



April 4, 2018

ISSN 1094-5296

García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon.

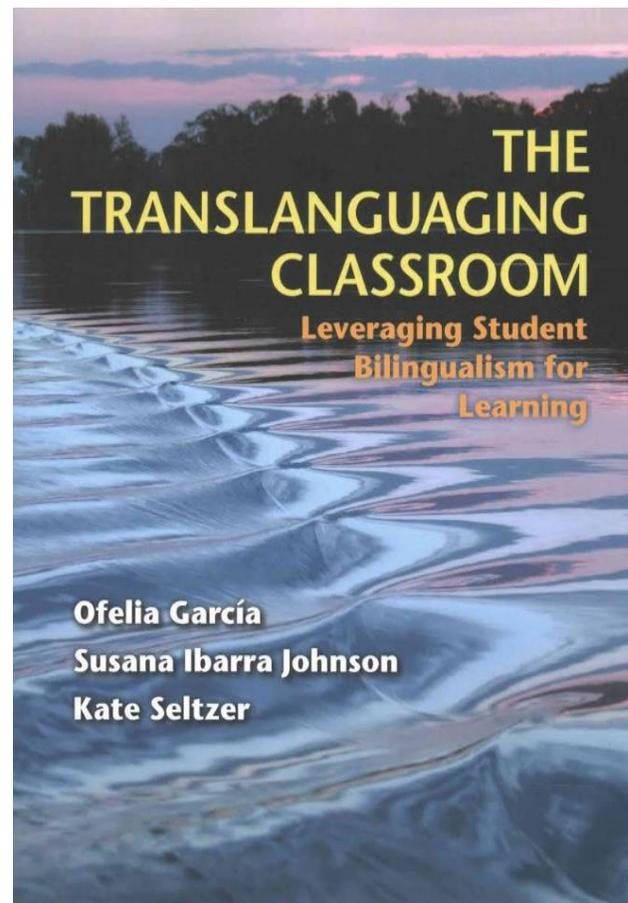
Pp. 224

ISBN: 1934000191

Reviewed by Rachel K. Gilbert
Jeffco Public Schools
United States

While the concept of *translanguaging* is a relatively new term in the world of bilingualism and bilingual education, the ideas in the book are not necessarily new. In conversations, the concept of translanguaging has always felt “forced” for me.

Translanguaging could be described as “the day-to-day practices [that] provided multiple opportunities for students to have ongoing access to each other's linguistic, cultural, and cognitive resources, and these practices had consequences that extended beyond the classroom walls” (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). Yet this was a definition used by Gutierrez in the 1990s to describe *hybridity* and the *Third Space*. One thing this book does exceptionally well is give names to concepts that have been floating out there as informal or less-known techniques and put them into a functional framework. After reading this book, I was able to adopt new terms to describe the language learning process and was also able to start framing conversations with a new pedagogical and equitable approach for



teachers. In my role as a dual language instructional coach, I have already started to see shifts in teacher beliefs about student strengths and instructional approaches. This book is an empowering resource and I strongly recommend that anyone who works with multilingual students read it.

The Translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning is crafted to help teachers leverage student strengths, but to do that, the authors build an equity pedagogy that addresses the problems from a political and national level down to classroom techniques. There is transparency about the authors' interest in changing national and state policy around bilingual instruction. They have a clear agenda of rebranding terms for language learners from a deficit lens of Limited English Proficient (LEP) to descriptions of what students can do—which is in line with the WIDA Consortium and their Can-Do descriptors and the language acquisition process. WIDA's mission is to advance “academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators” (WIDA, 2-21-2018). By encouraging this perspective of culture and language, the book allows for teachers to think more holistically about their students and what they come to school with.

From the beginning, the authors call all language learners *bilingual* regardless of where they are in the language learning progression. They use the term emergent bilingual in place of Non-English Proficient (NEP) and remind the reader, along the way, that they only use the terms LEP and NEP when referencing state or national level wording. The authors' assertion is that these are deficit-based terms. Throughout the book, the message is made clear that bilingualism is an obvious ideal instead of the ‘*mark or stigma of ELL*’. This asset-based lens allows for critical analysis of instructional practices that

leverage what students bring with them from their home language and culture. The concepts are again in line with hybridity and flexible third spaces (Gutierrez, 1999).

Throughout the text, the authors are consistent in their asset-based approach to language learning. The message that is woven through the entire book is that bilingual children come not with partial language, or limited proficiency, but with an entire *language repertoire* that is an asset and tool for success. There is no apology in the book for this assumption, but instead the asset approach is built into a framework for closing the achievement gap (or equity gap) and leveraging student strengths for more connected and contextual learning.

The book is laid out in a traditional social science style with concise introductions and conclusions. There are ideas presented such as the *dynamic translanguaging progression*, and pedagogically based suggestions for instruction and assessment around stance, design, and shift. There are concrete tools to use for further discussions about this for teachers and strong guiding questions, activities, and suggestions for taking action at the end of each chapter. It begins by building important concepts that support Translanguaging like dynamic translanguaging progression: a flexible model to help teachers understand each student's bilingualism (Garcia, 2017, pp. 35). This model helps teachers think through the four modes of communication (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in both languages. The models are then followed by concrete suggestions and tools. The authors effectively describe three classroom examples that represent a K-12 spectrum and effectively show how translanguaging can be used in high school content classrooms, middle school English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, and in dual language elementary settings.

One key premise is that bilingualism is an asset that educators can use to tap into to

help students achieve in schools. The authors explain that bilingual students come not with two separate languages and two separate skills, but one *language repertoire* (Garcia, 2017). Their assertion challenges some notions and common practices in ESL and bilingual programs—either dual immersion or transitional— that promote strict separation of languages. One practice that often happens in elementary schools is a transitional model where literacy in the home language is only taught until the student can perform in English and then native language and literacy instruction are stopped. The goal in these programs is typically to exit students out of the bilingual program by third grade. The equity issue with a transitional model becomes evident while digging into the *translanguaging pedagogy*. If we are not leveraging what students bring with them from home, we are inadvertently preventing students from accessing their cognitive and academic skills in the other language and are therefore continuing to contribute to the achievement gap.

The authors argue that translanguaging is a way to address social justice and meet the academic and social needs of our bilingual students. “Teachers who take up a translanguaging stance open themselves up to the idea that ‘traditional’ classrooms do not always benefit, and may even harm, Latino bilingual students. Transforming a classroom into a translanguaging space means thinking differently about traditional notions of what it looks like to teach, assess, and learn” (Garcia, 2017, pp. 58). If teachers value what students bring with them from home, and leverage the language and background, then students will be more connected to learning and it will be more relevant to them.

I am a native English speaker who speaks Spanish and French as second and third languages. As someone with a multilingual brain, I found the book to be an accurate description of my experience as a

language learner by capturing how learners can leverage bilingualism implicitly when allowed to tap into their full *language repertoire*. It describes what happens while bilingual students are translanguaging, and how different school experiences impact bilingualism. From the teacher lens, I was able to relate to the activities, structures, and experiences of the three classrooms discussed and found the tools that accompanied the book to be directly relevant and immediately applicable to k-12 classroom settings.

That said, there are some issues with the volume. Some terms tap into English and Spanish like the ‘*translanguaging corriente*’ which describes the language learning process as fluid and moving like a natural current. While I found this and other examples or terms in Spanish to be helpful to anchor to, I did not see use of other languages and wondered if it would be as impactful if the reader were bilingual in a language other than Spanish and English.

The author makes a good point—we need to change how students are talking and are being asked to talk during class. The book is about how to help students learn to use the languages they bring as a whole to gain success and academic achievement. Yet, the point is also problematic when it comes to implementing this change. For any of the ideas and suggestions in the book to work, students need to be allowed and encouraged to talk more to begin with in classroom settings. In particular, in secondary schools, it is still predominantly the teacher doing the talking, and is its own form of educational inequity by limiting student opportunity for verbal processing. Following the flexible and fluid translanguaging pedagogy may require a paradigm shift for teachers still carrying the bulk of the cognitive and language load for students.

While there may have been a handful of issues to consider while reading, *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student*

bilingualism for learning, is a strong reminder of the need to directly address, honor, and build upon what students bring with them from their lives outside of school and it offers the framework and tools for teachers to do this. In short, this book was a fast but dense read and can be consumed as a whole or chunked in parts for easier digestion. It is full of ideas that can be developed further. One concrete tool and accompanying idea that linger for

further exploration is around how we represent a student's language repertoire visually to guide instruction. School leaders and policy makers would benefit greatly from the pedagogical approaches that will empower experienced and novice teachers alike to improve student learning for all bilingual students-regardless of level, language background, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity or nationality.

References

- Escamilla, K., Hopewell, S., Butvilofsky, S., Sparrow, W., Soltero-González, L., Ruiz-Figueroa, O., & Escamilla, M. (2014). *Biliteracy from the start: Literacy squared in action*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Publishing.
- García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Publishing.
- Gutierrez, K. D. (2008). Developing a sociocritical literacy in the Third Space. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(2), 148–164. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.43.2.3>.
- Gutierrez, K. D., Baquedano-Lopez, P., & Tejeda, C. (1999). Rethinking diversity: Hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 6(4), 286-303. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10749039909524733>
- Gutierrez, K. D., & Vossoughi, S. (2010). Lifting off the ground to return a new: Mediated praxis, transformative learning, and social design experiments. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 100-117. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347877>
- Jurow, A. S., Tracy, R., Hotchkiss, J., Kirshner, B. (2012). Designing for the future: How the learning sciences can inform the trajectories of preservice teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63(2), 147-160. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487111428454>
- Sheridan, K. M., Halverson, E. R., Litts, B. K., Brahms, L., Jacobs-Priebe, L., & Owens, T. (2014). Learning in the making: A comparative case study of three makerspaces. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(4), 505. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.4.brr34733723j648u>
- Vossoughi, S., Hooper, P. K., & Escudé, M. (2016). Making through the lens of culture and power: Toward transformative visions for educational equity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 86(2), 206-232. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.86.2.206>
- WIDA Consortium. (2017). https://www.wida.us/standards/CAN_DOs/. Retrieved 2-21-2018.

About the Reviewer

Rachel K. Gilbert is a dual language instructional coach in Jeffco Public schools in Colorado. She is currently pursuing her Doctor of Education degree in Executive Leadership at the University of Colorado, Denver. She has worked as a world language teacher, instructional coach, and professional learning consultant and is focusing her doctoral research on effective language and equity practices and hurdles to implementation of professional learning.



education review // reseñas educativas

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: **gustavo e. fischman /
melissa cast-brede / gene v glass**

Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

 *Education Review/ Reseñas Educativas/ Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the edXchange initiative's Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

Disclaimer: The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview