve into praxis: action and reflection. I describe the iteration of praxis and the importance of exercising steady flexibility through the process (see Figure 14).

The Spiral Notebook

To understand my leadership development, I start in second grade. The evolution of my leadership was deliberate and informed by the processes of finding myself as a person. The spark of the development was a mysterious spiral notebook from second grade. My second-grade teacher held important things in that notebook—its wiry, flexible back binding together multiple possibilities for pride, pain, and next steps. Perhaps it even held my story. I will never know. What I do know is that the spiral notebook was evidence of my ignorance and my awareness of

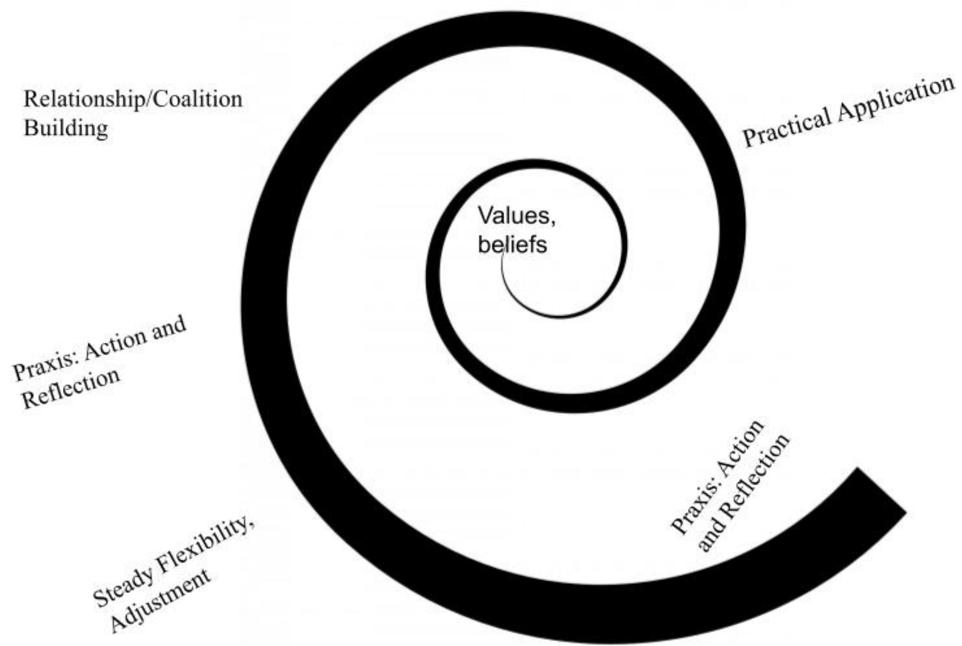


Figure 14. Leadership Spiral.

it. It represented a missed opportunity for my teacher to teach me. Yet, the spiral notebook awakened in me a new identity, and though I did not know it then, it inspired me to overcome it.

Values/Beliefs

Bateson (1994) posits that “the lessons of school gain authority because they are layered onto earlier informal learning in the home, which is where we learn how and what to learn and how to transfer knowledge from one situation to another” (p. 42). What Bateson described as layered lessons, I called spirals of knowledge and learning. My experience with the spiral notebook, my inability to continue studying beyond my primary education, the death of my mother, and subsequent migration to the United States. My encounter with a new culture, a new language, and a new reality provided me with spiraling cycles of knowledge and learning that cemented my values and beliefs and that Bruner (1960) says are how we construct knowledge. The spiral is iconic or a visual representation, symbolic because it has meaning, and then enactive because I act on this learning and knowledge. All of this is the kind of learning I value and want for children.

My mother ingrained in me these values: the importance of knowing how to read and write and the belief that being poor does not mean being incapable of learning. These values influenced my desire to do more, to learn more. These values and beliefs became a part of me, and I applied them to my different circumstances.

Practical Applications

Bateson (1994) states that “it is impossible to step into the same river twice, one can learn from each return” (p. 44). Every cycle in the spiral of my development as a person provided me with the knowledge and learning that I would need as a leader; each experience elevated me, returning me to the same river but holding a different perspective: president of my high school

Latino club and human relations commissioner, cultural ambassador and peer counselor in my community college, co-chair of the Chicano Commencement at my university, teacher, and commencement speaker at my graduate program. Although my values had evolved from the importance of knowing how to read and write to utilizing reading and writing for a higher purpose, my belief that poverty did not equal inability strengthened. Therefore, the practical applications of my values and beliefs evolved and adapted with each experience to meet the needs facing me.

However, it was not just the application of my values and beliefs by themselves. They were part of the values and beliefs of people with whom I built relationships. That is why I was committed to a value system as the basis of the dissertation; I knew what I espoused but not how to fully enact these values with and for coaches and teachers. The spiral learning in the iterative cycles of inquiry reinforced what I intuitively knew but did not know how to actualize fully in my work as a school leader. I now know what Nachamonivitch (1990) speaks of in *Free Play*, the first book we read for the doctoral program—that this creative experience has been a spiritual path. As such, “the adventure is about us, about the deep self, the composer in all of us, about originality, meaning not which is new, but which is fully and originally ourselves” (p. 13). Not the same river twice, but a learning journey.

Relationship/Coalition Building

Freire (2011) calls critical pedagogy a pedagogy of relationships, genuine, humanizing relationships. Relationships are at the core of my development. I learned, developed, and evolved because of the relationships I constructed through the cycles of my spiral and that which I co-constructed with others in the school. The relationships that supported the work of an administrator and encouraged me to embark on a project like a PAR to look more closely and

delve into a more effective way to enact the beliefs that reading and writing need to serve a higher purpose and that poverty cannot be equated with ability. Building a common purpose on the same beliefs was a crucial step in my leadership development. The building of a small coalition of similarly minded people encouraged me to take the chance and speak frankly with the staff. My apprehension "about informing the school community about [the project] because I was concerned that they would second guess the decisions I would be making" was unfounded (L. Rodriguez, Reflective Memo, September 26, 2020). The relationships I built were key to move more decisively to implement the project.

***Praxis*: Action and Reflection**

The implementation of the project, the action we engaged in, was a return to the river (Bateson, 1994). However, the return this time was with a group of people committed to exploring a shift in practice, to creating a space where teachers learn to teach differently and allow the students to learn differently as well. "All my years in education I have been driven by the desire to create a learning environment that is authentically demanding and authentically vulnerable. It is a learning environment infused with respect of self and others" (L. Rodriguez, Reflective Memo, February 28, 2020). Critical pedagogy as a pedagogy of humanizing relationships (Freire, 2011) was the perfect approach to effecting change. I welcomed the opportunity to create a point of convergence for a collective set of values and beliefs with an equalizing pedagogy for the benefit of our historically underserved students. Freire (2011) posited that "education is constantly remade in the *praxis*. In order to be it must become" (p. 84). Therefore, we engaged in "becoming" collectively.

However, the progress presented me with a moment to pause, a moment of doubt. At one point during the project, "I [felt] disillusioned because I [felt] like we were not making enough

progress [changing teacher practice]. I [questioned] if critical pedagogy was too abstract of an approach (L. Rodriguez, Reflective Memo, September 26, 2020). The process of reflection prompted me to adjust the approach while remaining flexibly consistent.

Steady Flexibility/Adjustment

Bateson (1994) reminds us: "A willingness to offer full participation to all its people is in some sense the criterion of a good society.... Almost everywhere a person is one who knows others even as she or he is known: more than living tissue, a participant" (p. 62). As I learned about the strong values that lived in our teachers and saw the challenges that impeded their collaboration, the disappointment I felt made me consider a different approach to effecting the change, another approach to becoming. Adjusting the process required that I exercise steady flexibility, that is, anchor the project to the values and beliefs and inviting everybody else to become the change we wanted to see at our school. The layers of my experience that Bateson (1994) described converged with the generative themes Freire (2011) posited. That is, my knowledge and my experience converged with "the complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites striving for plenitude" (p. 101). For me to adjust, I needed to understand the layering or cycle of the spiral, of my leadership. And herein lies the crucial lesson: the adjustment leads to another iteration of praxis: action and reflection, and unless we remain stagnant, the cycle repeats. The number of visits to the river will be different, but each visit will yield a lesson. Just as the water deposits sand in the riverbank in layers, the spiral affords me the opportunity to acquire a different perspective; for though I may end up facing in the same direction after each cycle, I will never remain in the same position. My leadership growth and development move forward and upward.

Conclusion

Growth and development are spiral; they are cyclical, and each spiral provides a different perspective. Therein lies the change.

> In all learning, one is changed, becoming someone slightly—or profoundly—different; but learning is welcome when it affirms a continuing sense of self. What is learned then becomes a part of that system of self-definition that filters all future perceptions and possibilities of learning. It is only from a sense of continuing truths that we can draw the courage for change, even for the constant, day-to-day changes of growth and aging. (Bateson, 1994 p. 79)

My growth and development as a leader grew out of a set of values and beliefs that germinated in my early years and sprouted that fateful day in second grade. Through the PAR research cycles, I re-discovered the importance of tapping into ingrained values to effect change. Understanding what motivates others and making them participants of the process was a key finding. An essential change component is relationships, relationships between teachers and students for learning, and relationships between and among adults to grow and develop. Freire (2011) reminds us that no change happens without dialogue. He also states that "dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. . . Because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is commitment to others" (p. 89). As I developed my sense of learning and ascended the spiral of knowledge and experience, what I discovered was how dialogue was absent in the missed opportunities for teaching and learning I experienced, and that dialogue was the method for my becoming the right teacher for my students. Through dialogue, I attempted to be the right administrator for the teachers at Gran Vista. Change cannot happen without dialogue and heeding Freire's (2011) words: "[D]ialogue cannot exist without humility . . .dialogue cannot

exist without faith in humankind . . .dialogue cannot exist without trust . . .dialogue cannot exist without hope . . .dialogue cannot exist without critical thinking" (pp. 91–93).

The focus of practice of this participatory action research addressed the inequity perpetuated by the banking system of education teaching practices and the detrimental impact it has on historically underserved students. Through this project, disrupting the status quo felt like a redress of the unequal and inequitable access to quality teaching for Black and Latinx students. The work will continue for it is easy to regress to what is familiar and comfortable. Change, as we discovered through the PAR project and as Freire (2011) surmised, requires strong convictions (feelings, values, beliefs) and sharp minds (critical thinking) in an appropriate balance.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
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Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Luis Rodriguez
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 2/3/2021
Re: Ame1_UMCIRB 19-001613
UMCIRB 19-001613
Changing Teacher Practice: Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review on 2/2/2021. It was the determination of the UMCIRB Chairperson (or designee) that this revision does not impact the overall risk/benefit ratio of the study and is appropriate for the population and procedures proposed.

Please note that any further changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a Final Report application to the UMCIRB prior to the Expected End Date provided in the IRB application. If the study is not completed by this date, an Amendment will need to be submitted to extend the Expected End Date. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Description
Extending expected study end date to 6/30/2021.

APPENDIX B: KINDERGARTEN WORK PLAN

AGENDA ITEM	NOTES FOR 2/27/20	TO DO / NEXT STEPS
Lesson planning **Math:**	**Teacher A: Finishing Unit 6 of foneticas Working on Unit 6 in reading Math: Working on numbers**	**NEXT WEEK: Unidad 7 Semana 1 Reading:Unidad 6 Semana 3 Math: Finishing Number Unit Science: Lesson 2.**
	Isabel: Finishing Unit 6 of foneticas Working of Unit 6: semana 3 in reading Math: Working on numbers	**NEXT WEEK: Unidad 7 Semana 1 Reading : Unit 7 Semana 1 Math: Finishing Number Unit Science: Goal is to teach one lesson.**
	Teacher B: Working on Unit 6 Semana 1 Working Unidad 5 for reading Math: Working on numbers	**NEXT WEEK: unidad 6 Semana 2 Reading Unidad 6 Semana 1 Math: Finishing Number Unit Science: Goal is to teach one lesson.**

APPENDIX C: THIRD GRADE STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Gran Vista Elementary Third Grade Focal Student Profile
2019-2020

Name: ______________________________

Classroom:___________________________

Birthdate: ___________________________

Year started at Dolores Huerta: __________

Focal Student Interview:

Picture of focal student

SEL	
What are you good at?	
What is something that is a challenge for you?	
What is something you want me to know about you?	
What was a favorite memory from last year?	
How do you ask for help?	
What do you do when you have strong feelings?	
What do you like to do outside of school?	
How do you feel when you make a mistake? And what do you do?	
Reading	
Do you like to read? (Or be read to?) and why?	
Where and when and with whom do you read?	

Gran Vista Elementary Third Grade Focal Student Profile
2019-2020

What is your favorite book or type of books?	
Is there something else you would like me to know about you as a reader?	
What is the hardest part about reading for you?	
Math	
When do you use math outside of school?	
What do you like best about math?	
What do you like least about math?	
Tell me about a time you were frustrated with math?	
Tell me about a time you felt proud of yourself with math?	
How do you feel when you make a math mistake?	
How can I help you learn math better?	
Do you like to work with a partner, group or alone when doing math?	