

Book Review

The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning, by Ofelia García, Susana Ibarra Johnson and Kate Seltzer. Brookes Publishing, 2017, 196 pp., USD 39.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-934000-19-9

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The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning offers an innovative approach to working with bilingual students in the K-12 setting. While nearly seven years have passed since its publication, the ideas remain relevant to American educators serving increasingly multilingual populations. Indeed, most American schools continue to employ traditional models of educating bilingual students that regard these students' home language and English language practices as two distinct and independent language systems (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Conversely, Garcia et al. present a translanguaging approach, seeing the language practices of bilingual students as the formation of unique and individual linguistic repertoires that incorporate the features of two socially constructed languages. This approach shifts the focus away from individual languages and emphasizes the observable linguistic practices within bilingual communities. The authors propose that when teachers incorporate translanguaging practices into their daily teaching, bilingual students are better supported in literacy, academic language development, their authentic bilingualism, and the socioemotional development of their bilingual identities, due to the ability to tap into and utilize their linguistic repertoires to the fullest.

In Part I, "Dynamic Bilingualism at School," translanguaging and its classroom applications are introduced. Translanguaging is positioned as an asset-based approach, urging teachers to view the complete language repertoire of bilingual students as valuable assets for success in formal education. This perspective challenges the persistent deficit view embedded in curricula and standards, including core content and language development standards. The authors then dive into a recommended translanguaging pedagogy and framework for educators, with special emphasis on the dynamic *corriente*, or current, of bilingualism and three core components of translanguaging pedagogy: stance, design, and shifts. Part I concludes with an exploration of the analysis of how teachers can promote students' dynamic bilingualism using a *robust multilingual ecology* in schools. This includes the implementation of a schoolwide pro-bilingual culture, documentation of the individual bilingual profiles of students by their teachers, and the use of flexible models to dynamically look at students' bilingualism. In considering these flexible models that the authors call

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dynamic translanguaging progressions, the book differentiates between *general linguistic performance* where bilinguals use their full repertoire of language features, and *language specific performance*, which refers to the use of the features of specific, socially defined languages. This seems to address potential critiques and unfounded fears that the approach would lead to students lacking true proficiency in either of their socially defined languages, instead speaking exclusively in supposedly inferior mixed languages like *Spanglish*. By including *language specific performance* in their framework, the authors make it clear that students are still expected to be able to differentiate the features of specific socially defined languages for communication when appropriate. With the introduction to translanguaging in this first part of the book, the authors present a way for educators to cultivate an organic and dynamic multilingual classroom. This offers a fresh take on teaching bilingual students who are often marginalized by more traditional approaches to teaching that focus on languages as distinct entities that cannot mix.

Part II, “Translanguaging Pedagogy” begins by explaining the previously introduced components of stance and design. Stance refers to the philosophical orientation taken by a translanguaging classroom; most important to this is the concept of *juntos*, or togetherness, where everything is viewed through a lens of community. Considering design, the authors demonstrate that translanguaging classrooms must be intentional in their design to encourage the flow of the *corriente*, or dynamic current of bilingualism as it exists in bilingual communities. Design is then applied to assessments with the authors making a case for translanguaging classrooms that assess bilingual students on what they know and can do using the full features of their linguistic repertoires as opposed to being restricted by the confines of societally defined languages. Finally, through exploring translanguaging pedagogy, the authors show the synthesis of its key components in action, providing examples of stance, design and shift working together in ways that are conducive to the flow of the *corriente* and the establishment of a democratic classroom that promotes social justice.

In Part III, “Reimagining Teaching and Learning Through Translanguaging,” existing systems teaching and learning are challenged and reimagined in the image of translanguaging. Regarding core content standards, the authors argue that teachers often fall into the trap of being *used* by these standards. This suggests that instruction has become so standard focused that teachers find themselves teaching students to be able to “talk the talk” and perform a given standard on an assessment while failing to ever assess whether they can also “walk the walk” and apply the standard to real world scenarios. A translanguaging classroom counters this by ensuring that the standards are made to work for bilingual students. Content standards, the authors argue, should be employed by educators as a tool to design instruction that will permit students to meet those standards on the students’ own terms and with their own language practices rather than as a sort of additional hurdle placed before bilingual students. Content area literacy is examined next, with the authors stating that in the translanguaging classroom educators choose content area texts to center students, their identities, and linguistic

practices. Bilinguality, the ability to read and write two languages, is said to work best in what is described as the *flexible multiple model*, one where the two languages are used to interact with texts in both languages. The authors bring the book to a close by reimagining socioemotional well-being and social justice in the context of translanguaging. In the socioemotional sphere, translanguaging classrooms are focused on valuing not only the students themselves, but their language and culture in ways that validate them. The core components of stance, design and shift must demonstrate this. Regarding social justice, translanguaging provides students with the linguistic tools they need to create a more equitable world where bilinguals are valued and encouraged to take full advantage of their linguistic repertoires in all acts of communication.

The Translanguaging Classroom makes a compelling case for rethinking our approach to educating bilingual students. As the authors point out, many bilingual teachers have engaged in these practices successfully for years though often clandestinely to avoid the scrutiny of more conservative administrators and colleagues. As such, the publication of this book grants new credibility to translanguaging practices. Although the authors provide vignettes from real-world translanguaging classrooms, if there is one limitation of the text, it is the efficacy of the framework as presented for students who are the lone speakers of their first languages in their classrooms. The authors describe how a teacher encourages the lone Korean speaker in the class to use dictionaries and Korean texts as a means of including her in the translanguaging framework. This does not seem remotely as revolutionary as the examples of Spanish and Mandarin speaking students described elsewhere that effectively function as micro translanguaging communities within their classrooms. It even feels almost performative or patronizing to suggest that handing a child a dictionary and a few books is comparable to encouraging her classmates to work together in groups where they can dynamically communicate in their first and second languages and make full use of the linguistic repertoires celebrated so frequently throughout the book. This sounds more like a desperate move by a teacher who has run out of ideas for what to do with a new student who does not speak fluent English.

Despite this one fault, the translanguaging theory for bilingual education presented in this book from 2017 breaks new ground and is worth contemporary consideration by educators. In reimagining the linguistic practices of our classrooms to mirror the dynamic ones of the real-world bilingual communities that our students come from, translanguaging pedagogy shifts our classrooms to a student-oriented model that best serves these students. Additionally, the valorization of the linguistic practices, bilingual identities, and full linguistic repertoires of students is conducive to the type of liberation-focused education described by Freire (1970) as well as the framework described more recently in *Cultivating Genius* (Muhammad, 2020).

In centering marginalized communities and their practices as the agents of social change, it reflects the ideas that were pioneered in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) a half-century ago, and offers practical applications for classrooms. Gholdy Muhammad's (2020) more contemporary framework can also intertwine with that of

Garcia et al. In particular, the concepts of identities and criticalities from Muhammad’s work, often absent from more orthodox teaching and learning frameworks, occur organically in the translanguaging classroom because it actively invites multilingual students’ communities and linguistic practices into a space where they have traditionally been denied admission. By its very design, translanguaging promotes equity through the spheres of socioemotional well-being and social justice that are so core to the framework presented in *Cultivating Genius*. The developments presented in this book prove to be fresh, exhilarating and affirming for experienced teachers of multilingual learners. Translanguaging is an essential new tool for educators looking to construct new ways of teaching that promote equity and social justice for our bilingual students.

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