The Common Core State Standards and English learners: Finding the silver lining

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In this article we lay out the tenets of a communicative repertoire (CR) approach to meeting the needs of English learners (ELs) in the context of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). We begin by critiquing the underlying theory of language that has long guided approaches to EL instruction. We then illustrate how the CR approach builds on more contemporary understandings of language and language development, noting its compatibility with the CCSS, and providing an example of what this approach looks like in a twelfth-grade English literature class for ELs. Building from this example, we illustrate the general framework for developing lessons from a CR perspective that align with the CCSS and can be used across a variety of instructional settings. Finally, we discuss what policies and opportunities for teacher professional development might be conducive to supporting this instructional approach and to ensuring that the CCSS is implemented in ways that maximize EL academic achievement and engagement.

Keywords: Common Core State Standards, English language learners, communicative repertoire, multilingualism

1. Introduction. Recently, we met Rachel, a newly retired teacher of K–12 English as a Second Language (ESL), who was relieved to be out of the public school teaching business. Why relieved? After twenty years of teaching, the growing specter of standardization was troubling her. She feared that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) would have negative consequences for her students and her colleagues who teach ESL. Even though she no longer has to worry about her own career, Rachel still worries from the sidelines, lamenting the standards-driven ethos that has taken over the schools. Even her husband expressed his sad awareness of the effects of the CCSS: ‘It’s too bad’, he said, ‘Rachel really loved those kids’.

2. A CR approach differs sharply from other approaches to making the CCSS responsive to the needs of ELs. As schools across the United States begin to implement the CCSS, teachers like Rachel, as well as administrators and parents, are concerned about how the CCSS will affect English learners (ELs). In what follows, we describe in detail and exemplify a communicative repertoire approach to the CCSS. This approach differs sharply from other approaches that focus on ELs. Other approaches to working with ELs also involve attending to language and interaction and the social nature of language learning and use. But many of these approaches can be understood as top-down, seeking merely to identify the features of academic language so that they can be taught explicitly and uncritically to ELs. Some features of language are deemed appropriate and some are deemed inappropriate for schooling (see Duff 2010, Gibbons 2003, Moore & Schleppegrell 2014). But within such approaches, ELs are not encouraged to develop language awareness or afforded much agency to play with the connections between form and meaning that have been presented to them. Language use becomes a process of matching the right set of forms with the right context.

The communicative repertoire (CR) approach begins from the opposite end. Rather than identifying precisely the language features that will scaffold ELs, we start from the point of view that these students’ current communicative repertoires provide the best scaffolding for approaching the CCSS. The CR approach to the CCSS is a bottom-up approach (García & Sylvan 2011) that does not develop out of a manual of aca-
demic language but rather a catalogue of all of the communicative resources that exist in multilingual classrooms. This catalogue is not a set of instructions that students must follow, but rather a guide that both teachers and students can use to expand and transform their communicative repertoires as well as expand and transform the traditional language of schooling. A CR approach asks students to critically engage with and reflect on how they and others do things with language, casting them as meaning makers, not mimics (Gao 2014).

3. THE SILVER LINING: A CR APPROACH TO ENGAGING ELs IN THE CCSS. Some educators have asked whether these new and purportedly more challenging standards will present additional barriers for ELs, who already struggle to access academic material. What language practices will ELs be expected to engage in? How well prepared are teachers to identify and teach such language practices? How will ELs fare academically—and perhaps more importantly, emotionally—on the new high-stakes set of CCSS-aligned assessments? Will ESL teachers find themselves under fire as teacher evaluations are increasingly linked to student performance on such metrics? As Rachel’s story illustrates, these fears have already driven at least one talented, loving, and experienced teacher from the classroom.

Despite these concerns, a closer look at the standards themselves suggests that they have the potential to change not only how ELs use language at school, but also how all students and educators approach language more generally. At all levels and content areas, the CCSS explicitly and consistently articulate the need for students to apply language knowledge purposefully, yet flexibly, to accomplish specific tasks in particular contexts.

For example, the Language Arts standards for second graders emphasize the need, when reading, to convey points of view by ‘speaking in a different voice for each character’.

(1) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.6: Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud. (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/6/b)

The CCSS also pay particular attention to multiple ways of telling stories. The following is again for second graders.

(2) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.9: Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g. Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures. (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/9/)

The CCSS highlight the need for all students to be able to glean information not only through the usual English language texts, but also through pictures.

(3) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot. (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/7/)

Highlighting the importance of developing multimodal literacies, the CCSS require students to present material visually and to use audio and video recordings to support both oral and written arguments. Second graders, for example, need to use digital tools and work with peers when writing.

(4) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.6: With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers. (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/2/6/)
The speaking and listening standards for second graders also call for the use of new media and multiple modes of expression.

(5) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.5: Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

(http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/S/2/5/)

Working collaboratively to create audio presentations, comparing tales told from different points of view, voicing characters in ways that illustrate their differences—these are all standards for language arts explicitly articulated in the CCSS that are aimed at developing LANGUAGE AWARENESS, or what Carter (2003:64) defines as ‘enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language’. They are also just the kinds of practices that bi/multilinguals draw on in their day-to-day practices (Canagarajah 2011, García 2009, Hornberger & Link 2012). As Canagarajah (2011) has noted, bi/multilinguals must continuously draw on various elements of their communicative repertoires in intentional, multimodal, and context-sensitive ways to ‘shuttle between communities’, not simply join one. Thus, for ELs, the CCSS could herald a turning point, provided that educators approach instruction through a critical framework for understanding how, when, where, and why ELs (and, indeed, all students) might use particular elements of their expanding communicative repertoires. And for ELs who have already developed some degree of bi/multilingualism, it is possible that they come to the classroom with even more language awareness than their monolingual, English-speaking peers.

And yet a number of barriers may prevent ELs from benefiting from the CCSS (Bunch et al. 2012, Hakuta et al. 2013). Consider, for example, that in past standards-based reform initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind, the needs of ELs were not taken into account, leading to their further marginalization (Menken 2008). The CCSS continue to rely on high-stakes testing that is normed on monolingual populations and thus not sensitive to the unique learning needs of ELs. Indeed, the fact that ELs are only mentioned explicitly in a two-and-a-half-page addendum to the standards threatens to turn the CCSS into yet another initiative that exacerbates the marginalization of these students (Flores & Schissel 2014). In addition, the haphazard rollout of these standards across the states has not included comprehensive professional development that will support teachers in developing instructional innovation and new classroom practices that build on the robust communicative potential of ELs (Santos et al. 2012). Therefore, overly simplistic and uncritical prescriptions about what language forms are appropriate for what contexts may continue to dominate EL instruction if teachers and students interpret and implement the new standards in narrow ways. Given these potential barriers, we understand the wariness of teachers, such as Rachel, who perceive the CCSS as a rigid attempt to control their teaching practices while failing to meet the needs of their students.

Despite this cloudy forecast and the potential for stormy implementation, we call attention to the silver lining of the CCSS for educators, particularly for those who work with multilingual populations and ELs. The positive potential of the CCSS for these students lies in their emphasis on the development of language awareness (or what Alim (2005) calls CRITICAL language awareness). In what follows, we describe the traditional approach to language that has characterized dominant approaches to meeting the needs of ELs. We then introduce the notion of communicative repertoire, noting how this perspective alters many of the ideas about language that have long characterized classrooms. Next, our focus turns to how a CR approach complements and extends
the theory of language motivating the CCSS. Likewise, we consider how the CR approach speaks to contemporary work in second language development, noting how this approach might be used to guide instruction in both ESL and other content area courses that enroll ELs. We then provide an example of what this approach looks like in a twelfth-grade English literature class for ELs. Building from this example, we illustrate the general framework for developing lessons, from a CR perspective, that align with the CCSS and can be used across a variety of instructional settings. Finally, we discuss what policies and opportunities for teacher professional development might be conducive to supporting this instructional approach and to ensuring that the CCSS is implemented in ways that maximize EL academic achievement and engagement as opposed to further perpetuating their marginalization.

4. How is language conceptualized in traditional approaches to instruction for ELs? Traditional approaches to teaching ELs conceive of language, literacy, and communication in general much less flexibly than implied in the CCSS. In schools, language is often presented and oriented to as if it comprises a set of linguistic forms and an accompanying rulebook for their use. Particular instances of language use are deemed right or appropriate depending on how well they conform to our idealized versions of how ‘experts’ (and very often, in the case of ELs, ‘monolingual native speakers’) are believed to use language in certain contexts. Prescriptions about proper language use abound: from lists of discipline-specific vocabulary items to memorize, to rules about how many sentences constitute a paragraph, to templates for structuring essays (Gee 2015). Acts of linguistic creativity, flexibility, or resourcefulness (e.g. using novel word combinations to evoke new shades of meaning, expressing different voices using different varieties of talk, or using multiple languages in a single sentence) are often cast as errors, thus perpetuating a view of language as a closed system, unaffected by the actions of its users (Bell & Pomerantz 2016, Rymes 2016).

In addition, a fundamental orthodoxy about languages—that they are discrete entities with names (e.g. English, Spanish, French, Hindi, Gujarati) and work best in isolation—dominates practice in classrooms. We call this point of view the MONOLITH APPROACH to language. Teachers who insist on English only in the classroom and even in the halls or the lunchroom (presupposing that any languages used in combination with English—even during non-class time—will be damaging to language development) exemplify this perspective in action. Such a view fails to account for the ways in which movement between languages, registers, and even communicative modes necessitates high degrees of language awareness and creates opportunities for expression. ELs who engage in translanguaging, for example, display strong sensitivity to the social and political dimensions of language use; yet too often, schools become sites in which communication is regulated in ways that do little to validate or build on such knowledge (García 2009, García & Wei 2014).

While the CCSS continue to promote a monolithic approach through their privileging of Standard English, a closer look at the standards themselves indicates the potential for a more robust approach to language for teachers interested in building the language awareness of ELs. The standards emphasize the need for students to demonstrate understandings of language nuance and shades of meaning, as well as to attend to mode, context, and collaboration.

Language standard 5, for example, explicitly mentions the importance of nuance and provides suggestions for how to explore nuance and shades of meaning with students from kindergarten through twelfth grade.
6. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.5: With guidance and support from adults, explore word relationships and **nuances in word meanings**.

   a. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.5.C: Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at school that are colorful).

   b. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.5.D: Distinguish shades of meaning among verbs describing the same general action (e.g., walk, march, strut, prance) by acting out the meanings.

This standard introduces awareness of linguistic nuance in kindergarten and maintains an emphasis on nuance and shades of meaning through twelfth grade. Children go from marching, strutting, and prancing around school, to analyzing the shades of meaning of *hurl* versus *throw*, to identifying hyperbole and paradox.

Other language standards in the Common Core address typical grammar points that would be covered in a traditional language classroom, but even these can be read in a more nuanced fashion from the early grades onward. Language standard #1A, for example, begins in kindergarten with a basic skill.

7. Standard 1A (Kindergarten): Print many upper- and lowercase letters.

Language standard 1A carries through grades one to ten and then into eleventh and twelfth grade by introducing more complex grammatical knowledge, but also by pointing out that rules (presumably even those about capital letters) may be conceived of as flexible, changing ‘conventions’ that can be contested.

8. Standard 1A (11th & 12th): Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

This standard points to the potential for the CCSS to take us away from traditional and often restrictive language orthodoxies. Paradoxically, learning about flexible language use is actually mandated in the standards. Knowing that this is the ultimate goal, we can begin to imagine how teachers in elementary school can build the foundations for the type of language awareness students will be expected to demonstrate in high school and beyond. Starting in kindergarten, students are learning basic skills, printing upper- and lowercase letters, but must simultaneously develop awareness of linguistic flexibility. The presence of other letters, in other languages, for example, would be appropriate to teach in kindergarten in order to build a foundation for language awareness. One could even imagine students being permitted to use multiple languages in certain written projects as a way of crafting new meanings. The CCSS have left open the possibility of departing from traditional language orthodoxies in the language classroom. The next step is up to us, as educators—to develop a coherent framework for assisting students in engaging in the complex linguistic analysis the CCSS demand.

5. **The CR Approach.** As the standards we have sampled so far illustrate, the CCSS afford and encourage a wide range of language exploration, with the potential to develop students’ language awareness. But while they provide mini-examples of classroom activities and lists of suggested texts, the standards do not specify what exactly counts as language ‘nuance’ or ‘real life connections’ or ‘digital tools’ or ‘collaboration with peers’. The standards do not explicitly mention, at any point, how exactly teachers should connect the use of multiple languages (English, Spanish), dialects (varieties of English or varieties of Spanish), or types of digital tools (cell phones or laptops), and modalities (text, Instagram, Tweets) to classroom practices. In other words, the CCSS make general propositions about language, but do not in any way delimit the range of
communicative resources that students could be using to ‘make real life connections’ or explore ‘shades of meaning’ in language. Indeed, the standards leave open the extent to which language awareness might be framed in critical terms. For example, they say little about whether and to what extent teachers might engage students in activities that encourage them to question how different communicative resources are understood and valued in particular contexts. Likewise, they are surprisingly quiet on where, when, and how bi/multilingualism might be encouraged. Indeed, as noted previously, the only mention of ELs is a two-and-a-half-page document articulating that ELs need more scaffolding than non-ELs, with little discussion of what this scaffolding might entail.

To draw attention to the resources and needs of bi/multilingual ELs, and to articulate those resources within the standards of the CCSS, we propose a CR approach to the CCSS. Increasingly, traditional monolithic approaches to language (discussed above), which conceptualize language as a unitary whole, are shifting to a repertoire perspective, which conceptualizes communication as the flexible use of an array of communicative resources rather than the rule-bound use of a pure and unitary code. We define COMMUNICATIVE REPertoire as the collection of ways that students use languages and other means of communication (gestures, dress, posture, and other media) to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate (Rymes 2011, 2012). Any student’s repertoire can include multiple languages, dialects, and levels of speech formality, as well as gesture, dress, posture, and even knowledge of communicative routines. This conceptual shift from traditional linguistic approaches to a repertoire perspective that builds on the bi/multilingual language practices of ELs has been increasingly influential in the field of language education and TESOL (Blommaert 2010, Canagarajah 2011, Creese & Blackledge 2010, Cummins 2007, García 2009, Gutiérrez & Rogoff 2003, Jørgensen 2010).

As discussed above, according to traditional, monolithic orthodoxies about language, languages exist as bounded and, at times, daunting wholes that must be learned in their entirety before they can be effectively used. From the monolith perspective, for example, speaking English and Spanish are practices that occur in isolation from one another. In the monolith classroom, teachers may struggle to police the boundaries of language groups—allowing exclusively one language to be used at a time, regardless of the practicality, in what Grosjean (1995) has called ‘double monolingualism’. By contrast, from the CR perspective, competence as a communicator necessitates combining languages and using multiple modalities (listening and speaking, but also writing, reading, gesturing, drawing, texting) in interactions every day. In the repertoire-attuned classroom, teachers attend to how language is used differently to accomplish different tasks and in different modalities; these teachers recognize that language may be used flexibly, and often in mixed ways, in support of learning and communication. That is, they aim their instruction at fostering language awareness. Table 1 illustrates how this shift from a monolith perspective to a repertoire perspective changes how we use language in classrooms.

This spotlight on communicative repertoires is consistent with changes in language theory discussed above that have begun to move away from monolithic understandings of language to more dynamic and flexible ones. And this approach accounts for important, yet often overlooked, contextual factors in EL education that shape classroom communication. As discussed in more detail below, a CR approach accounts for the presence of massively multilingual classrooms, variety within a single language group, and the multimodal demands of communication.
5.1. **Massively multilingual classrooms.** In a single classroom, ELs may come from a dozen or more language backgrounds (Rymes 2014). When viewed from a monolithic perspective, this could be a disastrous situation. From a monolithic perspective these students are locked into their own language until they have sufficient expertise in English to communicate effectively, and the teacher, even if bilingual, inevitably will be unable to communicate effectively with the majority of students who do not fully speak one of that teacher’s languages. And if the teacher takes a monolithic perspective and proclaims ‘English only’ as a leveler, communication becomes even more limited. From a repertoire perspective, however, all students have a vast range of communicative resources to draw on, and teaching proceeds from acknowledging those and allowing students to use them. For example, students from the same language group might work together on projects, activities, or assignments, pooling their collective English knowledge and facilitating each others’ understanding by translating for each other, or giving more detailed explanations in their shared home language. From the repertoire perspective, multiple languages, used in concert, facilitate communication and enhance learning.

5.2. **Variety within a single language group.** Those who are from a single language group (e.g. Spanish) may speak widely varying versions of that language and vary considerably in their oral and written proficiency as well as their schooling experiences in their primary language (Valdés 2005). From the monolithic perspective, this situation leads to pronouncements of value of certain types of English or Spanish. Teachers might say, ‘I’m teaching them English, but they’re only learning substandard English from their peers’. Or ‘They are Spanish speakers, but their Spanish isn’t even

<table>
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<th>TYPE OF INTERACTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH AND ASSOCIATED TERM(S)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bilinguals who switch languages freely as communicatively necessary.</td>
<td>Speaking English in the classroom, Spanish during recess, English and Spanish with bilingual siblings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People who know a few words of another language and use them in select contexts.</td>
<td>Teachers who greet Spanish-speaking children in Spanish. English-only children who use a few Spanish words with Spanish-speaking peers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>More repertoire-like</td>
<td>People (all people) who use combinations of languages and ways of speaking when they communicate.</td>
<td>Teachers who shift voices when answering phone in classroom or teaching a lesson or conducting circle time. Teachers and students using communicative resources tailored to digital media.</td>
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Table 1. From monolith to repertoire approach to language (adapted from Rymes 2014).
proper’. From the repertoire perspective there is not a single English or a single Spanish code. Rather, there are many ways of speaking any language. This point is compatible with the language expectations of the CCSS that students must be able to understand that there are different ways of saying ‘the same thing’ to address particular audiences. When reading aloud from a book, for instance, different characters must be voiced differently. A repertoire perspective emphasizes that students reflect on this multiplicity within a single language group as a way to enhance students’ communicative resources across situations and communities.

5.3. Multimodal demands of communication. We interact using more than just words, and visual and digital communication are increasingly integrated with traditional modalities across content areas (Rymes 2012). From a monolith perspective, this might look as if language is being degraded by internet genres or the use of visuals. From a repertoire perspective, these tools are important communicative resources that can enhance communication in and out of the English classroom. The CCSS also emphasize this need for facility in multiple modalities as a resource to communicate to different audiences. This perspective not only prepares students for the demands of an increasingly digital communicative environment, but it also accommodates the needs of multilingual students newly acquiring English, who can draw on these tools and hone them as they build their English repertoires.

In sum, by shifting away from a linguistic monolith perspective, the CR approach highlights the potential for the CCSS to enhance the educational experiences of ELs by building on multiple languages, multiple varieties within languages, and the communicative affordances of multiple modalities. A CR approach conceptualizes the communicative affordances that these contextual factors bring as strengths to be analyzed and developed, not obstacles to be overcome or eliminated.

6. The CR approach and second language development. The CR approach not only responds to the multilingualism and multimodality that characterize today’s classrooms, but also resonates with contemporary theories of second language development (SLD). As Larsen-Freeman (2010:67) asserts, SLD involves ‘the constant adaptation of their [the learners’] linguistic resources in the service of meaning-making in response to the affordances that emerge in the communicative situation, which is, in turn, affected by learners’ adaptivity’. This focus on supporting students to use their linguistic resources in learning how to adapt to different contexts has been taken up by scholars to argue for allowing students to use their entire communicative repertoire for meaning-making in the classroom (García & Flores 2014).

From this perspective, language development is not about the acquisition of a predetermined array of linguistic forms and a set of rules for their use, but rather a process of bringing together whatever communicative resources the learner has access to in order to make meaning. In some moments, these constellations of communicative resources may consist of frequent and highly regularized elements that the learners have noticed in their environments (e.g. a greeting like ‘Hi, how are you’ accompanied by a certain hand gesture), whereas in others learners may bring together communicative resources in novel ways that respond to both the exigencies of particular situations and the affordances or limitations of their repertoires. Over time, learners’ communicative potential will change and grow as they integrate certain constellations of forms into their communicative repertoires and discover and come to embody new ways of making meaning. In this way, the language practices being learned are understood to be dynamic and emergent within their context of use.
For educators, then, a CR approach brings to the foreground the importance of taking stock of the totality of students’ communicative repertoires, not just those elements that are deemed proper or appropriate for school. Language learning is thus understood as a process of repertoire recognition and expansion, not repertoire replacement. And, more importantly, significant emphasis is placed on the development of language awareness or the ability to use repertoire elements with both purpose and reflexivity. Thus, we see the CR approach as also consonant with changes within the field of language education itself, which urges us, as educators, to

\[t\]each our students less the ability to exchange information precisely, accurately, and appropriately in monolingual conversations with speakers of standard national languages, but, rather, that we develop in them a much more flexible capacity to read people, situations and events based on a deep understanding of the historical and subjective dimensions of human experience. (Kramsch 2008:391)

A CR approach potentially enhances all students’ and teachers’ communicative repertoires by first drawing on existing repertoires in the classroom—languages spoken, different varieties of individual languages, or the use of social media and digital tools. Designing classroom goals and activities follows directly from the initial discovery of existing classroom repertoires and continues in a cycle of discovering, designing, and doing. We call this the **3Ds of the CR approach**.

The 3Ds are not a series of steps or a recipe for teaching. Instead, they are a new way of thinking about one’s teaching, a new stance that involves recursive discovery of new repertoires in one’s classroom as a springboard to designing and doing lessons. Discovering begins through a teacher’s daily observation and interaction with children and their unique communicative resources. This is typically an important (yet often overlooked) part of any teacher’s professional practice (Schultz 2003). Next, the **Design** step builds those discoveries into lesson plans. And **Doing** those lessons consists of implementation; see Table 2.

We envision the three Ds operating in a cycle: a teacher begins by learning (Discovering) a small amount about students and Designs and Does lessons accordingly, but along the way, no doubt, the teacher discovers more about the students and redesigns, incorporating new discoveries into doing the lesson, and so on.

7. **Example: how teachers can plan CCSS-aligned instruction using the CR approach.** We have been arguing that adopting a CR approach will serve as an important first step in making the CCSS relevant to ELs and their teachers. This approach is compatible not only with the turn to less monolithic models of language and language development, but also with expert and experienced teaching we have observed as researchers in multilingual settings. Our example follows the observations we have made of one expert teacher’s lesson, showing how his practice illustrates the process of discovering communicative repertoires in his classroom, designing activities that align with the CCSS, and then doing those activities with students, reflecting on and assessing the impact of the design. In this example, we join a class of twelfth graders in a city school district on the East Coast of the United States, tracing the teacher’s practice as an instance of the 3D approach.

7.1. **Discovery.** The discovery step is intensely concentrated at the beginning of a semester. Just as any relationship begins, so begins concentrated mutual learning between teacher and his or her students during those first days. During this time, teachers can focus on discovering what their students already know and also begin to discover who those students are, where they have come from, and what they can bring to the classroom community, as well as the best way to go about designing new learning activities
**Step 1: Discovering.** Teachers and students develop awareness of their own and each other’s communicative repertoires.

a. Languages spoken by students  
   i. Languages spoken at home, by and with different family members  
   ii. Languages spoken with friends  
   iii. Languages spoken during out-of-school time  

b. Patterns of interaction used by students and teachers  
   i. Greetings, goodbyes  
   ii. Storytelling  
   iii. Questioning and answering  
   iv. Collaborative problem solving versus independent work  

c. Digital communicative resources used by students and teachers  
   i. Use of internet-based information sources  
   ii. Use of social media  

d. Additional forms of expression beyond language  
   i. Ways of gesturing while delivering information, conversing, etc.  
   ii. Ways of dressing  

**Step 2: Designing.** Teachers use awareness of repertoire variation to enhance instruction by designing new lessons.

a. Use of languages to access instructional content  

b. Use of patterns of interaction to engage students in content  

c. Use of digital resources and social media to engage students in content  

d. Use of additional forms of expression beyond language that enhance instruction  

**Step 3: Doing.** Students use awareness of repertoire variation to combine repertoires and expand communicative possibilities.

a. Use of multiple languages flexibly and effectively to accomplish assignments  

b. Use of a variety of patterns of interaction to engage teachers, peers, and audiences beyond the classroom  

c. Use of digital media in combination with other repertoire elements to communicate effectively  

d. Use of additional forms of expression in combinations to communicate effectively to a variety of audiences  

e. Use of all this variety to transform existing repertoire elements and develop new ones

Table 2. The 3Ds of the CR approach.

for this group of individuals. The emphasis is on describing the communicative repertoires in play, not evaluating them. How students identify and name particular repertoire elements or communicative resources, where they draw the boundaries between repertoires, the struggles they encounter in understanding their own and others’ communicative resources—these are all important aspects of the discovery process. The point is not to yield an outsider’s account of communicative resources, but to develop an insider’s perspective.

In Mr. Z’s class, English for English Language Learners, there are seventeen students from twelve different countries. He compiles a list of the students’ names, countries of origin, length of time in the United States, and the languages they know. He also has them write him a letter about their experiences prior to coming to his classroom—in particular their most recent schooling experiences and their journey to and settlement in the United States.

From this initial information, Mr. Z begins to learn about the communicative repertoires of the students in his classroom. They may still be learning English, but many speak at least two additional languages. From the letter, he begins to learn about their educational experiences and their classroom repertoires—their expectations for how teachers will treat them, and what they are expected to do in class. Most students have enough English to write at least a few sentences. It they do not, Mr. Z learns this. From day one, Mr. Z also notes the kinds of familiarity the students in his classroom have with digital tools and social media.
7.2. Design. During the design step, Mr. Z builds lessons, assignments, and final projects by thinking through the communicative repertoires in his classroom, the curricular goals of his semester, and the CCSS. So while designing activities, he accounts for his students’ multiple languages, varied levels in English, varied capacities with digital tools, and expectations for classroom interaction. He also needs to develop a poetry unit, a requirement for twelfth-grade English at his school. And he needs to build on the CCSS that are applicable to a unit on poetry.

The following twelfth-grade CCSS standards seem applicable to the poetry unit, so he builds the competencies into the design of his unit.

(9) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
(http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/5/)

(10) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A: Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.
(http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/5/a/)

(11) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.B: Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.
(http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/5/b/)

(12) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.
(http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/6/)

(13) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.5: Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
(http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/11-12/5/)

Since the technical language-about-language mentioned in the first three standards above is new to all of his students and is crucial to discussing poetry (e.g. hyperbole, paradox), Mr. Z decides to spend some time directly teaching these terms to the students. He teaches words like simile, metaphor, hyperbole, rhythm, rhyme, assimilation; exemplifies them in poetry examples he chooses; and then quizzes the students to be sure they have the basic sense of this vocabulary.

To make sure his students fully acquire these concepts and are able to use them to understand poetry of their own choosing and communicate that understanding to diverse audiences, Mr. Z wants students to engage in a more involved project. And he would like to have them use digital media (they have a class set of networked laptops) to do this. But he is aware of the diversity in this room: the students have hugely varying competencies in English and other languages, in writing, and in computer skills.

Mr. Z designs a long-term project that uses the newly learned literary language but calls on students’ existing repertoires to put that vocabulary to work. To take advantage of the multiple languages in the room, he devises a project in which students translate into English poetry that was originally written in a language of their choosing. In the process, they need to consider the nuance of language used in the poem and the way that translation departs from or adheres to the original. They also need to be able to convey the sense of the poem to an audience: their teacher and their classmates. To account for the different strengths in the classroom—including different degrees of facility with English and with digital tools—he provides the students a menu of options for their final project (see Figure 1).
7.3. DOING. In practice, students spent several weeks researching poetry, finding translations, devising their interpretation, and, finally, presenting their work. All but three students chose to create an iMovie. While students designed and edited their movies, they were also practicing the Language Arts standards: carefully considering the translation and the shades of meaning of vocabulary in the poetry, choosing images that best contextualized the sentiment of the words, being mindful of audience. In the end, they presented work that captivated the entire class of students, not just their teacher—attuning their work to that complex audience, another goal of the CCSS.

Of course, in practice, Mr. Z’s 3Ds operated less in the linear fashion outlined here, and more in a cycle. As students proceeded to create their movies, he learned more about their communicative repertoires. For example, while Mr. Z was expecting students to choose poetry that represented their home language and to use the assignment to practice the art of translation in that language, one student from Liberia chose to translate a Bollywood song, originally in Hindi/Urdu. When queried about this choice, the student described his and his mother’s shared Bollywood fan-ship. Since, technically, the language of Liberia is English, he had also wanted to choose a language that
would lend itself better to translation in the traditional sense. This discovery could have led the class in many directions. During this cycle of the 3Ds, Mr. Z took the opportunity to learn a bit more about this student and to allow him to share an affinity for Bollywood that other students in the class, from India, would also be able to engage with.

This example illustrates the facility with which Mr. Z develops CCSS-aligned instruction by drawing on the communicative repertoires already present in his classroom. In the process, students’ repertoires expanded not only to include the designated literary vocabulary and practices, and habits of poetry interpretation, but also to include understandings of the different languages and countries represented by their peers in that classroom. Throughout the year, as Mr. Z continued to cycle through the 3Ds of the CR approach, students continued to develop their English repertoires as well as to draw on their multiple repertoires—their own languages, additional languages in the classroom, and social media and digital tools—to convey messages for multiple audiences.

8. **What are the implications of a CR approach for the CCSS?** Second language teaching has traditionally focused on strategies for teaching grammar and vocabulary (Canale & Swain 1980, Leung 2005, Sato & Kleinsasser 1999, Savignon 1991). As our example illustrates, however, ELs must be supported not only in the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary but also in the larger discursive practices necessary for academic success (Gibbons 2003, Hammond 2006). Specifically, ELs must receive support in (i) engaging with complex texts to build knowledge across the curriculum; (ii) using evidence to inform, argue, and analyze; and (iii) working collaboratively to understand multiple perspectives and present their ideas (Bunch et al. 2012, Walqui 2006).

The example above illustrates that this can be accomplished while attending to the CCSS by using a CR approach that simultaneously accounts for multilingualism.

From a CR perspective, ELs are best supported in these areas by drawing initially on their preexisting communicative repertoires and augmenting those repertoires with additional communicative elements that are responsive to new social, academic, and other contextual demands (Gutierrez et al. 2011). That is, in order to develop the type of language awareness required by the CCSS, it is important to begin with the language awareness that ELs already have (Brisk & Proctor 2012, Flores & Schissel 2014, Garcia & Flores 2014). In Mr. Z’s classroom, the CCSS in combination with the CR approach facilitate the development of this awareness. Crucial to the process is the cyclic nature of the 3D stages. While informed by the CCSS and students’ communicative repertoires, each day in the classroom (each day of doing) also involves more discovering and designing or redesigning. Figure 2 illustrates this process of the theory-driven but locally informed change that lies at the core of the CR approach to improving student outcomes.

9. **What policies would support the implementation of the CR approach?** As of this writing, all but eight US states (and Puerto Rico) have adopted the CCSS. The CCSS are not going away. If the rhetoric surrounding them continues to smack of top-down mandates and testing of outcomes rather than respect for the role of teachers and their knowledge of the students they educate, the CCSS will negatively affect the public school system like so many other standards-based initiatives (Flores & Schissel 2014, Menken 2008).

This article illustrates the potential for the CCSS to change this trend. Policies that support their implementation must respect teachers and teachers’ knowledge of their students. For this to happen, implementation must focus on working with teachers, providing them tools to bridge the knowledge in their classrooms with the goals of the
CCSS, as we have shown here. Professional development opportunities that focus on helping all teachers, not just ESL specialists, to develop more nuanced views of language and language learning are an important first step. Successful implementation of the CR approach requires an understanding of language as a resource for making meaning. It requires seeing learners not as empty vessels to be filled with discipline-specific lists of vocabulary or templates for producing paragraphs, but as active communicators capable of following conventions or departing from them in meaningful ways. And it means developing in oneself and in others both the willingness and the ability to view language use in critical, nuanced ways.

10. Conclusion: exposing the silver lining. This article and our proposed strategy for CCSS implementation with ELs present an approach that foregrounds students’ wealth of previous knowledge about language and communication. Consider, again, this eleventh–twelfth grade language standard about ‘The conventions of Standard English’ that we cited in 8 above.

(14) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1.A: Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

(http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/11-12/1/a/)

From the 3D perspective, the best approach to this standard starts with discovering what students already know about language that might illuminate this concept. Have students noticed any conventions that have changed over time? Why might this be so? What are some that have changed over time? In many cases, the contestations may directly involve the use of multiple languages, or multiple Englishes, or digital media, including those used in US classrooms today. Speakers of the huge variety of languages represented in US schools have much to contribute to these discussions. After discovering part of what students know about this concept, teachers can better design and do lessons that build on that knowledge and engage ELs. Those students deserve the opportunity to think critically about how and why individuals use languages differently over time. Fortunately, the CCSS leave space for this opportunity to be fulfilled. That is their silver lining.

Rachel, the teacher who left her ESL classroom in the wake of ongoing standards-based reforms, has already retired, in part in frustration. But today’s teachers are coming into the profession in a slightly new policy climate. While standards-based reforms are still in full force, the CCSS are qualitatively different. The CCSS attend to new contexts—in terms of both classroom diversity and the massive diversity available through
the internet—and encourage complex language skills that a new generation of students will need. These are also contexts and skills with which many ELs have much experience. Given adequate support and encouragement to honor EL communicative repertoires as well as those of all their students, this new generation of teachers may be able to expose that silver lining of the CCSS, and in the process fully engage the range of communicative repertoires in today’s classrooms. But this can only happen if ELs are made central to the reform initiative, if assessment policies shift toward a value for bi/multilingualism, if teachers are provided with locally tailored professional development, and if students are provided space to use their entire communicative repertoire to make meaning in their classrooms.

REFERENCES


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