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Book Review: Translanguaging at Work: Approaches to Dynamic Bilingualism

Cover Page Footnote

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Book Review

Translanguaging at Work: Approaches to Dynamic Bilingualism

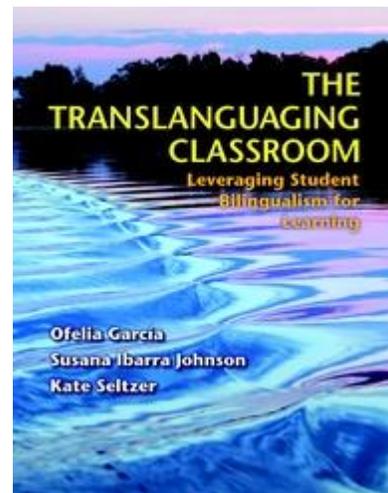
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Book Reviewed:

García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon, Inc., 196 pages, ISBN978-1-934000-19-9 (Softcover: \$ 39.95.); ISBN978-1-934000-19-9 (eText: \$29.95-\$36.95 depending on days used).

Considering how diverse and global our world has become, we need more than ever a stance that will broaden our understanding of bilingualism and create space for bilingual learning and instruction. It is a challenge to address the needs of students who speak languages other than English. It is more challenging to help teachers understand and envision the ways we can reach bilingual students and make a difference in their success through valuing, embracing, and utilizing their language capabilities and skills, culture, home language, and their complex language practices. In a moment where immigration policies are changing, and while inequality continues to exist in the education system, teachers need to be effectively equipped to challenge established ideas and traditional models about how to teach to bilingual students and shift their understanding to productively accommodate and nurture students' learning and help them achieve academic success.



In *The Translanguaging Classroom: Leveraging Student Bilingualism for Learning* García, Johnson, and Seltzer present how educators can witness this aspiring view on beliefs and pedagogy that work in harmony to educate all bilingual learners (from emergent to experienced bilinguals). The authors are distinguished educators and researchers who share similar experiences such as coming from diverse backgrounds, being bilingual learners, and bilingual teachers, which contribute valuable and credible information and experience to the book.

The volume's organization is logical and easy for the reader to navigate. The chapters flow in a way that builds on and expand readers' understanding about bilingualism and bilingual pedagogy. Guadalupe Valdés' foreword echoes the fact that the book is an essential, salient, and resourceful addition to bilingual pedagogy. Bilingual education has a long history involving, policy, politics, culture, ideology, linguistics, and pedagogy. Shifts in bilingual education as pedagogy have been observed over time from traditional models of language teaching such as immersion or *sink or swim* approach (Bybee, Henderson, & Hinojosa, 2014; Cummins, 1989; Krashen, 1996;), to models that keep languages separate, (Hadi-Tabassum, 2005; Leung, 2006; Soltero, 2004), to finally more promising and dynamic models, using the language as "medium of instruction" (García, 2009, p. 6) integratively, especially in the 21st century.

Translanguaging theory emerges as a dynamic model drawing attention to "new language practices that make the complexity of language exchanges visible..." (García & Wei, 2014). In the literature of dynamic bilingualism, this book contributes highly to effective pedagogy that promotes translanguaging and equal educational opportunities. The book is written to clarify definitions, terminology, and key understandings. The book demonstrates various and effective ways to implement dynamic translanguaging pedagogy providing examples and vignettes from teachers and classroom practices, useful templates, checklists, and forms. Its narrative is effective in reaching not only bilingual teachers but also monolingual practitioners and curriculum developers in culturally and linguistically diverse schools.

The authors' preface addresses the possible audience regarding who might benefit from the book, what concepts are emphasized and why, and how they establish and explain their unique stance regarding their beliefs and practices. Readers are introduced to concepts such as *translanguaging corriente (fluid language and cultural practices); dynamic translanguaging progression; and translanguaging stance, design, and shifts*. The three major sections of the book focus on dynamic bilingualism, translanguaging pedagogy, and practical applications of translanguaging. Each section consists of three to four chapters that further expand and complement the main focus and exemplify it in a variety of ways. Within the sections, each chapter begins with concise learning objectives to help focus the reader. Questions and activities at the end of each chapter motivate readers to think critically and to reflect on their own understanding of the material. Each chapter concludes with a *taking action* section, where the authors suggest ways for educators to implement their teaching pedagogy to bilingual students. The Appendix provides tools and charts that teachers can utilize in their instructional practices for all bilingual learners.

In Chapter 1, *Translanguaging Classrooms: Contexts and Purposes*, the authors expand and enrich the concept of "translanguaging" as "dynamic communicative practice" (p. 1), situating action as the center of dynamic bilingualism. The authors state that the origin of the word translanguaging (emerging from Welsh educator Cen Williams, 1994, 2002) has evolved especially after Colin Baker's (2001) translation and introduction of the concept to education. Although some definitions of translanguaging from different perspectives are presented in the book (for example, from linguistic perspectives by Otheguy, García, and Reed, 2015), García emphasizes her own earlier definition (2009), which states that translanguaging is "an approach to bilingualism

that is centered not on languages as has been often the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable” (p. 45). From the beginning, the authors make clear that their approach to translanguaging pedagogy in classrooms creates purposeful teaching practices. In order to emphasize and illustrate translanguaging in action authors present three teachers who create translanguaging spaces in their classroom working collaboratively with their students and providing practices that accommodate home language practices of their bilingual students. These teachers’ classrooms differ from each other in various ways. For example, Carla is a 4th grade dual language bilingual teacher from New Mexico; and she is Spanish bilingual herself. Stephanie is an 11th grade social studies teacher from New York City and Justin is an ESL teacher in a math and science classroom in California. Throughout the book, the authors provide concrete examples and refer to the translanguaging practices these teachers use. This first chapter ends with four translanguaging purposes the authors identify: (a) facilitating students’ comprehension of complex contexts, (b) supporting students’ “linguistic practices for academic contexts,” (c) making space for students’ bilingualism and “ways of knowing,” and (d) cultivating students’ “bilingual identities and socioemotional development” (p. 7). These purposes work together to create and ensure equal field (or opportunities) for bilingual students to flourish and advance in their learning.

Chapter 2 effectively presents the metaphorical concept of *translanguaging corriente*, or the flow of students’ bilingual practices (p. 17), as a process where bilingual and multilingual students bring all their linguistic repertoire and language practices to make meaning. While exploring the translanguaging classroom framework, the authors discuss bilingualism as a complex process which involves socially interactive aspect of language and the dynamic interaction of languages rather than traditional bilingualism where two languages are viewed as separate entities. Since dynamic bilingualism involves complex language practices, it is translanguaging that enables “transformative and creative” meaning (p. 20). The authors emphasize that “code-switching” (p. 20) is simply alternating between two languages and does not reflect students’ complex language interaction. However, *translanguaging corriente* (translanguaging current/flow) manifests diversity, dynamism, and complexity of both learning and teaching, introduced as the two dimensions of the translanguaging classroom: “students’ translanguaging performances and teachers’ translanguaging pedagogy” (p. 27). *Translanguaging corriente* is not possible if teachers do not have what the authors call the *stance*, that is, the belief system that supports their pedagogy; *design* of instruction and assessment in which both home and school practices are included; and *shifts* which center teachers’ flexibility to accommodate moment to moment decision to make the best of *corriente*.

Consequently, in Chapter 3 the authors describe how to build a multilingual ecology where teachers gather data to identify the strengths and needs of their bilingual students. They provide useful tools and charts that teachers can adapt and use when profiling their own bilingual students. To be able to capture the complexity of bilingual students’ learning and practices the authors opt to use the concept of *dynamic translanguaging progression*. As the authors believe in the “dynamic nature of students’ bilingualism” (p. 35), with the help of the teachers’ pedagogy a progression will provide

more space to see what students can do through their language specific and general linguistic performances, allowing them to use their full features of linguistic practice repertoire.

Part two of the volume begins with Chapter 4, which focuses on the concept of the *stance*, the first strand of translanguaging pedagogy. They refer to *stance* as a “mindset” (p. 50) that describes how teachers view their students as co-constructors of learning, and how teachers make space to encourage students to make full use of their language practices. It also includes how teachers design their instruction to promote *juntos* (together; p. 50). The authors use the term *juntos* intentionally to suggest ways in which students’ language practice incorporates their culture, family, and community as resources. Thus, *juntos* works meaningfully in the education process to create a more just and democratic ground (pp. 58-59). Through the description of the case teacher’s stance, the authors show that although each teacher’s approach is different from the other, each one has a strong stance on how all students should be able to bring their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning and successfully grow as learners. These examples provide a model for educators in developing their own stance.

Translanguaging Design in Instruction, the title of Chapter 5, explains how teachers can *design* their instruction, the second strand of translanguaging pedagogy. According to the authors, instructional design is purposeful and planned. Effective design should include classroom space where collaboration and multilingual ecology help *translanguaging corriente* flow and acknowledge dynamic bilingualism. The authors mention the social aspect of learning and cite the important concept of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (1978) as well as Moll’s interpretation (2013) of bilingual zone of proximal development. Collaboration supports emergent bilinguals and planning collaboration strategically facilitates their learning. Likewise creating a multilingual ecology, of which the authors provide various ideas and examples (p. 63), will welcome all learners with their language practices, their culture, their families and communities, and invite dynamic bilingualism in action. They emphasize that, when designing units and lessons, it is important to create translanguaging practices; plan out translanguaging objectives, culminating projects, and assessment; and consider the choice of texts and materials. The five stages of translanguaging instructional design cycle-*explorar, evaluar, imaginar, presentar, and implementar* (pp. 72-73) are explained in detail with examples from classroom practices of the case teachers. Through keeping bilingual students in mind each stage in the cycle moves students through the process and makes them stronger and successful in their learning.

Assessment as part of translanguaging design in instruction is discussed separately in Chapter 6, Translanguaging Design in Assessment. The authors conduct a useful discussion of students’ assessment examples in the case studies that reveal the effectiveness of holistic assessment, which invites many angles. They suggest that bilingual students’ profiles are essential for assessment and delineate four principles for assessment: (a) inviting many voices such as teachers, students, peers and families; (b) allowing students to use all their resources; (c) providing authentic and performance-based tasks, and (d) including both general linguistic and language-

specific performances (pp. 81-82). All these principles support *translanguaging corriente*. As the authors say “translanguaging in assessment requires a strong juntos stance, careful design, and well-orchestrated shifts” (p. 97).

The following chapter, *Translanguaging Pedagogy in Action*, gives the reader a hands-on example from a classroom situation and highlights the case teacher’s effective decision making and how this process reflects on students’ success. The example allows readers to experience her stance, design and unit planning, translanguaging instructional design cycle, assessment, and her use of teachable moments that are identified as shifts in her decisions based on students’ needs.

Part three, *Reimagining Teaching and Learning through Translanguaging*, presents a discussion of standards, content area literacy, biliteracy, and social justice. Chapter 8 sets forth a very significant aspect of translanguaging pedagogy; standards. Here they focus on the idea of “localizing standards” (p. 120) that meet students’ needs. This means selecting standards that will empower instructional design to make space for students to use their language practices, to put into good use their fund of knowledge, and to involve families and communities through expanding the standard’s meaning and function. Significantly, the authors affirm that it is essential to “make the standards work for students” (p. 118).

An additional discussion of stance, design, and shifts is included in Chapter 9, but this time focusing on teaching content area literacy. Dynamic bilingualism in content area teaching means leveraging students’ understanding of complex context and text, which is one of the purposes of translanguaging. This is accomplished via a case teacher’s example, in which the teacher’s stance, design, and shift help her position herself as both a content and literacy teacher, illustrating that they go hand in hand. Further, the teacher implements content area teaching to leverage students’ engagement with and understanding of complex content and text. The authors show that it is crucial to incorporate multilingual texts and to help students access content learning via enabling their use of their entire linguistic repertoire and language practices.

Chapter 10, *Biliteracy in the Translanguaging Classrooms: Making Space for Students*, broadens the discussion to bilingualism and ways of knowing. This chapter expands the understanding about how to foster students’ biliteracy through translanguaging. An interesting facet of this approach is the way that teachers foster a metalinguistic discussion (p. 148) to strengthen students’ biliteracy. Translanguaging nurtures and advances students learning of both classroom language and home language since their language practices are in full use.

In the final chapter, the authors explore how translanguaging pedagogy enables bilingual students’ language practices and contributes to students’ learning and teachers’ instruction in the classroom. Valuing who bilingual students are and viewing their repertoire as powerful resources can bring justice in reaching out to students, in their contribution, and provides fair platform for students to shine and be successful.

This book is well organized and places translanguaging pedagogy in its center. Throughout the text, the real effectiveness of translanguaging emanates from the examples of the three case teachers who incorporate their stance, belief systems, how

they draw students' full linguistic repertoire, funds of knowledge, and complex language practices along with their culture, families, and communities into their pedagogy. The authors articulate, describe, and discuss the concepts and instructional practices effectively and strengthen core understanding through case teachers' authentic and credible practices.

However, although the vignettes and models in the book are presented from three different classroom settings, teachers of an increasingly diverse population might be looking for instructional ideas as well as student work examples from communities and languages other than Spanish. Concrete examples from other languages along with Spanish would enrich the understanding of diverse practitioners. Nonetheless, the book presents a skillful link between theoretical knowledge and effective practice and shows how students' language practices and cultural contributions are valuable. Pedagogical ideas can empower teachers, educators, and researchers to challenge the system in order to create more applicable opportunities for bilingual students.

The volume is a wonderful aid to motivate educators to explore and challenge traditional instructional models and to examine their own pedagogical practices and assessment. Educators can reach a solid understanding and an opportunity to internalize the knowledge and practices presented in this book. Furthermore, the variety of the case studies and students' profiles that are presented, although only representing classrooms where English and Spanish are the instructional languages, enrich the understanding of how to meet the needs of diverse bilingual learners, which could be applied to different classroom contexts. Regardless of classroom type or types of students' bilingualism, translanguaging is transformative practice that is planned and strategic, which allows and encourages students' entire linguistic repertoire, including teachers, families, and communities. The authors promote valuing what students can offer and how teachers can nurture them as learners and while committing to bilingual students' academic excellence and social development.

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