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## Creating a Translanguaging Space for High School Emergent Bilinguals

Translanguaging is a rapidly developing concept in bilingual education. Working from the theoretical background of dynamic bilingualism, a translanguaging lens posits that bilingual learners draw on a holistic linguistic repertoire to make sense of the world and to communicate effectively with texts. What is relatively underdeveloped is the pedagogical aspects of translanguaging. This classroom-based study conducted in the southeastern US asks 2 questions: (a) How might teachers create a translanguaging space for students, and (b) what would this space look like? The authors, 1 classroom teacher and 1 researcher, engaged emergent bilingual students in small group reading of a culturally relevant text and observed students' active participation through strategic and fluid translanguaging practices. The authors argue that the linguistic norms of schooling should reflect the discursive norms of emergent bilingual students, and that teachers create translanguaging spaces as a path to educational equity.

As the number of English language learners (ELLs) in the US continues to grow (NCELA, 2011), it becomes ever more important for educators to be aware of their educational needs and conditions. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2016) estimates that there were approximately 4.5 million ELLs attending US public schools in the school year 2013-2014. As the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data show, ELLs are more than twice as likely to score below basic in reading and mathematics in fourth grade (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). The inequitable educational services provided to ELLs are also reflected in the high school dropout rates (Genesee, Lind-

holm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). In fact, while scholars cannot stress enough the importance of reading as a gateway skill to academic language and literacy development (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascón, 2007), NAEP data show that, in 2015, ELLs scored lower on reading assessments than their non-ELL peers in grades 4, 8, and 12, with an achievement gap widening as grades rise, from 37 points' difference in grade 4 to 45 points in grade 8 and 49 points in grade 12 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Despite data that paint English learners (emergent bilinguals) as academically lower than their English-speaking peers, this article aims to disrupt the pejorative narrative that frames emergent bilinguals and their underachievement as a "problem" (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Ruíz, 1984). Along the same line, we will refer to the students learning English in this article as emergent bilinguals to emphasize the positive characteristics associated with bilingualism and biliteracy development (García, 2009a). The goal of this article, then, is to show how a group of high school emergent bilingual students used "translanguaging" strategies during small group reading activities in natural and creative ways in a "translanguaging space" (Li Wei, 2014). This article highlights students' multilingual proficiencies and their efforts to tackle literary text, and to build comprehension and motivation in a secondary English Language Arts classroom. They did so by drawing upon their rich linguistic experiences and engaging in lively discussions in both English and their home language, in this case, Spanish. Such linguistic ability and efforts align with Makalelá's (2015) description of translanguaging, which he describes as "a fluid communicative language practice where the languages of input and output were purposefully juxtaposed" (p. 16). Therefore, we propose a translanguaging space for reading instruction with the explicit goal of reversing a deficit mind-set informed by monolingualistic ideologies. Rather, we focus on the assets and strengths that are prominent in emergent bilingual students' linguistic practices. A deficit mind-set views bilingual students' grammatical and pronunciation nonnative-like production as "errors." In contrast, a translanguaging perspective focuses on students' complex cognitive and linguistic skill sets when participating in classroom activities that are mediated by their multiple language use. A translanguaging lens is particularly interested in capturing the fluency and cross-linguistic proficiency as students select the language features that best facilitate their communication, academic discussion, and reading comprehension. Thus, a more productive approach to developing students' bilingual linguistic repertoire focuses on the strengths that students demonstrate and transgresses the deficit narrative of emergent bilinguals.

By demonstrating translanguaging strategies that emergent bilingual students naturally use in a space created by the teacher, this study aims to inform teachers, particularly those who do not share students' first language, with instructional implications for supporting emergent bilinguals in the classroom. Hence, the questions that guided this study were:

1. How does a teacher create a translanguaging space for emergent bilingual students in reading?
2. What does a translanguaging space look like in an ESOL pullout classroom?

### **Translanguaging as Theoretical Framework**

Vygotskian perspectives on learning posit that students will benefit from engaging socially in groups where teachers or more knowledgeable peers can guide their learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Based on this sociocultural perspective, Alvermann and Phelps (1998) envision language learning as a social practice that opens the door to new ways of thinking about content literacy teaching and learning in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. A more recent view of second language learning was put forth by Cummins (2005), who argues that bilingual instructional strategies should explicitly teach for cross-language transfer, which means that the development in emergent bilinguals' L1 could be transferred and will facilitate students' learning of an additional language. However, new trends in bilingual education research consider a bilingual learner's full range of linguistic ability as fluid and dynamic, as opposed to traditional views of bilingualism, which view a person's bilingualism as various discrete languages. For example, while scholars have documented the instructional potential of code-switching (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2005; Martínez, 2010; Sert, 2005), most of these studies are framed in a monolingual paradigm that views a learner's bilingualism as an aggregate of two or more separate languages.

Moving beyond this paradigm, García (2009b) argues that bilingualism is "not monolingualism times two" (p. 71), "not like a bicycle with two balanced wheels," but like an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). She explains that like the wheels of an ATV "extend and contract, flex and stretch, making possible, over highly uneven ground, movement forward that is bumpy and irregular but also sustained and effective" (p. 45), teachers and students respond to different classroom contexts through fluid choices of linguistic tools from their linguistic repertoire to fulfill classroom tasks. The notion of *one linguistic repertoire* is central to the concept of dynamic bilingualism (García & Li Wei, 2014).

For García and Kleyn (2016), “translanguaging refers to the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire, which does not in any way correspond to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages” (p. 14). Within this framework of dynamic bilingualism, students’ home language (e.g., Spanish or Haitian Creole) and additional language (e.g., English) are no longer labeled as L1 or L2. Instead, emergent bilingual students’ language use and language skills are reflected in their dynamic choice of vocabulary, syntactic features, grammar, and other contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1992).

When emergent bilingual students encounter everyday academic learning tasks, “they select features [from their one linguistic repertoire] *strategically* to communicate effectively” (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 22, emphasis in original text). Therefore, translanguaging presents an epistemological departure from a code-switching paradigm in which the language practices of bilinguals are centered as the norm and not like those of monolinguals (García & Li Wei, 2014). The implication of this epistemological shift is profound, because such a shift necessitates that educators rethink long-held beliefs of instruction and classroom practices. García (2009b) emphasizes that translanguaging involves “*multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*” (p. 4, emphasis in original text). Canagarajah (2011) also points out that translanguaging is a social accomplishment in which emergent bilinguals create identities that enable them to be more invested in learning through meaningful participation.

The notion of space proposed in this article is tightly related to Vygotsky’s (1978) definition of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978), ZPD is the space between what a learner already knows or can do (the actual level of development) and what he or she will be able to master when provided with support from a knowledgeable peer or teacher (potential development). The role of the knowledgeable peer or teacher is to provide space, assistance, classroom structure, or instruction, which are called scaffolding, that allow students to build on what they can independently perform. As Vygotsky (1962) contends, “Instruction cannot be identified as development, but properly organized instruction will result in the child’s intellectual development, will bring into being an entire series of such developmental processes, which were not at all possible without instruction” (p. 121).

Building on the Vygotskian notion of ZPD, Moll (2014) hypothesizes that the highest level at which emergent bilingual students can read in their home language could be a useful indicator of the proximal level of development, which is what students can achieve with

assistance. Meanwhile, the level at which students can read in English would be the actual development level, which is what students can do without assistance. The goal of teachers, then, is to construct a space with strategic scaffolding so that students can progress from their actual level of development to their proximal level. Moll (2014) termed this space as the Bilingual Zone of Proximal Development, which provides a theoretical framework for the translanguaging space proposed in this article. A translanguaging space, then, is what Li Wei (2011) refers to as socially constructed contexts in which individuals creatively and critically use their linguistic resources to strategically communicate. However, as scholars have pointed out, the pedagogical side of translanguaging has been underdeveloped in general, and translanguaging per se is seldom acknowledged in schools (Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009b; Lin & Martin, 2005). Therefore, this study focuses on how emergent bilingual students engage in reading through the rich use of translanguaging in small group guided reading activities, situated in an instructional space purposefully and strategically constructed by the teacher.

### **Methods**

This is basic qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) aimed at understanding and delineating a translanguaging space co-constructed by the teacher, researcher, and the students. Informed by Vygotskian sociocultural theories, data collection, analysis, and discussion center on the voices of students to highlight their strengths.

### ***Context and Participants***

The school site of this study was a large urban high school in a southeastern state in the US. The school had an enrollment of more than 2,200 students. Of the students, 65% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, including the eight high school students who participated in this study: four in 11th grade and four in 12th grade. All were enrolled in an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) pullout classroom, which means that they took English Language Arts through ESOL. Their countries of origin included the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. All students spoke Spanish as their first and home language. Author 1 chose to work with students whose home language is Spanish, because Spanish-speaking students comprised the majority of the classroom, and working with students from the same language group provided students a safe environment for translanguaging activities. (Note: Author 1 was a university-based researcher, while Author 2 was the high school teacher in whose classroom this study was conducted.) The students had beginning to

high-intermediate reading ability in English, based on the state's English language proficiency assessment, Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA), which had four levels of reading proficiencies: Proficient, High Intermediate, Low Intermediate, and Beginning. The classroom teacher (Author 2) helped to identify those students who were not traditionally considered to be successful students in terms of their performance on state standardized assessments. For example, none of the eight students passed the most recent Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), which was since replaced by the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) in 2015. The presentation of students' demographic information, academic performance, and socioeconomic status is not intended to associate the participating students with preconceived notions of low-income students. Instead, such information is intended to contextualize the findings where students' voices are presented.

In addition, reading had not been one of their favorite school activities, according to our informal conversations with them. For example, José (all names herein are pseudonyms) noted, "Reading makes me sleepy." We refused to associate students' reluctance to read with a deficit "problem" that they had. Instead, we turned our attention to what roles the curricula, school structure, and institutional inequities played, which either served to empower students or to discourage students, especially students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, to participate in a school task. As Clifford and Friesen (2003) note, "Reading [has] become a school task, defined and regulated by school activities. It was what teachers expected, not what you, yourself would choose to do" (p. 180). For many of the students who participated in this study, schooling and the language of schooling did not appear to be responsive to their actual lives and lived experiences. Table 1 organizes information of the participating students.

### ***Instructional Procedure***

The book we read with students was *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, which was chosen by the students from a selection of books from the classroom library. Most of the books in the classroom library are in English. Students explained that one reason for choosing *The House on Mango Street* was having bilingual versions of it. For our reading activities, we had two copies of the book in English and one copy in Spanish for students. We read the stories in the book in the reciprocal teaching fashion in which teacher and students take turns leading small group discussions (see Fisher & Frey, 2004; Oczkus, 2010; and Palincsar & Brown, 1984, for descriptions of reciprocal teaching). Author 1 modeled summarizing, question generating,

**Table 1**  
**The Participating Students**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>English language proficiency (reading)</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Home language</i>
José	11th	High-intermediate	Mexico	Spanish
Mateo	11th	Low-intermediate	Honduras	Spanish
Giovanni	11th	Low-intermediate	Dominican Republic	Spanish
Nazario	12th	High-intermediate	Mexico	Spanish
Edgard	12th	Beginning	Nicaragua	Spanish
Geminis	11th	Low-intermediate	Puerto Rico	Spanish
Samuel	12th	Beginning	Guatemala	Spanish
Diego	12th	Low-intermediate	Honduras	Spanish

clarifying, and predicting before different students led the questioning role. After each story, we also discussed the major themes and students' personal inferences.

### ***Data Collection***

With written consent from the teacher, participating students, and the Institutional Review Board, the primary data sources for this study were audio-recorded group reading interactions and extensive field notes. Group reading activities and interviews were audiotaped and a verbatim transcript for only the English utterances was created for analysis. Author 1 visited the classroom for a total of nine times over a period of three months. Each session lasted two hours. The total hours of data collection amounted to approximately 18 hours. Both authors of this article kept separate field notes (Bernard, 2011). Later, the field notes from the two authors were compared for triangulation.

### ***Data Analysis***

Both authors of this article participated in data analysis. Author 2's insider position helped provide insights to the meaning-making process of the data, while Author 1's position was reflected in direct interactions with students. Our data analysis occurred in dialogic interactions among data, theoretical framework, and our subjectivities. We repeatedly read and reread the transcripts, with special emphasis on the reading group transcripts, and engaged in reflective comparison of our field notes. Using a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the two authors independently grouped interactional



data into chunks. We then compared our grouping of data, discussed the rationale for our respective grouping decisions, clarified differences in the grouping decisions, and achieved agreement in the data chunks. Subsequently, we compared chunks of data with each other and again grouped chunks of data into thematic groups. Through this step, themes emerged from the groups of data. The broad themes that emerged from the data include building rapport with students, collaborative reading, and reciprocal teaching. Within the theme of collaborative reading, we realized that students were most actively engaged in deploying multiple semiotic resources and drawing on their full linguistic repertoire when they encountered comprehension challenges. These challenges appeared to be vocabulary, complex syntax, figurative speech, semantics, or unfamiliar contextual cues. We then created codes based on these challenges for these moments and individually coded the group of data from the reading interactions. After separately coding the data, we repeatedly got together for discussing coding decisions, clarifying ambiguities, and finally achieving consensus in the coding.

Finally, we aligned our analysis with the research questions and translanguaging theory so that the relationship between our own subjectivity and the data was clear and unambiguous (Smagorinsky, 2008). For example, Author 1 intentionally allowed students to return to the Spanish version of the book and discuss challenging texts in Spanish, and students spontaneously responded to Author 1 in English. This aligned with translanguaging theories in that students' choice of language use were natural, spontaneous, and conducive to reading comprehension. With the purpose of the study, which was to show the readers what a translanguaging space looked like, we categorized our presentation of the findings in the collaborative reading section in the following categories: reading beyond the lexical level, interacting with multimodality, drawing on multiple repertoires, tackling figurative speech, and making personal inferences. These categories aligned with translanguaging theory in a way that they portrayed representative moments when students were translanguaging to make meaning.

We enhanced the trustworthiness of the study by embedding the following strategies into the research design. First, we triangulated separated field notes from observations. Second, we achieved consensus in the coding process through a recursive process. Third, we presented the findings with what Denzin and Lincoln (2013) calls *fairness* authenticity, by which we mean balancing the voice, perspectives, claims, and values of all stakeholders, particularly the students. Fourth, we presented our initial analysis to the paraprofessional teacher in the classroom to allow her to determine if our analysis was rea-

sonable (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Last, we submitted our research report for critique through a peer-review process.

### ***Researcher Subjectivity***

Author 1 was a doctoral student in Bilingual Education at a local university, and Author 2 was the classroom teacher in whose classroom this study was conducted. Both authors were native Chinese speakers. Neither were Spanish speakers. Both authors held master-level degrees with specialization in Bilingual Education. Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph (2005) remind us that educational researchers, especially researchers of familiar educational settings, often bring with them (successful) histories of participation in those institutions as students, teachers, and parents. These histories represent what Fairclough (1992) refers to as “members’ resource” and what Gee (1999) refers to as “cultural models” that embody the beliefs, assumptions, and values within schooling contexts. Neither author of this article had US K-12 experiences as students. Author 1 did not identify as embodying rich “members’ resources” or cultural capital in a Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu, 1986) during his K-12 schooling. Author 2 was a first-year public school teacher at the time of the study. These positionalities lent a stance of empathy and understanding to the authors, allowing them to build rapport with emergent bilingual students based on shared experiences, for example migration, and resisting poverty.

Furthermore, we believe that listening to student voices, building rapport with students, and providing culturally relevant texts create opportunities for students to be more engaged and invested in reading classes. We could allow students to decide what culturally relevant text means to them. It is our belief that the mismatch between language practices, language expectations of schooling, and students’ daily language practices diminish students’ passion for reading. Therefore, as translanguaging reflects emergent bilinguals’ natural way of using language and therefore should be legitimized in schools, we promote that teachers intentionally and strategically construct translanguaging spaces in which students use all their linguistic abilities to achieve academic learning.

### **Findings**

In a translanguaging space, students were highly engaged in reading as they found that the characters spoke Spanish and that the themes in the story were similar to their experiences. For example, one student said, “I love this book because it’s like my life.” Also, when the reading activities reflected their everyday language practices, stu-

dents achieved better reading comprehension, as we will demonstrate in the following section.

### ***Building Rapport With Students***

Nieto (1994) asserts that listening to students' views, and especially to the views of those who come from linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds, can provide important clues about what is valued or devalued in the curriculum and why. To understand the students' attitudes about reading, writing, and general schooling experience, Author 1 conducted an open-ended interview with each of the students. The questions were as follows.

1. Where is your hometown? Can you show it to me on the map? Tell me more about it, the climate, the language you speak back home, the people there.
2. What was school like back home? What did you study? How did you learn English?
3. How long have you been in the States? How many places have you lived after you came? Who do you live with? Do you like it living here? What do you like or dislike to do every day?
4. How do you like the school here? What do you think of the teacher? What other classes are you taking? What do you want to do after high school?
5. Do you like reading? What do you like to read? Why not?

As Author 1 was the primary leader of the reading group, the Findings section of this article will use the first person singular pronoun "I." I invited students to ask me similar questions about my country of origin (China) and I shared with them my understandings of a migrating childhood and youth life. I assured students that they could be honest with me and did not have to say nice things to me about school. I also explained that I wanted to take the time to know them and for them to know me before we jumped into the book, and that I hoped that they would start to enjoy reading through reading this book. My belief that getting to know your students on a personal level was an aspect that could not be stressed enough echoed with several students. One student, Mateo, said, "Yeah, I agree, we need to get to know each other better. Many teachers don't care who we are. You are different." As youth culture is produced at home, in school, on the streets, with friends, in malls, among siblings, through TV, music, and the Internet (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998), I found students' diverse interests as a potential resource to engage them in reading materials, despite their initial disinclination for reading.

I also focused on what students could do and what they knew. For example, I said, “I wish I could speak Spanish as well as you do.” When students talked to me about the geography and climate of the Dominican Republic, I thanked them for giving me a minilesson on their home country. Gunderson (2000) invites us to

consider what it might be like to walk in the shoes of the adolescents who come to our classes each day speaking a different language, holding on to cultural practices that still make sense to them, and wishing for a teacher or two who will understand all of this. (p. 693)

Reading a text that related to students’ cultural background was one step toward this understanding.

### ***Collaborative Reading in a Translanguaging Space***

Our reading activities unfolded in a reciprocal teaching fashion. Everybody sat around a round table and took turns reading parts of the story. I was the one posing and modeling posing questions. During the reading activities, students fluidly chose the language in reading and discussion. For example, they either read the story in English and discussed in Spanish, or read the Spanish version and retold or explained to me in English. Baker (2011) reminds us that students may not be processing the information by simply reading aloud or copying words into a worksheet in a monolingual teaching situation, whereas when students have the space and opportunity to translanguaging in reading, it “means that the subject matter has to be processed and ‘digested’” (p. 289). In other words, in a translanguaging space, students had to make sense of the text in order to participate.

**Reading Beyond the Lexical Level.** Vocabulary was rarely an obstacle in our reading activities. Although frequently there were new words for students, we collaboratively tackled them by using different strategies. At first, students preferred to stick to their habit of using an English-Spanish dictionary. However, the pause in reading to use the dictionary seemed to interfere with students’ comprehension of the context. I encouraged students to skip the new word if “you could understand the sentence.” When gradually moved away from a focus on lexical-level understanding toward using the context instead of individual words to build comprehension of the text, students achieved better fluency in reading. When reading “My papa’s hair is like a broom, up in the air,” Giovanni reached out to the dictionary for the word *broom*. Nazario stopped him, saying, “No, no, no, I don’t know broom, too, but it says, *up in the air*, so you know what her papa’s hair is like.”

**Interacting With Multimodality.** As students move between languages in their discussions, they deploy a plethora of semiotic resources (Halliday, 1978). These multimodal semiotic resources include interactional linguistic symbols within their full linguistic repertoire, textual artifacts, as well as facial expressions, gestures, bodily representations, and interaction with the Internet (Kress, 2009). Makalela (2015) posits that curricula and instruction build on multiple repertoires of the learners and that educators acknowledge the linguistic fluidities that overlap into one another. This overlap of repertoires, including their digital literacy and linguistic repertoire, was manifested in students' spontaneous use of technology, that is, mobile phones that had access to the Internet. When Edgard read the word *seagull*, he wondered what it meant. Then he took out his mobile phone and searched *seagull* on Google images. The picture immediately clarified his confusion. Then he showed his partner the pictures. After a quick exchange of information in Spanish, they told me, "Oh, it's the bird. . . . In Spanish, we call it *gaviota*. Yeah, that makes sense because *mamacita* is singing sad songs like the sounds of the bird." In this snapshot of the interactions, we could see that emergent bilinguals take three natural translanguaging steps to understand a new word, *seagull*. First, they used an online search engine for a visual representation of the word; then, they referred to each other for confirmation and sharing of information; in the final step, they achieved comprehension by relating to Spanish.

**Drawing on Multiple Repertoires.** Naturally, students relied on each other's linguistic capital to tackle new vocabulary. It usually took the form of a quick peer discussion in Spanish. More often than not, the quick discussions led to students' discoveries of cognates as a valuable resource for them. Building on that, students frequently employed a combination of strategies when they encountered new words. When they read "Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier," they stopped because *chandelier* was a roadblock to comprehension. Helping each other, they found the word *candelabro* in the Spanish version of our book. Still confused, Nazario searched on Google images and then he discussed with Giovanni in Spanish for a minute. Turning to me, they explained to me what they found, "It's like the thing on the table. You put lights on it. Oh, candles on it. You see, there is the word *candle* in *candelabro*." When they read about the scene in which three little friends rode on the same bicycle, they tried to visualize how that is possibly done, and showed me in person using two chairs simulating the bicycle, and three of them mimicked what the story showed them—three friends riding one bike. The process of achieving this ability to show me a scene in the story involved going back and forth

between the English and Spanish text, talking to each other in Spanish, and answering my clarifying questions in English.

**Tackling Figurative Speech.** Students engaged in heated discussion in their first language when they encountered figurative language. One of the lines in the book caused confusion to Geminis and Edgard, “¡Ay! *Mamacita*, who does not belong, every once in a while lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country.” When asked what that thread was, Geminis and Edgard turned to each other and discussed in Spanish. They also referred to the Spanish version of the book. After a while, Geminis turned to me and said, “Thread is a line, like the line you make a sweater.” She pulled her sleeves when saying so. Edgard agreed with her. I prompted them to think about the thread as figurative speech, to consider who he and she were, and what happened between them in the story before this line. Again, they resumed lively discussion in Spanish and rereading both the English and Spanish text. Unfortunately, I was unable to keep track of their discussion in Spanish. But as they returned to me, we had the following conversation.

- Edgard: So the thread is figurative language. It doesn't mean the line in our clothes.
- Author 1: I agree. What does the thread mean figuratively?
- Geminis: I think it means her, I mean *mamacita* ... she is missing home.
- Author 1: That's interesting. So you are saying she is homesick. Then why does the author say he had torn the only skinny thread?
- Edgard: Because he is mad at her?
- Author 1: Why is he mad at her?
- Edgard: Because she keeps asking *¿Cuándo, cuándo, cuándo?*
- Geminis: And she plays Spanish radio and sings the songs.
- Author 1: What did he do to her when she did all this?
- Edgard: He cuts the radio? Because he says *Speak English!*
- Geminis: Oh, yes! It's like cutting her line to home.
- Edgard: Oh I see. But it's kinda weird. In Spanish you don't really say that.

During this process of clarifying misunderstandings, although I was unable to track students' discussion in Spanish, I clearly observed that students actively deploy their linguistic skills in trying to make sense of the figurative speech. In such small reading groups, students were given the agency to account for their own comprehension. In

order to achieve comprehension, they generated substantial amounts of spoken language in collaborative inquiries. In such social interactions, students strategically switched back and forth between English and Spanish. With each other, they used Spanish; with me, they used English. I refrained from talking more than they did; instead, I observed their interactions and their spontaneity in translanguaging to communicate with the text and with each other.

Jiménez and colleagues (2015) documented how emergent bilinguals used translation as a way to achieve conceptualized understanding of language and bilingualism. Similarly, in this case, students made several metalinguistic and metacognitive comments. For example, they discovered the cognates in Spanish and English, compared the unique use of figurative speech in English, and contrasted what was similar and what was different between the two languages. Hornberger (2005) points out that “bi/multilinguals’ learning is maximized when they are allowed and enabled to draw from across all their existing language skills (in two+ languages), rather than being constrained and inhibited from doing so under monolingual instructional assumptions and practices” (p. 607). In the process, students benefited from the translanguaging space that the teachers created and related reading in this space to their translanguaging realities in everyday life. Thus, they became more engaged and invested in reading comprehension. By engaging in such activities in a collaborative reading community, students were able to tackle unfamiliar vocabulary and recognize phrases, metaphors, and text structures. Students were also able to move from lexical-level text processing to larger text-level understandings. In such a translanguaging space, they were able to use their holistic linguistic repertoire for reading comprehension as compared to English-dominant ways of reading.

**Making Personal Inferences.** Besides encouraging students to engage in translanguaging activities in reading, I gave students brief prompts for the purpose of helping them understand how their life experience related to ideas and information presented in the text. For example, when we read about a man who worked two jobs to save money, José said, “He’s like *me*. I work two jobs.” We also shared our “Hamandeggs,” food that we will never eat again because, for a certain period in our lives, we had to eat it every meal. When *mamacita* recalled the pink house at home, I asked students the question, “What was home like to you?” Edgard said, “Home is a room full of my favorite hats.” Nazario said, “We lived in a big yard. We had a blue house.”

At the end of our reading sessions, we engaged in another activity using a stanza from the Shakespearean play *Romeo and Juliet* (thanks to Drs. Mark B. Pacheco and Robert T. Jiménez).<sup>1</sup> The stanza used was:

Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name.  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet. (*Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2)

After students read the text, I (Author 1) asked them to quickly discuss and clarify any confusion they encountered in the text. As typically occurred, the discussion among the students occurred in a fluid, bilingual manner, alternating between Spanish and English, as students made sense of the text. Students were then asked to rewrite the text using their daily language, typically text-message language, as if they were saying the same thing to their own sweethearts. After a few minutes of writing, students shared with each other hilarious yet profoundly meaningful texts. One student wrote: "Ay boy, where you at? Who cares what your family says. I just wanna be with you." Yet another student wrote: "¿Dónde estás Romeo? Don't listen to your dad. Be mine and walk with me in our dreams, and I will devote my life to you."

### ***Reciprocal Teaching***

Reading the book with them was a reciprocal experience when students eagerly shared their knowledge with me, which Li Wei (2014) describes as colearning in multilingual classrooms. For example, several students took great effort to explain to me what *mamacita* was and what *mamasota* was. Students also explained their different usages and meanings in different Latin American countries. Explaining the literal meanings of *mamacita* and *mamasota*, which are little mama and big mama respectively, students engaged in conversations of exploring a nuanced meaning of the two address terms. Alternating in Spanish and English with peers and with me, students explained that both *mamacita* and *mamasota* could be used as endearments. However, both terms could be potentially offensive in certain countries and contexts. Students did so because I asked them why everybody chuckled every time they read these two words. My identity as an English learner brought me closer to the students, allowing students to share their more personal experiences and opinions with me even though I do not share their first language. These interactions are, in essence, students' authentic efforts to negotiate meaning and engage in higher-order thinking with the fluid yet purposeful juxtaposition of two languages.

### **Discussion**

The above vignettes of students' interactions among themselves,



with the Spanish-speaking paraprofessional, their classroom teacher, and with Author 1 demonstrate how translanguaging is the discursive norm among bilingual students in this setting. Students' legitimate ways of living, thinking, and being naturally involve a recursive, back-and-forth process between the English and Spanish languages, mediated through their cultural lens. In fact, emergent bilingual students by definition negotiate two or more languages that may be used in the context of home, school, and community. Those students continue to expand, reveal, and negotiate their bilingual language development in and across multiple settings.

In this translanguaging space, in which students read the text, discussed the nuances of the text, reacted to confusions, negotiated meaning, and made sense, students' bilingual practices and their bilingual identities are affirmed. In contrast, a monolingual framework of schooling, curricula, and assessments are imbued with a oneness ideology, such as "one nation, one language" and "one classroom, one language" (Makalela, 2015). This oneness ideology views students' first language as irrelevant or even an obstruction to learning English and content-area academic knowledge. In those spaces, emergent bilingual students' bilingual lived experiences are often rendered invalid and even pathologized in such a framework. Until and unless academic assessments reflect the realities of emergent bilingual students' full linguistic repertoires, those students will likely continue to be perceived as inadequate, interior, and limited academically.

### ***Disrupting the Deficit Orientation***

Earlier in this article, we put forth the argument that there is a mismatch between language practices and expectations of schooling and students' daily language practices, and that this mismatch discourages emergent bilinguals from becoming more invested in reading in schools (Peirce, 1995). We follow Gutiérrez and Orellana's (2006) critique of the "cultural mismatch theory." The cultural mismatch theory, evolved from the cultural deficit theory or cultural deprivation theory, highlights the differences between school and home language practices (see Bernstein, 1971, for his account of the correlation between social class and language use). Following cultural mismatch theory, previously overt statements of deficits become covert or hidden, reinforcing stereotypes of linguistically and culturally diverse groups and masking social injustices. According to Gutiérrez and Orellana (2006), any differences in a stratified society are always ranked according to the dominant norms, meaning that the practices of lower-ranking families and communities have to be "fixed." In our argument, we propose that what needs to be changed is not a validation

of the linguistic practices of emergent bilingual students necessarily, but monolingual schooling norms that reflect a monolingual school space, curriculum, instruction, and testing regime. In other words, “the linguistic landscape of the classroom and the school should be reflective of students’ home languages and cultures, as well as the content students are learning” (Kleyn, 2016, p. 204). Although for many teachers, incorporating students’ first languages into their classrooms can be a daunting task (Karathanos, 2010), the vignettes of student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions in this article provide examples of how monolingual norms in schools can be disrupted.

### ***Translanguaging to Transgress***

The rewritings of the Shakespearean stanza demonstrate students’ high level of comprehension of the text and their ability to express this comprehension in a way that is relevant to their lives. By reading the original text, discussing it in Spanish, clarifying with a teacher or knowledgeable peer (Vygotsky, 1978), and rewriting the text in a language with which they were familiar, students were using their full linguistic abilities in a fluid and dynamic manner. The examples of students’ rewriting demonstrate that students were translanguaging across linguistic registers and across languages while engaging their full range of linguistic repertoires. Such examples are an authentic reflection of the students’ daily language practices. It also suggests that students’ daily language practices are legitimate resources that can be used in classrooms and can be viable gateways from which students can approach literature. With this in mind, teachers could create spaces and opportunities for students to engage in such translanguaging, which “*transgresses and destabilizes* language hierarchies, and at the same time *expands and extends* practices that are typically valued in school and in the everyday world of communities and homes” (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 68, emphasis in original).

### ***Connecting to the Common Core***

In a recent blog post, Flores (2016) debunks the dichotomous notions of academic language and nonacademic language and argues that emergent bilingual students’ language practices are already aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This dichotomy assumes that, according to Flores, academic language and nonacademic language are fundamentally distinct, and that each belongs to mutually exclusive domains—academic and nonacademic. The problem with this dichotomous view of students’ language practices is that certain types of language practices are valued more in schools, for example, white middle-class English-speaking literacy practices.

Typically, these types of language practices are seen to be associated with academic language and aligned with the CCSS. This leaves the language and literacy practices of emergent bilingual students seemingly more associated with the nonacademic domains and less aligned with the CCSS. However, Flores (2016, para. 3) suggests that the Common Core State Standards do not necessarily demand that students master academic language. Instead, reading standards, for example, focus on the analytical skills to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings” and “analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme” (Common Core State Standards, 2017). Although language is the semiotic tool for these activities, debunking the academic versus nonacademic language dichotomy is essential; otherwise, educators risk excluding the broad range of linguistic skills of their emergent bilingual students.

As many of the vignettes above have shown, students are able to meet reading standards while engaged in collaborative reading activities. When a teacher creates a classroom in which translanguaging is the linguistic norm, she not only empowers students to achieve and even go beyond the mandated standards, but also disrupts and transforms the monolingual structure of schooling.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

As García and Kleyn’s (2016) collection of research in classrooms with students from multiple linguistic backgrounds has shown, teachers do not necessarily have to speak the language(s) of their students. What matters more is a philosophical stance (García & Kleyn, 2016) that embraces a translanguaging space in their classrooms. How, then, might teachers create translanguaging spaces while ensuring that *all* students meet mandated standards? García and Kleyn (2016) proposed a three-element plan for designing translanguaging instruction.

**1. Constructing Collaborative/Cooperative Structures.** The reading group in this study provides only one example of this maxim. Instruction guided by a translanguaging stance should always be student centered and foster social interaction among peers. Higher-order thinking could be embedded in such interactional/collaborative learning activities so that students meet mandated standards. Students can be grouped into homogeneous language groups and encouraged to share information with their peers. This is what García, Johnson, and Seltzer (2016) refer to as *together/juntos* instructional design, and what Moll (2014) refers to as the Bilingual Zone of Proximal Development.

**2. Collecting Varied Multilingual and Multimodal Instructional Resources.** The classroom's small collection of reading resources in this study was primarily handed down by the district, with few multilingual texts available. Making appropriate multilingual and multimodal materials available means that teachers have to go out of their way, and sometimes outside their comfort zones, to identify and collect these resources. Some of those resources could include printed texts, videos, movies, and other Internet resources. One particularly helpful genre of text includes those authors who use translanguaging in their writing. Students can engage in an analysis of the translanguaging practices by the author, identifying the author's intention, and evaluating the effects of such writing. Additionally, students, families, and communities could also be rich sources of multilingual and multimodal resources for the classroom.

**3. Using Translanguaging Pedagogical Practices** (see also García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2016). García and Kleyn (2016) have shown specific pedagogical practices in a series of classroom studies and provided a long list of pedagogies for teachers and educators in bilingual programs, English-medium classrooms, and across content areas (see Kleyn, 2016). Examples of translanguaging pedagogical practices include allowing students to make presentations; reading aloud to the class in their home languages or bilingually; providing translations of lesson objectives, key vocabulary, directions, and concepts; and allowing students to *do* science or social studies instead of only *reading about* it.

### Conclusion and Limitations

One major limitation of this study was that neither the researcher (Author 1) nor the classroom teacher (Author 2) shared the students' home language. This meant that a major chunk of the interaction in the space was lost in the data. However, thanks to the translanguaging realities in the space, the researcher was able to capture the dynamics of student interaction in Spanish, that is, the moments when students achieved comprehension, through careful observations and extensive field notes. Another limitation is that this study did not touch upon how standardized assessments fit into a translanguaging space. During my (Author 1) last week's visit, the students were frustrated because they had gotten some disappointing results from the FCAT the previous day. Edgard said, "American tests are easy. Much easier than the tests at home." I teased them that if the tests were easy, they should pass them. Gabriel said, "If the tests are in Spanish, we could easily pass it. It's the problem of the language." What is reflected in these comments are the narrow monolingual practices in the assess-

ment that render emergent bilingual students' natural bilingual ways of knowing and being as illegitimate and deficient (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 134). Students' voices shed important light on future research on translanguaging in assessment such that scholars, teachers, and policy makers should reconsider monolingualism that dominates standardized assessments in the US.

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### **Note**

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