

Say It in Your Language: Supporting Translanguaging in Multilingual Classes

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This article illustrates how a multilingual e-book composing activity supported emergent bilingual students' translanguaging literacy practices during writers' workshop.

Classrooms that serve students who speak a variety of heritage languages are becoming increasingly common in the United States (E. García, Arias, Murri, & Serna, 2010). These students, often called emergent bilinguals, are not only learning to read, write, speak, and listen in English but also using and developing these skills in their heritage, or home, language simultaneously. As such, they bring a unique set of language and literacy skills to the classroom. *Translanguaging* refers to the way emergent bilinguals communicate and make meaning through the intermixing of their various linguistic repertoires (Hornberger & Link, 2012). Importantly, translanguaging does not view the language systems of a bilingual speaker as distinct but as part of a single interconnected system (O. García, 2014). This means that environments that restrict emergent bilingual students' use of language to one system (e.g., English) do not reflect their everyday practices at home or in the community. Alternatively, students who learn in environments where translanguaging is promoted are more likely to have positive views about their identity (Lee & Suarez, 2009) and to perform better academically (Goldenburg, 2008).

The question for a classroom teacher then becomes, How can I create classroom spaces that support my students' translanguaging skills? As a second-grade teacher in a culturally and linguistically diverse school, I grappled with this question. My students spoke nine different heritage languages, including Spanish, Karen, Farsi, and Kinyarwanda. I only spoke English and Spanish. Especially for teachers like me who work in English-dominant contexts and wish to encourage their students' use of all of their languages, it may not be

enough simply to ask young students to translate an English text or to write a bilingual text (Brown, 2014). In these environments, multilingual students need specific instructional supports to feel comfortable and know how to translanguage while composing at school.

Design Principles for Creating Instructional Spaces That Support Translanguaging

My review of the research identified the following six principles for designing instructional activities to support the language and literacy learning of emergent bilingual students: valuing students' languages and cultures, modeling translanguaging, providing authentic opportunities for multilingual communication, inviting two-way translation, composing dual-language texts, and connecting students with bilingual or multilingual audiences.

Explicitly Value Students' Languages and Cultures

Teachers must explicitly (verbally and through actions) value the languages and cultures of all students (Cummins, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2010; Zapata & Laman, 2016). Teachers can do this by holding discussions about different languages and cultures, reading diverse and bilingual or multilingual children's literature, and involving families and com-

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munities in the classroom. Teachers can also show interest in students' heritage languages and model learning new languages from students. This positions students as experts with knowledge to be valued and shared.

Model Translanguaging

Teachers need to model translanguaging, through teacher actions and dual-language texts, in all the languages that students in the classroom speak (Rowe & Miller, 2016; Zapata & Laman, 2016). For example, teachers can model using multiple languages and share bilingual texts they have written with students. This can be done even when teachers are not fluent speakers of the different heritage languages. Monolingual teachers can publicly value student models of translanguaging by highlighting students' use of multiple languages when speaking or writing. Teachers can also model translanguaging themselves by using heritage language words that they learn from students. In addition, monolingual teachers can bring family and community members who do speak students' heritage languages into the classroom to read and write with students and discuss how they use their languages. Bilingual aides or translators employed by the school can also be resources in helping monolingual teachers model translanguaging.

Provide Authentic Opportunities for Multilingual Communication

Teachers must provide students with authentic opportunities to use both of their languages in meaningful ways that relate to their lives and interests (Griffith, Silva, & Weinburgh, 2014; Haneda & Wells, 2012). This means connecting curriculum to students' lives, providing engaging activities and opportunities for student choice, and creating activities with tangible outcomes. When students engage in authentic activities that involve talking with bilingual speakers or audiences in their heritage languages, they are likely to use their translanguaging skills as they normally would in their everyday lives.

Invite Two-Way Translation

Classroom activities should support students' use of two-way translation as a strategy for making meaning (Jiménez et al., 2015; Pacheco & Miller, 2016). Students should be encouraged to use their translation skills as a resource as they read and discuss challenging texts. In the United States, many emergent bilinguals have experiences of translating for family or community members outside of school (Orellana, 2001). Although translation and translanguaging are not the same thing, translation creates a space in which students can use their translanguaging skills as they move between languages. By inviting students to translate, teachers can create authentic activities where translanguaging is not only encouraged but also socially visible and useful within a classroom space.

PAUSE AND PONDER

- What challenges do you face when teaching in a multilingual context?
- How do you support emergent bilingual students' use of their heritage languages in the classroom?
- How can you design instructional practices that leverage emergent bilingual students' existing literary and linguistic resources?
- How can you support emergent bilingual students in composing bilingual or multilingual texts?

Compose Dual-Language or Multilanguage Texts

Teachers should support students' emergent composing of multimodal and dual-language or multilanguage texts (Cummins, 2005; Rowe & Miller, 2016). They can encourage students to write and record texts in both or all of their languages. For students who do not have prior experiences of writing in their heritage languages, teachers can support them as they write texts phonetically using letters of the English alphabet to form the heritage language words.

Connect Students With Bilingual or Multilingual Audiences

A bilingual or multilingual audience should be present for students to share their work (Cummins, 2011; Durán, 2016; Louie & Davis-Welton, 2016; Rowe & Miller, 2016). In addition to the students present in the classroom, teachers can incorporate family and community members, students and teachers from other classrooms, and administration to create this audience. For example, teachers can design units in which students write letters to bilingual authors or create posters that hang in the hallway for the multilingual school population to view (see Durán, 2017).

Design Principles in Action: Using Tablets to Create Multilingual Texts

Using the six principles just described, I designed an instructional activity in which my second-grade students used touchscreen tablets to compose and share their own multilingual, multimodal e-books. Throughout the year, during writers' workshop, students wrote and edited on paper, photographed their pages to transfer these paper texts to the digital tablets, then recorded audio of themselves and peers reading their texts in multiple languages. The goal was for students to compose their own texts and record oral narration in multiple languages as a way to support not only literacy learning but also translanguaging in the classroom.

Setting the Stage: Demonstrating and Valuing Translanguaging Through Multilingual Trade Books

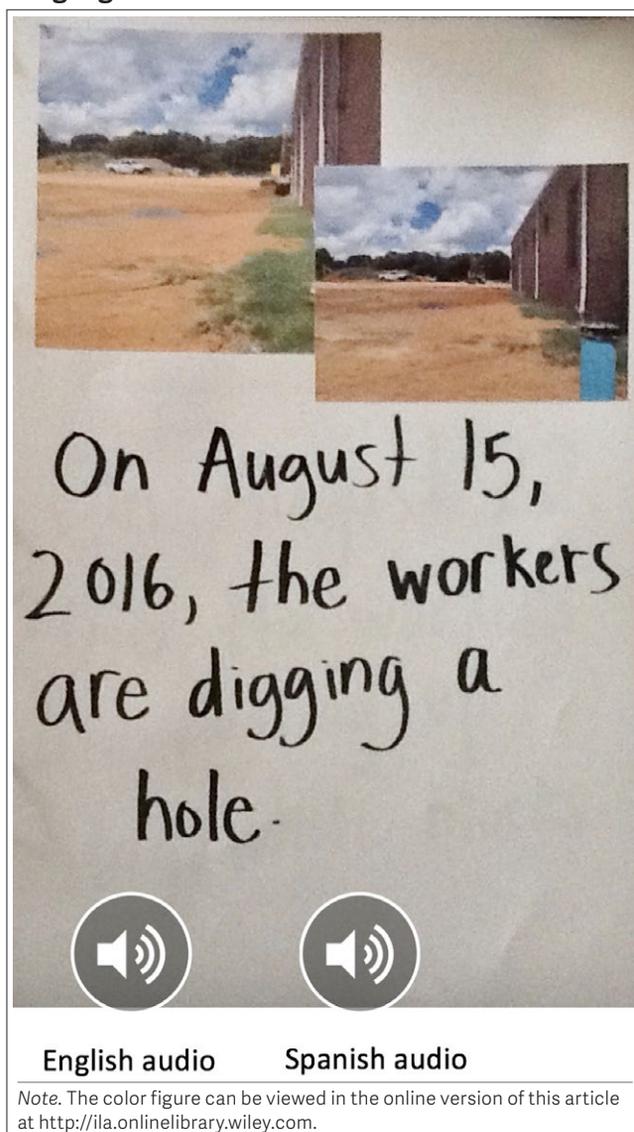
Although the school had a welcoming atmosphere and provided translators for parents, instruction was in English and, by second grade, many students had begun to view English as the appropriate language for classroom activities. Therefore, in order for the multilingual composing activity to be successful, I had to work to create a classroom culture and community in which students felt their languages were valued. This was an ongoing process throughout the year, and I began on the first day of class by making sure that students knew they were invited and encouraged to speak in whatever language they desired.

With this context in mind, the multilingual composing activity was launched through whole-group read-alouds and discussions of multilingual children's trade books such as *Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin* by Duncan Tonatiuh, *Family Pictures/Cuadros de Familia* by Carmen Lomas Garza, and *Elephant Huggy* by Win World. In these class discussions, students noted how authors used more than one language and sometimes switched between the two languages. We also considered the reasons why an author might write in more than one language and who would be able to read such a text. Following the first design principle of valuing students' languages and cultures, these conversations helped build a classroom culture that encouraged the use of heritage languages and valued those languages as resources.

Modeling Translanguaging: Translating a Shared Text

To enact the second design principle of modeling translanguaging, I then introduced the multilingual e-book writing process by modeling how we could add other languages to a book the class had previously created together in English during shared writing. The subject of the book was the construction of a new school building next door (see Figure 1). As a class, we took pictures of the construction and decided on the accompanying text. This shared authen-

Figure 1
Page From Class Construction Book Used for Teacher Demonstration of Adding Audio in Different Languages



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

tic experience helped ensure that all students could understand and relate to the text. I used it to introduce students to the process they would use to create multilingual texts. I showed students the steps of turning the physical book into an e-book, then added audio of myself reading the text in English and Spanish, the languages that I speak. I also prominently displayed a large flowchart showing the e-book process (see Figure 2). Students referenced this throughout the year.

Composing on the Page in Writers' Workshop

Next, students were invited to write their own stories or informational texts in English and/or their heritage language during writers' workshop. This enacted the fifth design principle of inviting students to

create dual-language or multilanguage texts. These texts could be stories of their choosing or on topics relevant to their experiences in school or at home (e.g., superhero adventures, interactions with brothers and sisters). This helped keep the activity authentic and engaging, following the third design principle of authentic activities. Students wrote these texts on paper and edited them with my support during one-on-one conferences. I had students write their texts on paper, rather than composing entirely on the tablet, not only because of a limited number of tablets but also because I was able to work with students to plan, draft, edit, and illustrate their work more easily.

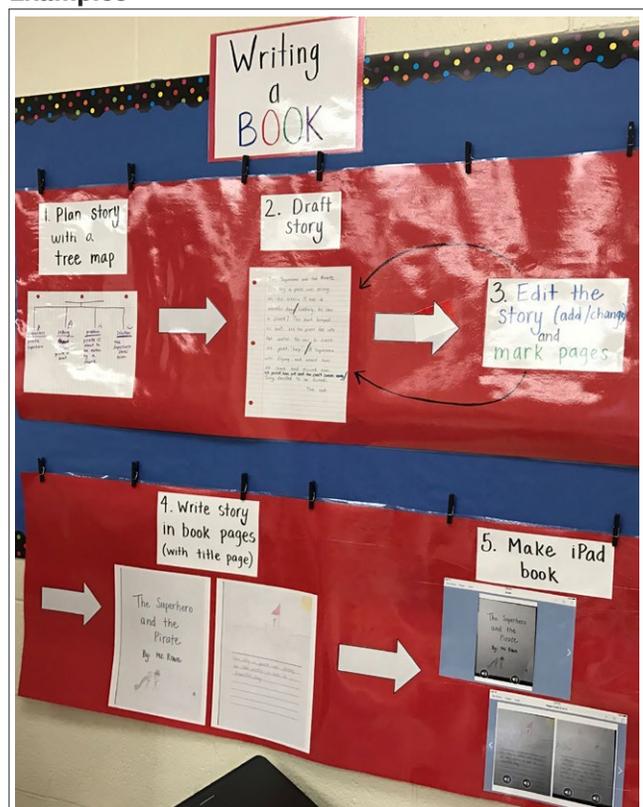
Moving Books to the Screen

After completing and editing their written stories, students were invited to use touchscreen tablets (e.g., iPads) to take pictures of their pages. Using the app Book Creator, they then accessed the photos from the tablet's photo library and inserted them into a multipage e-book.

Creating Audio Translations

Next, students were invited to use the app to record audio of themselves reading each page in English and/or their heritage language. I encouraged them to ask peers to translate their pages into additional languages. This incorporated the fourth design principle of inviting two-way translation. Importantly, all students working on a tablet sat together at a circular table (see Figure 3). This allowed them to talk with one another about their stories and to ask one another for translation help.

Figure 2
Flowchart Showing Bookmaking Steps With Picture Examples



Note. Steps: (1) Plan the story with a tree map, (2) draft the story, (3) edit the story (add/change) and mark pages, (4) write the story in book pages (with a title page), and (5) make the iPad book. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

Figure 3
Students Working Together at Circular Table While Composing on Tablets



Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

Sharing Multilingual Books

During author sharing time, students connected the tablet to the digital projector and speakers to share their completed e-books with the class. Because most students had peers who shared their heritage language, the class served as a multilingual audience with whom authors could share their multilingual texts. This fulfilled the sixth design principle of ensuring that students have a bilingual or multilingual audience with whom they can share their work.

Students' Responses to Multilingual E-Book Composing

The goal of this activity was to support students' translanguaging as they created multilingual texts. Prior to beginning, many students were hesitant to write in a language other than English. However, as students became more comfortable creating texts with bilingual audio, some students also began to create bilingual written texts. Of the 84 written books that students published during the year, 19 (23%) included some text written in a language other than English (four of these were written entirely in Spanish). The first book that a student wrote using a language other than English was created in mid-November, after more than a month of students engaging in the multilingual e-book process. Figure 4 shows an example of a Spanish–English bilingual text created by Gloria (all student names are pseudonyms).

Students who spoke heritage languages other than Spanish were more hesitant to write in their heritage language. I suspect this is because they were the only speaker of their language in the classroom and therefore had fewer heritage language supports. Students only created two texts in a written language other than English or Spanish. One of these was a Farsi translation that a student asked his father to create, which suggests one possibility for increasing family involvement in similar activities and highlights the importance of home-to-school connections. To connect with families about students' ebooks, I emailed completed books to parents when possible. In addition, some students took in-progress books home and worked on them with family members. Future projects could extend home-to-school connections by inviting family members to the classroom to compose with students and to hear students share

Figure 4
Gloria's Bilingual Written Text With Accompanying Bilingual Audio Recordings

English Audio (red text):
"the girl [in written text: sister] is dancing with her friend and she likes to dance"

Spanish Audio (black text):
"la niña está bailando con su amigo y ella le gusta bailar"

Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

their texts. This could be especially valuable for students who are the only speakers of their heritage language in the class.

Student Examples of Translanguaging

Students were able to use their full linguistic repertoires freely when writing and recording their stories. Rather than being forced to communicate only in English, as sometimes happens in English-dominant school settings, students were encouraged to tap into the linguistic resources they already possessed. I believe students were prolific, enthusiastic writers in part because they were given a space that did not restrict their language use; rather, it allowed them to explore their ideas in a way that naturally reflected how these ideas are formed. Translanguaging was evident as students moved across languages in both their written texts and audio recordings.

In writing, Valeria used the Spanish word *cabañas* (cabins) in a text that was otherwise composed in English: “One day I was goinag to The *cavañas* and I went ice ekaden and I kudindt skat so mi dad help me and i Fild hape.” She read this text as, “One day I was going to the *cabañas* and I went ice skating and I couldn’t skate so my dad help me and I feeled happy.” Instead of substituting a familiar but less specific English word, such as *house*, Valeria drew on her Spanish vocabulary to create a more nuanced meaning in her text.

Translanguaging also occurred naturally in students’ audio recordings. For example, Javier recorded audio for his text in English and Spanish. He wrote in English: “The to pope ran owy.” He read this in English as, “The two puppy run away.” For his Spanish audio recording, he said, “el [the] puppy run lejos [far].” In both of these examples, students were able to efficiently get their meaning across, rather than being forced to stop or say something else, as might have happened if the activity had restricted the use of their languages. These instances reflect how many emergent bilinguals, such as Valeria and Javier, use language in their everyday lives.

Oral Translation for Peers

Students were encouraged to add heritage language audio recordings not only to their own books but also to their peers’ books. Although students likely had experience translating outside of school (Orellana, 2001), this was an ability not commonly drawn upon in their school instructional activities. This practice quickly took off in the classroom, and it soon became desirable to create a text and then have it translated by peers into as many languages as possible (see Figure 5). The average number of audio languages in books was 2.9 languages per text. This was especially important for students who were the only speaker of their heritage language in the classroom. Rather than feeling marginalized, these students became highly desired translators as they could add a new language that no one else in the class was able to speak. Students began to value not only their own languages but also those of their peers. This reflects the first design principle: that diverse languages were valued in the classroom and used as resources.

Students became proficient translators for each other and developed systems for asking for translation from others. A request often heard was, “Can you put it in your language?” The following is an

Figure 5
English Text With Audio Translations in Four Different Languages



exchange that took place between Valeria, who spoke Spanish and English, and Fynn, who spoke Kinyarwanda and English:

Valeria: [coming over to Fynn as he works on the tablet] Do you want it in Spanish, Fynn?

Fynn: Yeah.

Valeria: OK. [grabs the tablet so she can record]

Fynn: It says [takes the paper book page and starts reading quickly], “One day there was a—”

Valeria: Just slow down. Slow down, Fynn, so I can read. Slow down, OK?

Fynn: [stops and starts over more slowly] “One day—”

Valeria: [translating while recording on the tablet] *Un día*.

Fynn: “There was a—”

Valeria: *Había un*.

Fynn: “Ninja—”

Valeria: *Ninja.*

Fynn: “And wizard—”

Valeria: *Y un mago.*

Fynn: “And secret agent—”

Valeria: *Y un espía.*

Fynn: “They said if anybody tells the secret—”

Valeria: *Ellos dijeron si alguien nos puede decir el secreto... [indistinguishable dialogue]*

Fynn: “They will turn into a frog.”

Valeria: *Nos van a transformar en una frog.*

This interaction shows a sophisticated use of translation by both Valeria, as the translator, and Fynn, as the author who wished to have his text translated. Fynn began by reading his text too fast for Valeria to follow. This caused her to stop him and ask him to go “slower,” by which she meant presenting smaller chunks of text at a time. Fynn acknowledged this and then began to provide smaller bits of text to translate. He started with words, then moved to presenting her with phrases. As with adult translators, a word-by-word translation does not always reflect the speaker’s meaning (Nida, 2012). As they worked together across the year, students learned that they needed to provide each other with meaningful phrases to create a comprehensible translation. In addition, students who were emergent writers had to be able to clearly read their texts for the translator, which encouraged them to practice reading their texts and check that they made sense. The translators had to understand the author’s text to create a meaningful translation in the new language.

Conclusion

Teachers in multilingual classrooms have the special task of supporting students who speak many different languages. Although this can be challenging, it is also an exciting opportunity to draw upon the translanguaging abilities that these emergent bilingual students bring to the classroom. Numerous scholars have discussed the importance of creating classroom spaces that support these students’ bilingual and biliteracy development (Gallo, 2014; Martínez, Orellana, Pacheco, & Carbone, 2008; Reyes, 2012). The six design principles described here (valuing, modeling, authentic opportunities, two-way translation,

TAKE ACTION!

When designing instructional activities to support multilingual students, consider the following:

1. *Value students’ languages and cultures:* Talk about the value of speaking multiple languages, encourage students to use all of their linguistic resources, read diverse and bilingual or multilingual texts, and involve families and community members in the classroom.
2. *Model translanguaging:* Even if you do not speak all of the languages of your students, model moving between and across languages when speaking and composing. Highlight when students, authors, or community members do this as well.
3. *Provide students with authentic opportunities to use their languages:* Engage students in activities that have real value to their lives, give them choice, and connect with authentic audiences.
4. *Invite two-way translation:* Encourage students to use their linguistic resources to translate for themselves and others.
5. *Encourage students to compose dual-language texts:* Invite students to compose on the page in multiple languages.
6. *Ensure that a bilingual or multilingual audience is present:* Provide students a bilingual or multilingual audience with whom they can share their work.
7. *Consider how technology could help you create instruction that supports multilingual students’ translanguaging abilities:* Adding audio to e-books is an accessible way for multilingual students to use heritage languages while composing.

dual-language or multilanguage texts, and bilingual or multilingual audience) are meant to be used by teachers to create instructional activities that support their emergent bilingual students. In doing so, they can help students leverage and grow their existing linguistic and literacy skills.

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MORE TO EXPLORE

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