CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN A DIGITALLY MEDIATED CLASSROOM: PRACTICES, CHALLENGES, AND NEEDS

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This article reports the results of a pilot qualitative case study on the enactment of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy for multilingual students in digitally mediated elementary classrooms. The data include curriculum, teaching artifacts, student work, teacher journals, and interviews with ENL teachers in which they reflected about their online teaching. When the data were analyzed using a thematic analysis method, three themes emerged: the culturally and linguistically responsive multimodal literacies instruction that teachers enacted, the challenges that teachers confronted, and the types of support teachers need in teaching multilingual children more effectively. Implications for online instruction of multilingual students are discussed.

Keywords: culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, multicultural literature, multilingual learners, multimodal literacies, online instruction

As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the number of multilingual and multidialectal students of color continues to increase, comprising more than 50% of students in U.S. public schools, and making students of color a new mainstream (Enright, 2011). However, not many teachers feel that they are prepared to teach multilingual learners (i.e., English learners) in a culturally responsive way (Sleeter, 2012). Additionally, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has dealt teachers further change, turning the classroom into a digitally mediated space. Thus, in order to provide insights into what culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP) looks like in online classroom settings, along with strategies, challenges, and needs of teachers, this study examines the practices, challenges, and needs of two teachers of multilingual learners in their enactment of CLRP in their virtual elementary classrooms with the following research questions: (a) How do teachers enact culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy in a virtual classroom? and (b) What kinds of challenges do teachers confront and what kinds of support do teachers need in their enactment of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy online?

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Theoretical Framework

More than 50 years of research has shown that culturally relevant/responsive/sustaining pedagogy promotes the academic success, cultural competence, and positive identity formation of multilingual learners (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Moll, 1990; Paris & Alim, 2014). Gay (2000) summarized the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching based on her review of programs that were successful in enabling marginalized students of color to accomplish academic, cultural, and personal competence as follows:

> The praxis of culturally responsive pedagogy confirms the theory. When instructional processes are consistent with the cultural orientations, experiences, and learning styles of marginalized African, Latin, Native, and Asian American students, their school achievement improves significantly. This success is most evident in learning "spaces" where culturally relevant content, teacher attitudes and expectations, and instructional actions converge. (p. 181)

Ladson-Billings (1995) attempted to articulate culturally relevant pedagogy through an examination of the pedagogical practices of eight exemplary teachers of African American students. From a context of Black feminist thought, Ladson-Billings defined three criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy: (a) an ability to develop students academically, (b) the willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and (c) the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. According to Ladson-Billings, teachers who implemented culturally relevant pedagogy were teachers who believed that all students are capable of academic success, who made connections and practiced scaffolding with all their students in collaborative communities of learners, and who used multifaceted assessments that incorporated multiple forms.

In addition, multilingual learners can benefit by recognizing and learning how language works in different content-specific textual contexts (e.g., language arts, science, social studies, math) (Schleppegrell, 2004). Therefore, researchers (de Jong et al., 2013; Echevarria et al., 2018; Lucas et al., 2008) proposed linguistically responsive pedagogy; an early version of this pedagogy focused on the development of academic language in connection with content by drawing on second language acquisition theories (Cummins, 2000; Krashen, 1981; Swain, 1995). For example, Lucas et al. (2008) proposed the six understandings of linguistically responsive teachers: (a) the distinction of academic language and conversational language; (b) the concepts of comprehensible input/output and zone of proximal development; (c) the social interaction for the development of conversational and academic English; (d) the connection of the home language with second language for language development; (e) the importance of a safe and welcoming learning environment for learning, and (f) explicit instruction of linguistic form and function. On the other hand, Hollie (2018) defined culturally and linguistically responsive teaching as "the *validation and affirmation* of indigenous (home) culture and language for the purpose of *building and bridging* the students to success in the culture of academia and in mainstream society" by providing appropriate scaffolding instruction for independence (p. 27, italics in the original). This study combines these two conceptualizations of linguistically responsive teaching with the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy by centering both language and culture in the teaching and learning processes. So, while enacting the culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy of this study, teachers not only utilize, integrate, and center students' linguistic and cultural repertoires, but also enhance metalinguistic awareness in connection with disciplinary texts in their pedagogical practices.

Methods

Context and Participants

This qualitative case study was conducted in two online classrooms of second-grade multilingual students in two suburban elementary schools located in New York State. The research participants are Laura and Jennifer, who teach ENL (English as a new language) to those multilingual students.

Laura has a master's degree in elementary teaching, certifications in TESOL and reading, and 23 years of teaching experience: ENL teacher for five years, first-grade teacher for ten years, kindergarten teacher for six years, and reading teacher for two years. Laura teaches ENL to 14 K–2 multilingual students, 10 who are currently attending school in person and four who are attending school virtually. These numbers have shifted throughout the school year, as some students who were initially learning virtually have returned to school for in-person instruction. She teaches her virtual and in-person students simultaneously during their daily stand-alone instructional time; she modifies her lessons to be accessible to her virtual learners. She has students who speak Chinese, Polish, Chuukese, Farsi, and Spanish.

Jennifer has a master's degree in TESOL and 20 years of teaching experience; she has been an elementary ENL teacher for15 years. Prior to becoming an ENL teacher, she was an elementary classroom teacher for two years and a middle/high school Spanish teacher for three years. She has taught in urban, rural, and suburban districts in both New York State and California. Jennifer is fully remote this year, in both asynchronous and synchronous format, and teaches ENL to all of her district's 31 second-grade multilingual students who selected remote learning. Ten of those students receive stand-alone instruction in addition to the asynchronous co-taught lessons that are posted in the district's remote second-grade Google classrooms. Jennifer's multilingual students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, speaking more than 22 different languages between them. Their top two languages are Urdu and Chinese.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected for this study include curriculum, teaching artifacts, student work, teacher journals, and interviews with teachers in which they reflected about their online teaching. Formal interviews were conducted three times for about 1½ hours each with occasional informal interviews; formal interviews were transcribed verbatim. All the data including curricular units and interviews were analyzed using a thematic method.

Researcher positionality is important in qualitative research because researchers construct findings through their past histories, perspectives, and interactions with research participants in their research practices (Charmaz, 2006). Heeok (author and researcher) is a transnational educational researcher and teacher educator from Korea, a different cultural context from Laura and Jennifer. Laura (participant) and Jennifer (participant) are White middle-class ENL teachers. All of us have a strong passion for and commitment to the education of multilingual learners. It should be acknowledged that the interpretations, analysis, and synthesis of the data were constructed through our knowledge, lived experiences, and world views.

Heeok identified the four themes—text choice, multimodal text and multimodal instruction, appropriation of digital tools, and family and community involvement—by reading interview data and curricular units multiple times in relation to CLRP in six phases: (a) becoming familiar with the idea; (b) generating initial codes; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes; (e) defining themes; and (f) write-up (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and then discussed the identified themes with Lara and Jennifer, the research participants. This, together with the yearlong period of informal conversations and interactions with each other in our community of teacher leaders, served as a member check, and multiple data sources were employed to triangulate the findings. This study was limited by a lack of classroom observations or interviews with students and parents.

Findings
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Pedagogy in a Virtual Classroom

Heeok identified these four themes from analyzing case study data regarding culturally and linguistically responsive instructional practices in a virtual classroom: (a) choice of multicultural literature as a text; (b) the creation of multimodal text and multimodal literacies instruction in a virtual classroom; (c)

appropriation of digital tools, and (d) connection of classroom learning to family and community practices. Laura and Jennifer reflected on these themes in both interviews and journals.

Text choice. Laura is cognizant of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy in both in-person and virtual classrooms; thus, she chose mentor texts that focused on diversity. One example is *The Colors of Us,* written and illustrated by Karen Katz (Katz, 2020). Using this text, she encouraged students to explore how the characters represented their diversity by explaining that diversity means that no two people are the same. In Laura's lessons, she emphasized the importance of embracing diversity and differences, and the power of diversity in current U.S. society. Jennifer chose the text *The Day You Begin,* written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by Rafael López (Woodson & López, 2018). She found that students connect to this text because it is visually appealing and delves into the concepts of identity, class, linguistic background and friendship, all of which are engaging topics for young learners.

Multimodal text and multimodal instruction. Using Katz's book *The Colors of Us,* Laura designed this lesson to be taught over five school days (see Table 1, page 44). On Day 1, she engaged the students in a book introduction, encouraging them to make predictions and read for enjoyment. On Day 2, she guided her students through a retelling of the story, focusing on story sequence—First, Next, Last/Beginning/Middle/End. On Day 3, she guided students in discussing story elements, the characters, setting, plot, problems, and solutions and resolutions. On Day 4, she took her students for a walk around the school and asked them to talk about the different skin tones they saw—just like Lena, the character in the book, did as she walked around her neighborhood. On Day 5, as a culminating activity Laura provided materials for students to create self-portraits to demonstrate their diversity, asking them to draw themselves and encouraging them to choose the color they identify as their skin tone. The five-day classroom learning sequence is depicted in Figure 1.

Jennifer taught the writing unit in an asynchronous format, based on the district's second-grade writing curriculum. This unit, which was positioned at the beginning of the school year, in September. centered around Woodson and López's book *The Day You Begin*, as a mentor text to engage students and facilitate discussions about identity. During the unit students also focused on linguistic elements. They learned about and identified nouns, verbs, and adjectives; these parts of speech served as a vehicle for students to discuss their personal identities. After developing the vocabulary to talk about identity, the students created a written project with an artistic component. Students wrote an identity poem, called a diamante poem, and created a piece of visual art to accompany their writing. The poems were then compiled into a slideshow, so that all students in the classroom were able to view each other's work.

This writing project was completed by all remote second-grade students, regardless of ENL status. The structure of the poem that the students were writing isolated parts of speech, allowing an entry point for even the newest speaker of English. As a result, all students, from entering through commanding, were able to successfully complete this unit. In addition to writing the poems, the students participated in breakout rooms to share what they had written before the poems were then compiled into a classroom slideshow. Jennifer displayed the multimodal texts, explanations, and directions on PowerPoint slides, which included videos, pictures, visual images, and voice recordings.[1] The virtual classroom learning sequence and writing a diamante poem are depicted in Appendices A and B, pp. 50–51.

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[1]For the full list and sites of all digital tools and resources used for the PowerPoint presentation slides, see Digital Tools, listed before References.

Figure 1

Classroom learning sequence, Days 1–5

Note: Included with permission (Katz, 2020 paperback).

   Digital tools. Laura utilized Google Classroom for instruction with Epic books and Learning A-Z resources to read books online with students. Assignments and learning tasks were posted in Google

Classroom, either in the form of Google Slides or as a Nearpod presentation. Jennifer employed Nearpod for both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. The Synchronous Nearpod learning opportunity allowed Jennifer to direct the pace at which her students progressed through the lesson. For example, in a lesson on close reading, the students participated in a synchronous learning opportunity using Nearpod. They were engaged by a poll question asking their opinion of the text, followed by a slide featuring an excerpt from the text *Cozy*, written and illustrated by Jan Brett (Brett, 2020). After that, there was a discussion question, followed by a quiz question. Students submitted their answers at this point and Jennifer was able to view student responses to assess comprehension. The slide presented after that was a discussion board where students offered feedback about their opinion. The final slide was an opportunity for students to draw their favorite character from the text. This type of interactive, synchronous instruction engages students and enables them to feel that they are participating as a part of a larger group. The virtual instructional sequence using digital tools is depicted in Appendix C[2] (see p. 52).

To engage students during synchronous remote instruction, Laura used Google Meet, whereas Jennifer used Zoom and the Zoom breakout room functions. During the lesson, a question or discussion topic was posed to the entire group. A spokesperson was selected for each Zoom breakout room and the students were sent to their breakout rooms to discuss the topic. The teachers popped into various breakout rooms to facilitate the conversation and to ensure student understanding of the task. After a prescribed amount of time had passed, the student groups were all brought back into the main room and the spokesperson for that group presented what the group had discussed. Laura and Jennifer utilized Google Translate and Talking Points for multilingual students' language and parental support.

Family and community involvement. Laura noted that family members often participated in Google Meet and commented about how they were learning English along with their children. They listened in on instruction and contributed their thoughts and ideas along with their children's. Laura said that she was able to form close connections with families because she was, in essence, invited into their homes on a daily basis. Students were able to ask their parents questions about their culture, and rich conversations would often ensue as a result of the mentor text that Laura was reading with her virtual learners. Jennifer also integrated family and school community involvement into her virtual classroom practices. For example, the identity poems her multilingual children wrote in an asynchronous class were shared in a virtual poetry café. The virtual café functioned as a family and community sharing space, and helped supplement family involvement that might have been diminished because of the asynchronous instruction format. Jennifer reflected that:

My diamante poem classroom project was expanded to school and community involvement. Prior to the shutdown, these projects were completed as a family unit, with both parents and children co-creating meaning. This event was attended by families of ELLs and non-ELLs alike.

The enactment of CLRP online must overcome two significant challenges: the first challenge is to create opportunities for students to collaborate with each other, and the second challenge is to overcome the digital divide between dominant students and multilingual students from under-resourced families. To overcome these two situations, Laura stated the importance of another teacher or parental support for their children's online education:

Without the support of an additional teacher, my students are too young to engage in break-out room activities. My students also require a lot of guidance when completing activities that can prove difficult to do remotely. They do not have the level of independence that older students have. Parental support is essential.

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[2]For the full list and sites of all digital tools and resources used for the PowerPoint presentation slides, see Digital Tools, listed before References.

Jennifer as well mentioned the importance of technological support to and from parents given that the usual technological needs and difficulties are intensified for multilingual learners because of the digital divide:

Another need at the elementary level is more technological support provided to parents. The digital divide is real . . . [F]or multilingual learners for whom access to technology is new, the need for families to gain familiarity is high. At the elementary level, parents are a vital link in the educational process as these students are not yet fully independent in a virtual learning environment.

Jennifer's statement indicates unequal access and use of digital resources, which means "unequal ability to make use of the Internet, due not only to unequal access but also to other factors (such as education, language, content, etc.)" (Warschauer, 2011, p. 5). The digital divide—that is, both unequal access to digital devices and the inability to use technology in a productive way—creates a disparity between students according to their socioeconomic status, and serves to exacerbate the outcome divide. Thus, Warschauer (2011) defined the digital divide as "social stratification due to unequal ability to access, adapt, and create knowledge via use of information and communication technologies (ICT)" (p. 5). In order to eliminate the digital divide, both its access disparity and its usage disparity, this study shows that more technological material and educational support are needed for multilingual parents and students, particularly in low-income school areas.

Needs in the Enactment of CLRP Online

Both Laura and Jennifer identified needs for family support and technology in enacting CLRP to effectively teach virtual multilingual students. They also mentioned material needs such as a document camera, Chromebooks, desktop computers, and stable Internet connectivity at students' homes. Most important, Jennifer pointed out the lack of multicultural books in classroom libraries, including, she noted, "virtual Bitmoji libraries that have become commonplace during remote instruction," and explained the need for collaboration when teaching remotely to select the most appropriate texts for multilingual students:

Background and experience with culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy varies greatly. In a brick-and-mortar setting, even though it is still rare, there is still more opportunity for collaboration and discussion. In a virtual setting, teachers often operate in isolation. There's also a lack of access to culturally and linguistically rich texts that lend themselves to unit lessons that enhance student learning. While there may be many materials that exist virtually, not all texts are created equal. Without a sounding board and collegial feedback, texts that are less than culturally responsive may be presented in the classroom. That is why collaboration is critical in a culturally and linguistically responsive learning environment and lack of collaboration is a significant challenge.

As she indicates here, Jennifer recognizes the need for collaboration to decide about what books are relevant to her students with teachers in her school because every student owns a unique cultural and linguistic background, as stated by Freeman et al. (2003): "Not all books about Spanish speakers, for example, are relevant to all Hispanic students. Some books merely perpetuate stereotypes. Others, especially those published in Spain, contain settings and events that are unfamiliar to most Latino students in the United States" (p. 7). Goodman (1982) found several factors beyond ethnicity to be considered for culturally relevant text choice: "socio-cultural-economic institutions, including occupations, housing patterns, and family relationships; setting; chronological time, age, and sex of characters; language variations represented in the text; and readers' experience with certain kinds of texts" (p. 303). This study also shows that teachers need a collaborative space where they can share ideas and discuss

their choice of culturally relevant books related to students' cultures, languages, and lived experiences beyond concluding cultural relevance based on those usual macro categories of language, ethnicity, race, age, and family structural dynamics.

Conclusion

Despite the sudden onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, which did not give them much preparation time for teaching online, the teachers in this study demonstrated the power of teacher agency in their enactment of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLRP) in online classrooms in four ways: choice of multicultural literature, multimodal text and multimodal instruction, appropriation of digital tools, and family and community involvement.

First, the choice of multicultural literature is in accordance with CLRP's concept of the enhancement of cultural competence because multilingual students can connect themselves with the text, classmates, and the multicultural and multilingual world surrounding them. The books chosen by the participants, *The Colors of Us,* written and illustrated by Karen Katz (Katz, 2020), *The Day You Begin,* written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by Rafael López (Woodson & López, 2018), and *Cozy,* written and illustrated by Jan Betts (2020), allowed students to navigate social, linguistic, and cultural boundaries (Ghiso et al, 2012) and to recognize the differences as humanness by sharing their lived experiences of shame, loneliness, and insecurity. These stories function as multicultural tools for students to connect the words with the world (Freire, 1970) because multicultural "literature can authentically mirror or reflect one's life; look through a window to view someone else's world; and open doors offering access both into and out of one's everyday condition" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, xiii).

Second, the creation of multimodal texts and multimodal literacies instruction allows expansion of the existing research on CLRP by demonstrating the pedagogy of multiliteracies, which "creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes" (New London Group, 1996, p. 64). These multilingual children learn language and develop literacy abilities by drawing, writing poems, embodying (i.e., walking through the school building for in-person classes), and sharing their poems and self-portraits in a virtual classroom. In addition, the teacher's creation of multimodal text and multimodal literacies instruction allows students to engage in learning linguistic and literacy elements (i.e., parts of speech, genre knowledge, reading comprehension strategies, and writing), simultaneously recognizing their special identities and appreciating the beauty of diversity and differences in society.

Third, the appropriation of digital tools according to the situated classroom context made the online classroom a more engaging space for multilingual students' learning. Multiple digital tools were used: Nearpod for collaborative learning and formative assessment using polls and quizzes, Google Translate and Talking Points for language support, Epic books for multicultural books, a document camera for virtual teaching, and YouTube for asynchronous lessons and other material. Multilingual students learned and grew by manipulating digital tools (e.g., drawing, answering questions, sharing their writing online, participating in polls) for their own purposes, with an authentic audience in mind in a digitally mediated virtual classroom.

Fourth, connecting classroom literacy learning with family and community practices enabled the culturally sustaining pedagogical practices that the teacher of immigrant transnational adolescents enacted in their classroom, school, and community settings to be demonstrated by making space for their students to embody what they learned in class in their family, school, and community settings (Jeong, 2021). Multilingual students learn on the move, manifesting the concept of literacy as social practice (Street, 1984) and identity practice (Gee, 2008). Laura's multilingual students during their in-person classes walked around the school buildings to see, feel, talk, draw, and embody their inquiry through movement. Jennifer's diamante poem project was expanded into the family and school community when students

shared their identity poems in the virtual poetry café. In an online classroom, parents of Laura's multilingual students invited her to their home by moving their cameras within their homes on a daily basis, which demonstrates the affordance of a virtual classroom beyond geographical boundaries. Even with these promising signs, however, more familial and community support is urgently needed for the education of multilingual students, particularly young children, and more funding is needed for digital educational materials and resources for teachers and students, and technology education and equipment for parents

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the importance of culturally relevant multimodal literacies pedagogy in a digitally mediated space and provides insights into how to expand the existing concept of CLRP that has been enacted in a face-to-face classroom in order to enact CLRP in a virtual classroom. In order to accomplish this, teachers are strongly recommended to: (a) (re)design the virtual classroom environment to have multilinguals learn and embody what they learn through interactions between the culturally relevant texts and the linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and other modes for communication and meaning-making (Kress et al., 2005); (b) utilize, contextualize, and appropriate the multiple semiotic modes and digital tools for multilinguals' multimodal practices for language learning and literacy development; and (c) have multilingual learners embody and connect those classroom multimodal literacies practices (e.g., diamante poems and self-portraits) with community practices that include peers, family, and community members, as demonstrated in this study. Laura and Jennifer worked as transformative intellectual agents to make the digitally mediated classroom a meaningful and engaging space for multilingual children by enacting CLRP, despite the tremendously tight school schedules with challenges such as limited material resources and the new contextual situation of teaching online.

Digital Tools

A-Z resources: https://www.readinga-z.com/
Epic books: https://www.getepic.com/sign-in
Google Meet: https://meet.google.com/
Google Classroom: https://classroom.google.com
Google Translate: https://translate.google.com/
Nearpod: https://nearpod.com/
Talking Points: https://talkingpts.org/
Zoom: https://zoom.us/

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APPENDICES A–C

Note: The images in Appendices A–C were included in the PowerPoint presentation given at the 50th NYS TESOL virtual conference. They are used as an educational teaching tool only; the excerpts here appear under "Fair Use".

APPENDIX A—Writing Project

APPENDIX B—Diamante Poem

Today you will tell your story in the form of a diamante poem. Use the words you selected yesterday to write your poem.

You can type your poem on the slide and then insert an image OR you can write your poem on a piece of paper and then draw a picture.

The picture that you use has to show us what makes you unique.

The Day You Begin … is the day you start to tell your story.

Student Identity Poems

MY POEM

Jamila

Clever   Silly

Run   Hug   Dance

Friendly   Energetic

Sister

The Day You Begin … is the day you start to tell your story.

Student Identity Poems

MY POEM

James

Smart   Helpful

Running   Reading   Riding

Brave   Courteous

Student

APPENDIX C—Digital Tools in Instructional Sequence
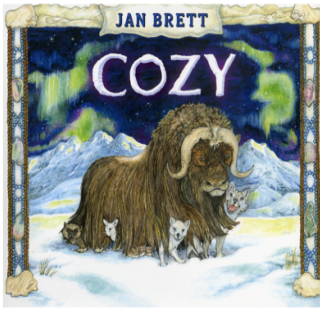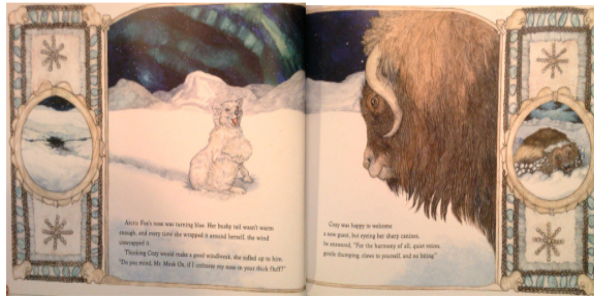
Listen to the text on the
next page. What do
you think canines
means in the passage?