

## CHAPTER 16

# Best Practices to Support the Literacy Development of Bilingual Learners

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### THIS CHAPTER WILL:

- Consider who is a bilingual learner
- Expand theoretical understandings of language/bilingualism and literacy/biliteracy by focusing on the bilingual learners' own sociopolitical lives as minoritized people, as well as their own knowledge systems
- Describe principles of a critical literacy/biliteracy education for bilingual learners to provide them with social and cognitive justice opportunities
- Provide examples of critical literacy/biliteracy pedagogical practices that create generative learning contexts for bilingual learners

### INTRODUCTION

Almost one-fourth (23%) of children 5–17 years of age in the United States speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a, C16007). Of these, 94% also speak English “very well or well.” Furthermore, only 3% of 5- to 17-year-olds in the United States are foreign born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a, C05003). Bilingualism is not only rampant in the United States but is also native to its soil. Although most U.S.-born American children are being raised in bilingual homes where languages other than English are spoken even when children speak English well, bilingualism is visible in U.S. education only when children are seen as “limited”

in English and are classified as "English learners." As a result, ways of languaging other than in standardized "English" are viewed as inadequate.

This chapter extends our understandings of bilingual learners and literacy practices. These students are complex in cultural and linguistic practices, nativity and nationality, histories, race, generation, and social class, but U.S. schools tend to see these students narrowly, focusing only on those whose English is considered inadequate, and who are characterized as being immigrants, poor, and at risk. Yet even "English-fluent" bilingual learners whose families have been in the United States for generations, engage with texts and literacy differently from monolingual White students. U.S. schools thus limit the bilingual and biliterate potential of *all* bilingual children.

Literacy scholars agree that it is important that learners bring forth all their resources to "enter" and make sense of texts. Literacy involves a complexity of actions that depend on varying social, cultural, political, and economic contexts (Street, 1984), and so literacy education must engage students in "reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In U.S. schools, bilingual learners are seldom given the opportunity to read their borderlands, their *entre mundos* world (Anzaldúa, 1987). And this occurs whether instruction is in English only or bilingual, and whether they are classified as English learners or English fluent. The knowledge base of traditional literacy scholarship in relation to bilingual learners is limited, and many studies simply compound bilingual learners with those who are considered "at risk" (Escamilla, 2009).

This chapter raises the consciousness of literacy scholars and educators about the importance of supporting bilingual learners of *all* types in accessing their entire meaning-making repertoire. To do so, we shift theoretical understandings of language/bilingualism and literacy/biliteracy that are prevalent in schools today by listening to and viewing minoritized and racialized bilingual learners as valid meaning makers themselves, with their own knowledge systems and cultural/linguistic/semiotic practices. We propose literacy education principles for all bilingual learners and describe literacy pedagogical practices that enact social and cognitive justice for these students by leveraging their entire meaning-making repertoire.

## LANGUAGE/BILINGUALISM AND LITERACY/BILITERACY: THEORIES AND RESEARCH

### Language, Colonialism, and Nation Building

From the beginnings of modern history, the construction of language as an autonomous linguistic system has served to dominate and subjugate people. Colonial empires have always relied on distinctions of language, as well as race and gender, to dominate and conquer, and these processes of control

have been extended through "coloniality" (Quijano, 2000)—that is, domination through linguistic, racial, and gender hierarchies that continue today. The coloniality of language (Mignolo, 2000) was strongly exerted in the processes of nation building and imposition of a national identity that followed the end of colonial empires. Yet language is heteroglossic through and through, meaning that at the local/micro-levels of society multiple voices and languages coexist within the imposed dominant language (Bakhtin, 1981) because speakers actively engage in *doing* language. In other words, despite linguistic impositions, people language differently according to their own lives and interactions.

### Bilingualism and Literacy Development

The logic about language as an autonomous linguistic system was then applied to the study of bilingualism, understood only as double monolingualism. The study of bilingual speech focused on what were considered and named "interferences," when compared to the language of monolinguals. In the late 1970s, Jim Cummins's research on bilingual development made inroads, introducing several theories that have proven important for bilingual learners. Cummins (1979) posited that there was an interdependence of the bilingual learners' "first language" (L1) and "second language" (L2). As a result, educators and scholars started to pay more attention to the role of the child's L1 on his or her L2 development, and transitional bilingual education programs, where the student's L1 was used until he or she learned English, grew. Literacy educators started focusing on the relationship of L1 vocabulary and L2 reading comprehension among bilingual learners (Proctor, August, Carlo, & Snow, 2006)—however, bilingual learners did not have a first, single, and separate language to which a second one could be added. To put it simply, the L1 of U.S.-born bilingual learners was bilingualism as a unitary repertoire; these bilingual learners were not limited to a separate "first language." Some bilingual literacy scholars began to consider the *interaction* between the two languages to make meaning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Alvarez, 2001), and the term *multilingual literacies* emerged to refer to the "multiple ways in which people draw on and combine the codes in their communicative repertoire when they speak and write" (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000, p. 7).

### Bilingual/Biliteracy Theories from the Perspective of the Bilingual Learner

Biliteracy is most often understood as "any and all instances in which communication occurs in two or more languages in or around writing" (Hornberger, 1990, p. 213). But schools construct biliteracy as if literacy

was predetermined in the language of the text itself, and not in the interaction of the bilingual student with the text. Rarely are bilingual learners encouraged in schools to leverage their entire repertoire of meaning-making resources when they engage in literacy acts. As applied linguists turned their attention from language to *speakers* in the late 20th/early 21st century, other issues came to the fore. The role of ideology, as well as the complexities of language, race, and gender as categories of power and domination became the focus of scholarship, which brought attention to how ideas about language are shaped by the social positions and values of the speakers and listeners, as well as the semiotic processes involved (Gal & Irvine, 2019). This work clarified how minoritized bilingual learners are racialized and enraptured as deficient, regardless of their language performance. Flores and Rosa (2015) proposed the concept of *raciolinguistic ideologies*, describing how race and language are mutually constituted and shifting the attention from bilingual speakers to the ideologies that *listeners*, those whom Flores and Rosa call “the white listening subjects” (p. 151), hold about racialized bilinguals.

Bilingual scholars, many members of racialized communities themselves, started studying bilingualism as dynamic (García, 2009), focusing on what bilinguals do as they language. *Languageing*, or the action of doing language and reflecting on those actions, denotes the communicative system that distinguishes human beings from other biological creatures (Maturana & Varela, 1984) and offered an alternative to the view of language as simply a system of structures externally imposed that human beings get to “have.” The ways of languageing bilingually of racialized speakers was different from that of majority speakers who learned a “foreign,” or “world” language sequentially in school. The process of bilingual languageing and teaching in ways that leveraged this dynamic bilingualism became known as *translanguageing*.

**Translanguageing and Literacy**

Originally in Welsh, the term *translanguageing* was used to describe a bilingual pedagogy that did not instructionally separate Welsh from English but that used both languages to increase ways of comprehending and producing texts in two named languages. The term *translanguageing* was then taken up by sociolinguists to describe the ways in which bilingual learners do language and make sense of texts with their entire meaning-making resources. By foregrounding the actions of bilingual learners, translanguageing considers the simultaneous use of multiple semiotic resources that mutually elaborate one another, including the perceived languages, different modes, the social context, and historically shaped material (García & Li, 2014). A translanguageing approach to literacy views bilingual learners as languageing with a *unitary* repertoire that goes beyond the boundaries

established by how nation-states and schools have defined language (García & Kleifgen, 2019). Literacy scholars began to recognize that the multilingual process of reading and writing “transcends language borders” (Kabuto, 2017, p. 39). Moreover, bilingual literacy research also noted that bilingual learners rely on literacy knowledge and histories that go beyond those acknowledged in U.S. schools (Reyes, 2006). A translanguageing approach to literacy education recognizes that learners act with much more than what is seen as “the linguistic.” The learners’ repertoire of signs is represented in multiple modes, including aurally, orally, and written, as well as bodily, emotional, gestural, visual, and feeling. Some may be identified as “English” and others as “languages other than English.” But regardless of how externally and socially they are perceived to be, speakers *do* language with their entire repertoire.

The scholars associated with the New London Group (1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) had argued that literacy must be viewed in ways that go beyond traditional language-based approaches but did not go far enough in acknowledging the complexity of languageing practices of bilingual learners, nor in recognizing the hierarchies of knowledge established by coloniality that dismiss and delegitimize the ways of reading the world from the margins/borders (Degollado, Núñez, & Romero, 2021). The constant surveillance in schools that values only certain signs—those rendered in what is considered standard English or another standard named language and limited to oral and written modes—restricts bilingual learners’ potential to be creative and critical learners (Nuñez & Urrieta, 2021). Whereas monolingual students are free to act with almost all of their repertoire as they engage in literacy events, bilingual students are restricted to using only half of their repertoire of meaning-making signs. The rest of their repertoire is at best ignored and at worst stigmatized and used as a label of deficit and deviance. This perpetuates colonial and raciolinguistic ideologies and leads to disengagement and educational failure.

Texts are not self-enclosed systems with *a priori* meanings; they are not just about the world; they are participants in the world capable of “generating intensity and the excitement of emergence” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 26). When bilingual learners enter a text, the text itself may be rendered in one named language or another and in the script used to represent that language but the bilingual learner who truly engages with a text that is described as monolingual always “bilingualizes” the text, bringing his or her entire repertoire to bear on what the text communicates (García, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2019). For bilingual learners with the freedom to leverage their entire repertoire, there are no monolingual texts. As García (2020) noted, “bilingual Latinx readers do not read in English or in Spanish nor do they read in English *and* Spanish” (p. 557). Bilinguals *do* literacy/biliteracy with a unitary linguistic repertoire rather than separate dual linguistic systems (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015).

In many bilingual education programs, and especially in those labeled “dual language,” the goal is not only bilingualism but also biliteracy. But because of the interpretation of biliteracy as double monolingual literacies, literacy instruction in one language is always separate from the other. Learners are expected to engage in literacy activities using only the language that has been allocated to that specific day or time or subject and the activities are rendered monolingually, supposedly resulting in a bilingual/biliterate person. Thus, for example, when reading during “English day,” only English can be used to speak, read, perform his or her inquisitiveness, or write.

To counteract the effects of the enduring coloniality performed in schools, literacy for bilingual learners and biliteracy must be reframed through a *critical translanguaging perspective*. Becoming bilingual and biliterate are important for the social and emotional development of minoritized bilingual students. But to produce a measure of social and cognitive justice, the entire repertoire of signs and meanings of bilingual learners must be considered. To foster bilingualism and biliteracy would require that schools leverage the translanguaging of all bilingual learners, regardless of the language(s) of instruction, and simultaneously raise their critical consciousness (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017) about the role of language in their subjugation. Not to do so dooms bilingual learners to restricted interpretations of the world through a knowledge system that is not entirely theirs and perpetuates educational inequities.

### EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN CRITICAL LITERACY/BILITERACY EDUCATION FOR BILINGUAL LEARNERS: PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES IN ACTION

Bilingual learners must be able to engage their whole selves and meaning-making resources in different literacy tasks. Here we outline five interrelated principles of literacy education for bilingual learners that reflect a critical translanguaging literacy/biliteracy theoretical perspective. To contextualize the principles and view them in action, we introduce Ms. Cristina, an English as a new language/English language arts (ESL/ELA) fourth-grade teacher, and her students.

#### Centering Bilingual Learners' Language, Experiences, and Complex Knowledge System as Strength

While extremely valuable, concepts of cultural relevance are usually framed through English, and tend to leverage the minoritized students' funds of knowledge only as a “bridge” to facilitate these students' development of

what is valued as “academic language.” Instead, a critical literacy/biliteracy approach values the literacy practices of different minoritized communities and learners as important on their own (España & Herrera, 2020). Literacy practices are then evaluated according to the logic of those communities, rather than compared to those of White English-speaking middle-class communities. This principle is not future looking or developmental—instead, it recognizes that these students already have a “language architecture” (Flores, 2020) that is a rich and complex foundation for a solid education.

Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno (2021) encourage educators to root literacy work in the strength of children. To do that, the educator's gaze must be turned inward, toward the child and his or her community, and not outward toward external standards. This close looking is derived from descriptive processes by which children's literacy acts are carefully described in relationship to the child's own meaning-making emergence. To root the literacy work in strength one needs to adopt what decolonial theorist Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls “post-abysal thinking” (in García et al., 2021). This refers to thinking and seeing beyond the colonial line that established differences and that made the world of the subjugated invisible and unreachable. Bringing back that integrated vision in what Santos calls an “ecology of knowledges” can then enable literacy educators to ground their work on the strength of bilingual learners that school curriculum and practices often efface and make invisible.

As we said, Ms. Cristina is a fourth-grade teacher in a New York City classroom that is officially designated as English as a New Language/English Language Arts (ENL/ELA). There are students with different named languages and varying language and literacy performances, including students designated as “English learners,” “English-fluent” bilinguals, and “monolingual” English speakers. Ms. Cristina has created a multilingual context in her classroom based on her commitment to her multilingual learners and her understanding of critical translanguaging bilingual/biliteracy practices. Ms. Cristina is Filipina, and she speaks Tagalog and some Spanish and Portuguese.

The first thing one notices when one enters Ms. Cristina's classroom is that the walls are full of signs and products in languages other than English, produced by Ms. Cristina, families, and students. Her reading baskets contain books in English, Spanish, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Yoruba, and Polish—some of the languages of her students. These multilingual books are accessible to all of the children all the time. There are tablets and iPads where children can also listen to stories in different languages. Ms. Cristina has been conscious of building a multilingual landscape in her classroom, giving her children the opportunity to interact not only with languages familiar to them but also with those of their peers. This attention to the linguistic landscape is an important feature in classrooms that

honor critical literacy practices, but this is not enough. It is essential to find ways of involving students dynamically with multilingual texts—that is, the pedagogical practice cannot be simply to name or acknowledge the children's different languages in the classroom. This would reify named languages as autonomous linguistic structures, instead of focusing on the children's actions. That is why Ms. Cristina's pedagogical practices follow the principle of *en comunidad/juntos* discussed next.

### En Comunidad/Juntos

Ms. Cristina's pedagogy requires making visible to students how they assemble and "stitch" together all of their meaning-making resources. Bilingual learners thus engaged start to understand that each piece provides a new "cue" to enter the world of multilingual literacies but that these must be integrated to their own repertoire through their own acts of languaging.

By focusing on the sense of *comunidad* of different people, languages, and texts, España and Herrera (2020) propose an integrated vision of bilingual learners in which their differences are seen as strengths. This sense of *comunidad*, of always seeing elements juntos/together, and not separate, can transform these students' identities "when they realize the artificial and constructed nature of the categories imposed on them" (Kramsch, 2012, p. 498). To focus on *comunidad* in literacy education would mean that the entire repertoire of semiotic forms would always be available to bilingual learners, including what society considers different languages, as well as different modes. Language is not dismembered but reassembled through the bilingual learners' actions. This requires teachers to develop a translanguaging juntos stance (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017), the conviction that bilingual learners act with one unitary repertoire of signs and meanings to be leveraged juntos/jointly for sense making.

Focusing on *comunidad* also means including families and their practices (Alvarez, 2021; Noguero-Liu, 2020), including stories, images, art-work, testimonios, and so on (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Saavedra, 2011), as the very texts to be studied. It also means creating opportunities for bilingual love (Mignolo, 2000), which involves using minoritized bilinguals' unique sensibilities about what it means to continuously negotiate diverse linguistic practices and expectations and serve as mutual resources of linguistic agency for one another, especially as they transgress and resist linguistic impositions (Degollado, 2019). Students' literacy growth is then not an individual endeavor but one done in community.

Working in *comunidad* can often be achieved through writers' workshops and other spaces of shared agency and creativity, where students juntos with one another, their teachers, their families, and communities can generate their own course of action and products that center their

experiences, voices, and entire repertoires (Alvarez, 2021; Harvey-Torres & Valdez, 2021).

In writing instruction, Ms. Cristina encourages her students to draw from their full semiotic repertoire to ideate and to create new ideas/worlds/understandings/knowledge. Emergent bilingual writers leverage their unitary repertoire to think, reason, imagine, and organize ideas (Fu, 2009). Fu has said, "I believe thinking (reasoning and imagination) and the ability to organize ideas are equally, or even more, important than language skills in learning to write" (p. 74). Translanguaging is then an important asset that supports emergent bilinguals' writing (Fu, Hadjioannou, & Zhou, 2019). When one of Ms. Cristina's students, Lin Zhen, got "stuck" while writing a personal essay in English, Ms. Cristina reminded her of the mentor text they had read, where translanguaging was present. Lin Zhen then added dialogue to her story, writing in Chinese. This then generated more writing in English.

Ms. Cristina's unit on poetry showcased bilingual poets. She encouraged her students to use all of their meaning-making resources to write their poems. Their voices were amplified, as they were able to voice richer shades of meanings, sounds, and feelings. Ms. Cristina is guided in her literacy instruction by lessons she learned from her bilingual learners and by the deep trust she has in their strengths. She realizes that bilingual learners use different resources in their unitary repertoire differently, depending on their audience. And she allows them the freedom to select the resources they find more useful to communicate with the audience and build community.

### Temas, Textos, and Translanguaging

España and Herrera (2020) propose three *T*'s (*temas*, *textos*, and *translanguaging*) as the elements of a critical literacy/biliteracy approach for bilingual learners. Because of the importance of raising the students' critical consciousness, it is crucially important to select meaningful topics that reflect the complex identities and experiences of bilingual learners, and then to identify mentor texts that speak about those topics (García-Mateus, 2021). For example, Brochin and Medina (2017) note that the identities and experiences of students from transmigrant communities are often erased in typical children's literature used in schools. Therefore, they argue for the need to use "critical fictions of transnationalism," which are texts that make visible the intersecting politics of international borders, global capitalism, and the emerging cultural knowledge and practices produced by transmigrant communities and that illuminate and connect with the identities and experiences of our students.

These *temas*, however, are not just written, or literary, but they are

multimodal, including history, music, digital texts, trailers, interviews, speeches, documents, social media, spoken word performances, body inscriptions, drawings, photographs, images, videos, Excel sheets and tables, signs, grocery lists, and so on (Cárdenas Curiel & Ponzio, 2021). The textos are not seen through a named language only, or through the meaning of a single genre. Instead, the learner appropriates them juntos and liberates them from school strictures. In their translanguaging, bilingual learners also liberate themselves as valid meaning makers.

Literacies acquired beyond the oral and reading/writing domains are recognized. For example, Degollado et al. (2021) note that transfronterizo children (those who constantly cross international borders) develop embodied border literacies from the constant negotiation of identity and subjectivity of living in the in-betweenness “of colonial legacies” (p. 457), and through which their bodies read, feel, and understand the world. Therefore, the materials, texts, and learning activities should reflect students’ complex identities and experiences, providing a mirror that legitimizes them as worthy of attention.

De los Ríos and Seltzer (2017) have documented the use of corridors and translanguaged spoken-word performances and poetry as mentor texts in ways that encourage bilingual learners to write different types of texts. Testimonio is also an example of a powerful texto to be used and generated juntos and that can be manifested in multiple modalities. The practice of testimonio originates in oral cultures of Latin American human rights struggles but in education it can be employed as a way by which the testifying subject (student, family member, teacher) is given time and space for the sharing of personal narratives that historicize experiences connecting him or her to larger social structures in order to expose oppression, disrupt repression, and build solidarity (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Saavedra, 2011).

Because the official aim of instruction in Ms. Cristina’s classroom is to develop English, the mentor texts that she reads in her read-aloud are most often in English, although she selects texts about important topics for her multilingual students and written by bilingual authors who exhibit translanguaging. Ms. Cristina encourages her students to raise questions and discuss the reading using their full repertoire, sometimes in what are recognized as other named languages, sometimes acted out, sometimes visually represented, other times through the voice of a peer who offers a translation. The objective is for Ms. Cristina and everyone else in the class to understand, so that these languaging acts are meaningful to the class, as well as to the student who is generating the interaction.

During read-aloud, Ms. Cristina pairs students so that everyone has a partner who speaks the other language. This enables her to stop at times and ask them to turn and talk, giving students an opportunity to make sense

of the text that is encoded in English through varied languaging practices. During guided reading, Ms. Cristina also groups students in ways that are heterogeneous in terms of English language ability but where there are at least two students who speak the same language other than English. This enables everyone to use languaging practices other than English, and other than oral language, to share meaning. Besides encouraging the students’ translanguaging in discussion about texts, Ms. Cristina urges them to annotate the text, a well-documented practice (Fu, 2009; Martin-Beltrán, 2014; Pacheco, Daniel, Pray, & Jiménez, 2019), by deploying all of their languages and multimodal resources, according to their own needs.

During independent reading, Ms. Cristina often provides all of her students with bilingual texts with side-by-side translations. For those who are at the initial stage of English use in the bilingual continuum, she searches for websites that offer visual support, including images and video. She also encourages students to use Google Translate to access the content of the written text, whether that content is in English or in another language. This extends the students’ literacies/biliteracies in many ways, for not only is the meaning of the original text deepened but students also develop a consciousness of how different languages express the same ideas in various ways and explore the subtlety of these differences (see Pacheco & Miller, 2016).

Biliteracy is developed not by doing literacy practices in two languages in isolation, but by enabling bilingual learners to make cross-language connections. Escamilla, Hopewell, and Burvilofsky (2013) demonstrate how students can collaboratively interpret and translate a chosen text and discuss the translation, thus deepening text comprehension, while at the same time further developing a critical metalinguistic awareness of their own bilingualism. Translation tasks have been shown to support the development of bilingual learners’ reading comprehension (Jiménez et al., 2015). Although Ms. Cristina’s classroom does not aim specifically to develop the students’ biliteracy, by giving students access to bilingual texts and the use of their entire repertoire in instruction, the students are engaging in literacy acts that can develop their biliteracy, if students’ acts of languaging, including reading and writing, are supported outside of the classroom.

### Educators as Co-Learners and Teaching to Raise Critical Consciousness

A critical literacy/biliteracy approach for bilingual learners requires educators who see themselves as co-learners and not as “experts” (Fu et al., 2019). Teachers who truly validate minoritized bilingual learners’ knowledge systems trust their students’ and their communities’ expertise and are open to learning from them. This means putting the bilingual learners and their communities in the driver’s seat, acknowledging that bilingual

families have always been teaching their children not only to speak other languages but also to read and write the world with other texts and scripts (Noguerón-Liu, 2020), and to survive and thrive.

Taking up a critical approach toward language and bilingualism in literacy instruction is a political act. By opening new space, this critical approach works against raciolinguistic ideologies and other social and cognitive injustices that bilingual learners face in school. It requires taking an informed stance against the injustice of viewing language and literacy only through the lens of White monolingual students. The task of educators then becomes that of advocates and activists on behalf of their students and to create opportunities for reading the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

A meaningful literacy/biliteracy education for minoritized bilingual learners must raise their critical consciousness (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017) with regard to the role that language, race, and gender have played in processes of domination and minoritization. Engagement with literacy must produce learners who are informed about political processes and focus on engaging learners with historical, sociological, economic texts that would enable them to form their own critical consciousness. Educators as advocates must listen critically (Palmer, Cervantes-Soon, Dorner, & Heiman, 2019) to their students to recognize their capacity to not only read the world but also to creatively write the world in unexpected ways—that is, to transform it drawing from their knowledge repertoire that may go beyond conventional school practices. In other words, these educators foster students' creativity and ability to produce new texts in multiple modes and signs with the potential to shape their own and others' conceptions of the world (Harvey-Torres & Degollado, 2021).

To bring all the literacy acts together, and to raise her students' critical consciousness, Ms. Cristina prepares the class for a performance for the end of the unit in which the students will engage in speaking, role playing and acting, writing, making music, and making art/visual artifacts. To prepare for the performance, she makes the students view and listen to the first few stanzas of the song from *Encanto*, "We don't talk about Bruno, no, no no." Ms. Cristina sings for the students and then they do a shared reading of the song. When they get to "I'm sorry, mi vida, go on" they discuss why the character said "mi vida" in Spanish. As they go on, they also discuss why "Abuela, get the umbrellas" rhymes, and whether the bilingual songwriter Lin-Manuel Miranda started out with the choice of "abuela, or "umbrella," and why these two have come together.

In five groups, the students write out the song and discuss words and constructions with which they are not familiar. With guidance from Ms. Cristina, they particularly hone in on how the two characters in the song interact, often tripping on each other's words, interrupting, in ways that resemble their family practices. They also discuss how they often feel

ashamed of their mother's or grandmother's bilingualism when they go shopping with them, and they discuss how they have been stared at, told to speak English, and made to feel inadequate. They realize that language is not just an instrument for smooth communication but for interruptions, questioning, excluding, stigmatizing, and expressing feelings and emotions. Language, as the song says, is produced by "brains" that become "hurricane," and in so doing, in bumping dynamically against each other, open possibilities of protection, just as the "abuela" gets the "umbrellas." With this renewed understanding of language, they are ready to write their own collaborative song/poem, based on their families' interactions at home, and representing their own ways of translanguaging. Students come together in an animated discussion to defend their choices, consider alternatives in different languages, and summarize their new understandings.

The written pieces of the five groups in the class are then read, acted out and eventually produced, put to music and to dance, with designs to contextualize the writing. In this collaborative literacy activity, the learners are transformed. Monolingual English-speaking students have to rely on bilingual students. Speakers of different languages other than English also have to rely on one another. No one, not even Ms. Cristina, is the expert. Everyone is collaboratively learning and transformed through this literacy experience, enabling youth to navigate their lives and socioemotional confianza in themselves. Ms. Cristina understands that the transformation generated by this literacy activity cannot be limited to individual students' own subjectivities. She imagines how understandings in the entire school community about her students' bilingualism could also be transformed so that these students would be supported throughout their schooling. Following the study by Sunny Man Chu Lau (2019), the class creates posters describing bilingual families' language and literacy practices and experiences of discrimination. Resources are thus created for the possible transformation of the entire school community.

### Fair Literacy Assessment

The literacy assessment of bilingual learners must consider the different ways of languaging and meaning making—that is, assessment cannot be simply based on literacy evaluations in one language or another, or even in both languages separately. Instead, making room for students' translanguaging during formative literacy assessment gives a better sense of what bilingual students know and are able to do (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021; Noguerón-Liu, 2020; Schissel, De Korne, & López-Gopar, 2018).

It is important for literacy educators to differentiate in assessment between what García et al. (2017) have called general language performances

and specific linguistic performances. Bilingual learners might know how to use language, for example, to find evidence in text, infer, synthesize, apply knowledge, make an argument, and tell a joke, although they might not yet have integrated into their repertoire the specific linguistic elements that schools desire. To provide social and cognitive justice, educators must be able to advocate for translanguaging in assessment but also to differentiate between their students' general language performances and the use of certain features associated with the ways of languaging valued in school.

Ms. Cristina's formative assessment of literacy always leverages her bilingual students' translanguaging practices—for example, while taking informal reading inventories and running records, Ms. Cristina encourages students to leverage translanguaging so as to get a more accurate picture of their potential (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). She relies on her close observations of the children's performances to assess their literacy engagement, rather than on a single standardized score. She becomes an advocate for her bilingual students, insisting that scores on standardized summative tests in English only are invalid. Ms. Cristina denounces as unfair how bilingual students are required to demonstrate what they know with only less than half of their resources, while monolingual students have access to their full repertoire.

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Bilingual learners are often misunderstood and the literacy practices used to engage them with text often fall short. This chapter has highlighted how to understand language/bilingualism and literacy/biliteracy *not* from the external perspective of nation-states and educational institutions but from the internal acts of bilinguals themselves. We have identified five principles of a critical literacy/biliteracy education for bilingual learners—centering bilingual learners and building on their strengths; acting in comunidad/juntos; leveraging meaningful temas, textos, and translanguaging; becoming co-learners and teaching for critical consciousness; and insisting on fair literacy assessments. The ways in which this is specifically done must remain flexible, for as García and Kleifgen (2019) have said, it “must respond to the specific interaction, in the specific place, and with the specific interlocutors and objects in which the spontaneous performance happens” (p. 13). Won Lee (2018) has pointed out that a critical literacy/biliteracy pedagogy cannot be dictated but must be continually reimaged from within the local ecology in which it functions.

Future directions in the research and practice of literacy instruction for bilingual learners will have to fundamentally shift from using conventional frameworks of language and literacy that have conceived language

from a monolingual and sequential perspective to using, building on, and expanding frameworks that consider the unique, dynamic, and authentic linguistic practices of multilingual learners. In addition, attention to literacy cannot remain exclusively in a functional linguistic realm but will have to center criticality and transformative goals. Through these new lenses, literacy educators will be better able to capture the dynamic ways in which their students read/make sense and write/act upon the world in ways that empower them. Importantly, these practices allow literacy educators to recognize strengths to tap into that otherwise have been constructed as deficits and in need of intervention.

### ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Attempt to read a text in a language you do not understand. Read a text on a topic you do not know. Then read a text on a topic you do know. What strategies do you use to understand the gist of each text? What resources would you need to understand deeply? Which text was easier to understand and why? How does this relate to bilingual children's acts of reading?
2. Suppose you were allowed to type with only two fingers instead of five. What would happen to your writing? What is the effect on your ideas? On your physical stamina? On your production? On your emotions? Reflect on the relationship of this exercise to what bilingual children experience when they are forced to write in one language only.
3. Read a book. Then discuss its content with a group. Reflect on the dialogue. How did you extend your understandings of the book in community? What resources, other than oral or written language, did the different members of the group use? Why? How did you go beyond the static printed page? How does this relate to the reading of so-called monolingual texts by bilingual people?
4. Design a literacy lesson for bilingual students following the principles of critical translanguaging literacy/biliteracy. What tema(s) of significance that will raise the bilingual students' critical consciousness will you select? Identify textos, both literary as well as other textos that do not involve the written word to convey meaning. Think of how you would use these multimodal textos and translanguaging pedagogical practices to transform the instruction. Consider what critical questions and issues affecting your students' lives and communities could emerge and how you could create space for critical listening and dialogue to engage juntos in transformative productions.
5. An important project in advancing a critical literacy/biliteracy education



for bilingual learners was the project known as CUNY-NYSIEB (City University of New York–New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals, 2020). The project maintained a website of practices and projects ([www.cuny-nysieb.org](http://www.cuny-nysieb.org)). Together/juntos the CUNY-NYSIEB team published a book in 2020, with chapters that showcased different projects. Visit the website or read one of the relevant chapters in the book and comment on a critical translanguaging design that may be relevant for your work.

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