

The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning

Ofelia García, Susana Ibarra Johnson, and Kate Seltzer.
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So often teachers and teacher educators have to choose between a book that is skewed heavily toward either theory or practice; rarely does the literature adequately cover both. Ofelia García, Susana Ibarra Johnson, and Kate Seltzer's recent book *The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning* (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017) does just that, however. Their work blends both theory and practice, making it not only appropriate, but much needed, for both preservice and inservice teachers who have (or will have) emergent bilinguals in their K–12 classroom.

Preservice teachers in K–12 teacher education programs and inservice teachers in K–12 schools are often woefully unprepared to teach emergent bilinguals and generally must resort to outdated policies and notions of bilingualism (García & Kleifgen, 2010). *The Translanguaging Classroom* responds to this need. Written by three of the most prominent authors in translanguaging for the K–12 classroom, it includes detailed definitions, explanations, and real-world examples of translanguaging theory and practice. Such a rich resource serves to guide teachers unfamiliar with the relatively new notion of translanguaging through an understanding and implementation of translanguaging practices. García, Ibarra Johnson, and Seltzer also achieve the two other purposes they articulate for their text: for “educators and researchers to see a clearly articulated translanguaging pedagogy in practice” and to “provide the foundation for teachers and researchers to gather empirical evidence in translanguaging classrooms” (p. xiii).

The chapters are divided into three parts: Dynamic Bilingualism at School, Translanguaging Pedagogy, and Reimagining Teaching and Learning through Translanguaging. García, Ibarra Johnson, and Seltzer integrate their three stands of a translanguaging pedagogy—stance, design, and shifts—throughout these parts. Chapters begin with learning objectives and conclude with two reader-activity sections—“Questions and Activities” and “Taking Action.” The chapter contents are well organized and helpful: Chapters 1 and 2 set up a number of key definitions, address possible misconceptions about language learning, and dive deeply into the theoretical underpinnings of a translanguaging pedagogy and its purposes; the text for these chapters uses helpful metaphors such as *the translanguaging corriente*, which illustrates the fluid linguistic and cultural practices of bilingual students in the classroom and the creation of something new from what seem like distinct features. Chapter 3 focuses on ways to document students' linguistic performances and introduces dynamic translanguaging progressions as a method of assessing what all students can do with language. Chapter 4 is centered on the translanguaging stance and its connection to teacher practice. Chapter 5 takes the reader into the classroom, focusing on “purposeful and strategic” classroom layout/design, lesson plans using the translanguaging instructional design cycle, and pedagogical strategies that respond to student needs and are flexible. Chapter 6 covers how to design

formal assessments that utilize translanguaging. Chapter 7 provides an in-depth representation of the design cycle. Chapter 8 walks the reader through the process of meeting state standards and scripted curricula while also staying true to a translanguaging stance. Chapter 9 demonstrates how content teachers can use translanguaging pedagogy to reinforce and literacy skills during content-area instruction. Chapter 10 describes dynamic biliteracy and how to implement activities to develop biliteracy. Finally, Chapter 11 brings closure to the text by returning it to an overarching purpose of the translanguaging classroom: social justice and the socioemotional well-being of students.

The Translanguaging Classroom is not an instruction manual for readers to passively replicate in their current or future classrooms. Instead, through an exploration of a translanguaging stance, pedagogical design, and translanguaging shifts, it offers ways for teachers to make decisions about planning, instruction, assessment, or other classroom practices guided by translanguaging pedagogy. This serves as a much stronger teacher development tool than simply providing a list of activities to follow that may or not fit a particular translanguaging classroom.

The development of teachers' translanguaging practices is aided by the highly valuable "Questions and Activities" and "Taking Action" sections at the end of each chapter. The "Questions and Activities" section invites reflection and connection to the classroom on the part of the reader and are appropriate for both preservice and inservice teachers. The "Taking Action" section encourages readers to apply various techniques mentioned in the chapter or to investigate their classroom. As an example, the end of Chapter 6 includes the following question: "Think about the four principles of a translanguaging assessment design. Which are easier for you to include in your own assessment design? Why? Which are harder? Why?" and the following action step: "Select three students. After a lesson, have each of them fill out the Self-Assessment . . . What did you learn from these various assessments? How would you adapt or change your instruction based on this new information?" (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, p. 98). These are questions and action steps that require reflection on teaching practice, integration of new translanguaging concepts, and inquiry into the teacher's classroom.

Another strength is the generous use of realistic vignettes throughout. The vignettes are drawn primarily from three classroom contexts: (a) an eleventh-grade social studies class in New York City comprising students of varying language backgrounds, some officially designated as ELLs; (b) a fourth-grade dual-language bilingual classroom in New Mexico comprising mostly Spanish-speaking bilinguals; and (c) an English-medium middle-school math and science classes in Los Angeles, where the teacher serves as a push-in ESL teacher. The vignettes, which document teachers' actions and stances in the classroom, center on several focus points: snapshots of lesson plans and classroom action, including conversations between teachers and ESL support instructors; student and teacher interaction with classroom projects and directions; unit plans in action; and information gathering of students' cultural, language-specific, and general linguistic needs. Most important, the vignettes are embedded in the body of the text, so the authors can readily alternate between describing the analysis of classroom practices (i.e., discussing why a teacher asked certain questions, alternative decisions and results, or what the teacher observes and how that is used to inform practices). The classroom snapshots and the authors' explanations greatly encourage teacher reflection and thoughtful translanguaging pedagogy.

One possible drawback of the text is that while the vignettes provide much-needed contextual support for teachers new to translanguaging, they are somewhat flat and static. Short videos of teaching practice or more developed student work samples in addition to vignettes would complement the text noticeably. A stand-alone text does not easily adapt itself to changing teaching practice, but with an online component to watch classroom videos or interviews with teachers in the form of stimulated recalls or follow-ups to teaching, readers would have a much greater chance of transferring the text on the page to the living, breathing classroom.

Overall, there is much to celebrate in *The Translanguaging Classroom*. García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer have crafted a remarkable learning tool that fits the needs of both preservice and inservice teachers. This book would make an excellent fit for teacher education as a required text for a university course or a professional development text for a group of teachers or administration in a school without strong support for teachers working with emergent bilinguals.

References

García, O., & Kleifgen, J. (2010). *Educating emergent bilinguals: Policies, programs, and practices for English language learners*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.



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