



Translanguaging: A Powerful Model for Emergent Bilinguals

—by CECILIA M. ESPINOSA
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When emergent bilinguals—or students who use two or more languages in their daily lives—are viewed through a translanguaging lens, their multiple resources take center stage and are considered absolutely critical to their literacy development.



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Dr. Cecilia M. Espinosa is an associate professor at Lehman College, City University of New York. Cecilia's journey started as a teacher assistant in a preschool. She was also a bilingual multi-age teacher and director of a dual language program in Phoenix, Arizona. She currently works with bilingual teachers at the early childhood and childhood levels and teaches courses

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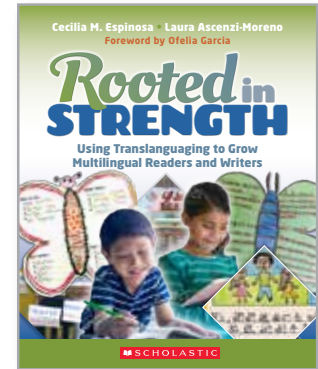
Dr. Laura Ascenzi-Moreno is an associate professor and the bilingual program coordinator at Brooklyn College, City University of New York. She has more than a decade of experience in the classroom, as a bilingual teacher, literacy coach, and new teacher mentor in New York City public schools. Currently, she works with practicing and preservice teachers.

Her research focuses on the literacy development and assessment of emergent bilinguals, the development of teacher knowledge, and how these topics can contribute to addressing issues of equity.

One to Know: Translanguaging Explained

In our book, *Rooted in Strength*, we define translanguaging as “a creative and critical process in which multilingual people use their language and other resources in dynamic, flexible, multimodal, semiotic, and purposeful ways (p. 12).”

Translanguaging is a 21st-century practice that creates a space for the full participation of emergent bilinguals; it positions multilingualism as the norm. This perspective is a significant departure from how emergent bilinguals are currently viewed through a deficit perspective and in need of remediation. From this perspective of scarcity, any use of the home language is often seen as an “interference,” and students’ success is not about sustaining and further developing their bilingualism, but about transitioning to English. In contrast, in a classroom rooted in translanguaging pedagogy, emergent bilinguals can fully engage in literacy when drawing upon their multiple resources—linguistic, socio-cultural, and more.



What to Know and Do: Highlighting Students’ Linguistic Resources

Read alouds are literacy events that are ripe with possibility for engaging emergent bilinguals. All books hold the power to engage emergent bilinguals, when teachers thoughtfully consider how they can leverage all students’ resources at each stage of experiencing the book with children—before, during, and after reading. While many teachers recognize the power of read alouds, when they take a translanguaging stance to read alouds, children are invited to capitalize on all of their linguistic and socio-cultural resources. This stance can be taken by any teacher—bilingual or otherwise. When teachers center their practices on students’ bilingual resources, the read-aloud becomes an opportunity for students to exhibit agency and voice.

Any book and any engagement with a text can provide opportunities for translanguaging because when we read aloud a book, we are opening up spaces for students to engage to engage with texts using their entire linguistic repertoire. Throughout the reading of the book, teachers must think about how they orchestrate opportunities for the whole child to come into the literacy event as they engage in meaningful talk.

When children are invited to capitalize on their entire linguistic repertoire, a read aloud experience offers emergent bilingual children the opportunity for their whole selves to be fully and actively present. From this stance, emergent bilingual children can listen to beautifully crafted language, imagine worlds painted by words, study illustrators’ interpretations of authors’ words and, most importantly have opportunities for rich dialogue with others about texts. Read-aloud is a time for the teacher to read a book for students’ enjoyment, while ensuring that through translanguaging everyone has the opportunity to construct meaning. Read aloud is a time for us to share a cherished book and the story behind it, or a book that we know the students will just love, or a book that will introduce them to content that requires the scaffolding of an adult. Read alouds offer the opportunity to study together how a character develops, to consider the importance of the story’s setting, to think about the symbolism and metaphors of the story, and so on.

More to Know and Do: Maximizing Read Alouds for Multilingual Learners

Reading aloud is a powerful reading event in all classrooms. Yet, to fully construct meaning, multilingual learners need opportunities to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire and other resources to make sense of the text and be able to construct new meanings throughout the read-aloud. For example, students:

- can make connections to the text before reading it and make predictions using their entire linguistic repertoire before reading the book.
- can enter in dialogue with peers, confirm their predictions, take on the characters' perspectives, and share their connections during the read aloud.
- can engage in deeper thinking as they analyze a text and interact with peers about the book after the read aloud.
- respond to read alouds that incorporate multimodal approaches and showcase students' varied resources and creativity, such as: dramatizing a science topic; engaging in readers' theater; writing a song inspired by the story; writing a letter to a character; interviewing characters.

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