
Translanguaging and Early Childhood Education in the USA: Insights from the CUNY-NYSIEB Project

Kate Seltzer, Laura Ascenzi-Moreno and Gladys Y. Aponte

Abstract

This chapter offers insights into the education of young children—what is referred to in the United States as early childhood education—who come from homes where languages other than English are spoken. Drawing on recent critiques of early childhood education in the U.S., this chapter provides classroom-based examples of how teachers can leverage young children’s translanguaging and cultural knowledge in their education. Overall, the chapter demonstrates both the possibilities and challenges of adopting a translanguaging pedagogy (García et al., *The Translanguaging classroom. Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*, Caslon, Philadelphia, 2017) in early childhood classrooms in the United States.

Keywords

Translanguaging · Emergent bilinguals · Early childhood · Classroom practice

K. Seltzer (✉)

Rowan University, Glassboro, USA

e-mail: seltzerk@rowan.edu

L. Ascenzi-Moreno

Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, USA

e-mail: lascenzimoreno@brooklyn.cuny.edu

G. Y. Aponte

Bank Street College of Education, New York City, USA

e-mail: gaponte@bankstreet.edu

© The Author(s) 2020

J. A. Panagiotopoulou et al. (eds.), *Inclusion, Education and Translanguaging*, Inklusion und Bildung in Migrationsgesellschaften, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28128-1_3

1 Introduction

This chapter offers insights into the education of young children—what is referred to in the United States as early childhood education—who come from homes where languages other than English are spoken. Drawing on a recent critique of early childhood education in the U.S. (Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol 2018) as well as critiques of recurring deficit framings of young children’s languaging such as research on the so-called ‘word gap’ or ‘language gap’ (Flores 2018; García and Otheguy 2016), this chapter provides classroom-based examples of how teachers can leverage young children’s translanguaging and cultural knowledge in their education. These examples emerge from a study of an early childhood education program that was carried out by researchers with the City University of New York—New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (CUNY-NYSIEB) project. From 2011 through 2018, this New York State-funded project worked with schools to improve the education of emergent bilingual students. The project’s focus has been wide-ranging—from school-wide language policy development to professional development for teachers to collaborative instructional planning—but as maintained a singular vision that all schools can and must view students’ bilingualism as a resource in their education. This chapter outlines the work that CUNY-NYSIEB researchers conducted with a group of early childhood educators in a “dual language bilingual” program, which had the explicit goal of fostering students’ bilingualism and biliteracy in English and Spanish. By detailing the professional development the research team did with the teachers and providing examples of how their professional learning was translated into classroom work with young emergent bilingual students, this chapter offers both a counter-narrative to deficit discourses about these students’ language practices and opportunities for future growth and development of early childhood educators. Overall, the chapter provides insights into both the possibilities and challenges of adopting a translanguaging pedagogy (García et al. 2017) in early childhood classrooms in the United States.

2 A Critical Perspective on Early Childhood Education

This study has been framed through the convergence of two critical theories, which together, shed light on the non-neutral nature of early childhood education: a critical race lens on early childhood education and translanguaging theory. We believe that these theoretical framings in combination allow us to see young

emergent bilingual children, their identities, and languaging practices as they currently exist within the early childhood education landscape. They also shed light on the ideologies that shape this educational landscape in ways that marginalize young Latinx emergent bilinguals in the U.S. and provide us with a framework for promoting pedagogies that can counter such ideologies.

We start with Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol's (2018) intersectional approach to early childhood education, which is informed in large part by critical race theory. Their work dissects the notion of "best practices" in early childhood education by highlighting that the standards of quality and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) are far from neutral. They argue that, "traditional notions of quality in early childhood education are exclusionary, rooted in White monolingual and monocultural values and experiences, and apply deficit paradigms to frame the developmental trajectories of multiply minoritized children" (Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol 2018, p. 204). In other words, when early childhood "best practices" are implicitly rooted in white, middle class cultural and linguistic norms, the resources that racialized emergent bilinguals have are not valued or, worse, considered liabilities in their learning trajectories.

Rosa and Flores (2017) present a complementary framework, a raciolinguistic perspective, which highlights the ways in which language and race are co-constructed and, thus, intricately interrelated. Their work brings to educators' attention the role of the "white listening subject" who when hearing the speech of the racialized speaker—regardless of what register it is in—interprets that speech through a deficit lens. This theoretical lens can also be useful to examine the ways in which young emergent bilinguals have been negatively positioned in regard to their linguistic resources in schools.

The ideologies described by Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol (2018) and Rosa and Flores (2017) demonstrate how educators' day to day perceptions of their emergent bilingual students are influenced by notions of what is considered "standard" in early childhood education. One example of how young emergent bilinguals are framed is the concept of the "word gap" (Hart and Risley 2003), which refers to the alleged disparity in vocabulary with which students from different socioeconomic groups, predominantly from families of color, enter school. It is argued that children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds arrive to school knowing fewer words and they never catch up to middle-class students. By employing a critical lens, García and Otheguy (2016) argue that the research that generated the "word gap" has not taken into account multilingual students' full emergent linguistic repertoire and therefore the word gap is simply perceived and does not truly account for young emergent bilinguals' expansive resources.

Another way that deficit lens of emergent bilinguals takes root in educators' everyday practices is through the framing of emergent bilinguals' language practices. Many educators see emergent bilinguals' language through the lens of deficit and because of this, they may claim that students do not have language and describe them as 'semilingual' (Cummins 1994) or 'languageless' (Rosa 2016). This view, in turn, shapes how teachers and school administrators focus their instructional work on "repairing" children's language and, thus, teach them dominant practices without interrogating the ideologies that render their and their families' existing practices as deficient. This standardization of idealized monolingual language practices in early childhood education perpetuates deficit views of Latinx children (as well as other language minoritized children) and often prevents teachers from appreciating and building on students' rich linguistic repertoires (Ascenzi-Moreno 2018; Flores 2016; Flores and Rosa 2015; García and Otheguy 2016; Rosa 2016; Sánchez et al. 2017).

The work of CUNY-NYSIEB has been to assist educators in developing programming and instruction for emergent bilinguals that recognizes and builds on multilingual students' full linguistic repertoires. One way this is done is through familiarizing educators with translanguaging theory, which can serve as "a counterstory to the inferiority and deficit master narratives that define multilingual children as not having language or as having limited language" (Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol 2018, p. 215). Otheguy et al. (2015) have referred to translanguaging as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically (and usually national and state) defined boundaries of named languages" (p. 283). Translanguaging theory argues that bilinguals develop an integrated, dynamic linguistic system and agentively use linguistic features (words, sounds, rules) that society ascribes to a specific "named language," dialect or language variety (Otheguy et al. 2015). Acknowledging the dynamic nature of bilingualism from the internal perspectives of marginalized individuals, rather than from dominant monolingual perspectives, is an essential aspect of anti-oppressive pedagogies that center and leverage students' marginalized [linguistic] identities. Accordingly, educators who take up a translanguaging approach recognize that any perceived educational "gap" lies in social and educational practices framed by ideologies of inferiority rather than in the minoritized children themselves (Baugh 2017; Flores 2018; García and Otheguy 2016).

Translanguaging theory and practice has most often been applied to elementary and secondary school contexts, where the focus has been on how translanguaging supports emergent bilinguals learning through multiple modalities (reading, writing, speaking and listening) during literacy and literacy in the content areas (Celic and Seltzer 2013). In this same vein, we ask, how does translanguaging open up new

ways for teachers to value the language and literacy practices of young emergent bilinguals? And how does translanguaging theory and practice assist teachers in developing new instructional spaces for students' bilingual language development? We now turn to describing the CUNY-NYSIEB project as well as the early childhood education work that members of the research team undertook in 2017–2018.

3 Working in the Early Childhood Context: The CUNY-NYSIEB Project

The CUNY-NYSIEB project was started in 2011 by co-principal investigators Dr. Ricardo Otheguy, Dr. Ofelia García, and Dr. Kate Menken. The project, affiliated with both the Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society (RISLUS) and the Ph.D. Program in Urban Education at the CUNY Graduate Center and generously funded by the New York State Education Department, had the overarching goal of improving educational outcomes for those students labeled English Language Learners but whom the project referred to as emergent bilinguals. To meet this large goal, the project partnered with schools across New York State, working with administrators and teachers to promote two interrelated “non-negotiable” principles: (1) that students' bilingualism is a resource in their education, and (2) that the ecology of a school should reflect the bilingualism of its students. To this end, members of the CUNY-NYSIEB team—bilingual and TESOL educators from universities within the CUNY and SUNY (State University of New York) system and PhD students—were assigned to schools and worked collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a cohesive language policy, build a diverse group of advocates for emergent bilinguals within the school, and make changes to existing curriculum and instruction so that it better leveraged students' bilingualism through the use of translanguaging strategies.

In the 2016–2017 academic year, the project's focus shifted from intensive work in schools to the production of resources that would help educators across New York State educate themselves on emergent bilingual students and better serve them in the classroom. After producing a series of Topic Briefs on different populations of emergent bilinguals in the state (i.e.: Newcomer students, students labeled “Long Term English Language Learners,” etc.), members of the project decided that the production of resources had to emerge from what CUNY-NYSIEB always did best: work with teachers on the ground in schools. For this reason, in the 2017–2018 academic year, the project partnered with three schools to work with teachers in early childhood education, dual language bilingual education, and high school English as a Second Language (ESL) education.

In this chapter, we focus on the work the team did with a small group of early childhood educators at a bilingual school in a borough of New York City.

This chapter focuses on the collaborative work among teachers at the Villa School (pseudonym) and university-based researchers in the CUNY-NYSIEB project. The Villa School is a Pre-K-8 dual language, bilingual public school located in urban area in the Northeast of the US. The school has a unique history in that it emerged from the combined advocacy of parents in the community with the assistance of a local non-governmental organization dedicated to the betterment of the neighborhoods. Parents at the time (mid 1990s) recognized the need for bilingual programs within the diverse community which included Latinx students from a variety of countries and African-Americans. The school was created through a grant supporting the creation of small schools within the district. It is distinguished by having a dual commitment to bilingual education and being responsive to parent and community needs.

The dual-language bilingual program at the Villa School has been committed to providing students and families with learning that is rooted in the community. As such, it is expected that teachers, educational leaders, and parents have a say in how the bilingual program is carried out within the school. Since its inception, the bilingual program has been rooted in project-based learning and teacher-developed bilingual units of study around topics such as the ocean or restaurants. However, with the adoption of Common Core Standards at the state level and more pressure for New York City schools to adopt curriculum aligned to these standards, the school's teacher-generated curriculum became less so. Additionally, the school experienced a shift in the early childhood program as the state and district pressure has been placed on reading and writing objectives in Kindergarten. As a result, across the school, the teacher-written literacy curriculum was replaced by a pre-packaged curriculum available only in English that teachers would have to adapt, even in Kindergarten. To reach the curriculum's goals with young emergent bilinguals, play-based spaces were eliminated in favor of explicit literacy instruction.

Our work in the school was a result of a convergence of interests. The Kindergarten teachers at the school had attended a workshop about play in Kindergarten and wanted to incorporate play into their schedule. Our work with Kindergarten was determined, in part, because of New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) policies. While a PreK class is part of the school, all professional development for PreK teachers is centralized at the NYCDOE. Therefore, PreK teachers are not involved in the overarching school-based professional development. Therefore, the scope of our work was limited to the Kindergarten teachers. The positive aspect of this, is that Kindergarten is a contested space in education.

While Kindergarten is considered early childhood, it has increasingly become a site for explicit reading and writing instruction. Kindergarten children in public schools in New York City, and many other districts across the country, are held to reading and writing standards that previously began in first grade classrooms. It is this context for literacy learning in which we began our work.

Our aim was for the work at the Villa School to be collaborative. Our group was comprised of the Kindergarten team of teachers at the school, one Research Associate, Gladys Y. Aponte, and one Associate Investigator, Laura Ascenzi-Moreno. The teachers brought to the work their inquiry about how they could incorporate play into the day with their students. The CUNY-NYSIEB team brought their understanding of translanguaging theory and their experience as bilingual teachers. The school principal supported this work by providing the entire team with time built in for a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The PLC met on a weekly basis to discuss scholarly articles, plan collaboratively, and share and reflect on videos of students at play, anecdotes, and student work. The team worked collaboratively to better understand the dynamic ways students learn through their uses of language as well as their social interactions and play.

The PLC started out by reading two texts around play selected by the CUNY-NYSIEB team. For each article, teachers focused on how it applied to emergent bilingual students. The first text, “Play-based Learning and Intentional Teaching: Forever Different?” by Susan Edwards (2017) was selected so the group could refine their thinking about the different types of play that exist within early childhood settings—open-ended play, modeled play, and purposefully-framed play—and define the teachers’ role in relation to these different types of play. During the discussions, the team recognized that the three types of play are opportunities to observe, welcome, and build on students’ multilingualism. The second text, “Playing within and Beyond the Story: Encouraging Book-Related Pretend Play” by Jodi G. Welsch (2008) highlighted how play-based activities originating from shared texts could be supportive of children’s literacy development. The members of the PLC appreciated the idea of placing books and text-related props at play centers to elicit play relevant to the literature they read as a class. This set of articles provided the PLC members with a foundation for how to conceptualize and plan for play in ways that maximize their students’ engagement, conceptual learning, and dynamic language development.

As the PLC progressed, the team planned collaboratively and adapted their practices and play centers to allow different modes of play that could center and extend students’ multilingual identities and their emergent literacy skills. For example, teachers placed books that had been read in both English and Spanish, such as *The Three Little Pigs/Los Tres Cerditos* in play centers so that students

could engage with the stories through their play. The teachers also added culturally relevant and book related props to different play areas to elicit students' unique cultural perspectives and bilingual imaginations when interpreting, reenacting, reimagining, and extending stories. The teachers created a puppet show center, and the block area, dramatic play center, kitchen, art center received finger puppets, pretend foods, dress-up clothing, and different playthings that could encourage children to transform stories in ways that reflect their dynamic multilingual worlds. These thoughtful adaptations allowed teachers to observe students' language practices holistically during play and to better understand, appreciate, and build on students' dynamic emergent bilingualism. Several important findings emerged from the work within this PLC: students fluidly used their multimodal linguistic repertoires during play, they reimagined and played beyond texts in ways that reflected their personal bilingual experiences and creativities, and their teachers exhibited ideological shifts while *simultaneously* continuing to communicate deficit thinking about their students. We describe these three findings in the following section.

4 What Did We Learn? Translanguaging and Play in the Early Childhood Classroom

Our first finding from this work seems, at first glance, fairly obvious: the children in the kindergarten classrooms engaged in translanguaging while they were at play in the play centers. Obvious as this may seem—it is our belief that translanguaging is the typical way of languaging for bilingual people—it is worth stating out right. Acknowledging the ways that young bilingual students language can counter the recurring, deficit mindset we laid out earlier in this chapter: that bilingual students lack proficiency in *either* language and are in need of remediation at such an early age. Additionally, paying close attention to how the students languaged while at play was an important element of teachers' professional development. By using an observation protocol to stimulate their thinking and focusing their attention on students' languaging rather than any "absence" of language (Fig. 1), the teachers were able to see and hear their students in a new light (for more on this protocol, see our resource on the New York State Education Department's "Bilingual Education Resources: Supporting and Sustaining Initiative" page).

As students played, teachers saw high levels of engagement. They talked excitedly to one another at the different centers. There was laughter and extended interactions between students who might not have interacted before. And all the

Child Language Observation Protocol

Observer		Date	
Students		Setting	
Time Begun		Time End	

Please remember that the goal is for educators to learn about the child's language practices, *not* the absence of language. Therefore, *all* of the linguistic features observed should be recorded, including the non-verbal resources students use to communicate and make meaning. These low inference observations will eventually help educators plan instruction that values and builds on the emergent language practices that are already part of this students' repertoire.

Actions/Content of the conversation What are the children doing? Who are they talking to?	Child's Talk Document everything the child says.	Non-verbal Language How do the child use their bodies/facial expressions/gestures to communicate? Do they use objects?
		<i>Describe how students use any of the following to communicate:</i> Gestures Facial expressions Whole body movements Objects

Fig. 1 Observation protocol developed for teachers to document language and play

while, students drew on both English and Spanish to understand, discuss, reenact, and co-construct meaning of the stories they read. For example, in the block center, where students focused on building using wooden blocks, students built the pigs' three houses for finger puppets that were added to the center and reenacted the story together. The following interaction occurred during students' play at the block center:

Student 1: Y sopló, y sopló [*and he blew and blew*]...Open the – [pause]

Student 2: Puerta! [*Door*:]

Student 1: Open the puerta! Open the puerta de casa! [*Open the door! Open the door to the house!*]

In their reenactment of the pivotal moment when the wolf tries to blow the pigs' houses down, students drew on both English and Spanish, collaboratively building on one another's language practices to tell the story. Because both students were Spanish-English bilinguals, they fluidly shifted between English and Spanish, using language in ways that do not conform to monolingual expectations. Seen through a translanguaging lens, these two students were not "incomplete" bilinguals or "non-linguals" who lack necessary vocabulary in both English and

Spanish; they are drawing on the full linguistic repertoire to make meaning of the story and play with one another. Turning this lens on students' languaging was highly important for the teachers, who—as already discussed—expressed deficit thinking about them.

This next finding from our work builds off of the previous one. Not only did students translanguange at the play centers to engage with the stories they read; they also translanguaged to go *beyond* the stories in creative and innovative ways. This, again, counters discourses of “languagelessness” and, relatedly, “illiteracy” that so often pervade the education of emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools. An example of this creativity and innovation emerged from students' performance of a puppet show that retold the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Building off of their play in the puppet play center, the teachers facilitated students' creation of a short performance that students put on for all the kindergarten classes, teachers, and CUNY-NYSIEB researchers.

The performance featured several examples of how students' translanguaging—and their experiences as members of bilingual, bicultural families and communities, what Seltzer (*in press*) has called their *translingual sensibilities*—enabled them to go beyond the story itself to create something new. One example was the students' uses of English and Spanish as characters in the story. Though their performance was done primarily in English, the student who played “Baby Bear” spoke her part exclusively in Spanish. The students did not translate for her, nor was her use of Spanish at all “marked” within the otherwise English performance. Instead, the effect was that of a fluidly bilingual story, told in a way that would resonate with and understood by the bilingual audience members. Though students had read the story in both English and Spanish—kept separate in the texts—their performance integrated them and, as a result, created something new.

A second example of how students translanguaged in ways that went beyond the text was through the small changes they made to the details of the story itself. During a pivotal moment in the story, when the bears discover that Goldilocks has tasted each of their bowls of porridge, the performers (a student narrator and three students playing the three bears) said the following:

Narrator: Papa Bear said...

Papa Bear: Someone has eaten my porridge!

Narrator: And Mama Bear said...

Mama Bear: Someone has eaten my porridge!

Narrator: And Baby Bear said...

Baby Bear: ¡Alguien se comió mi avena! [Someone has eaten my oatmeal!]

While the narrator, Papa Bear, and Mama Bear all spoke the lines of the story in English in ways that stuck closely to the language of the original text, Baby Bear's line demonstrates how the student made the text her own through her use of Spanish. In order to speak her line, the student translated the word "porridge"—the name of a food rarely eaten in any U.S. household—to "avena," which refers to the more commonly consumed "oatmeal." "Avena" would have been a well-known food item for members of the bilingual audience, as it was to the girl playing the role of Baby Bear, and her facile translation speaks to her ability to navigate not only the languages but the cultural references. In short, by making space for students to use all of their language practices in the play centers, students brought to the performance their bilingual imaginations and experiences. This reimagining of even a small detail from *The Three Little Pigs/Los Tres Cerditos* highlights students' membership in bilingual communities and families as well as their bilingual pride, which enabled them to creatively transform a traditional tale to reflect their bilingual lives.

A final finding from our work with the early childhood educators at the Villa School was that these teachers—all Spanish-speaking Latinx working in a bilingual program—simultaneously evidenced ideological shifts as a result of their professional learning with the CUNY-NYSIEB team *and* continued to communicate deficit thinking about the Latinx students they taught. For example, during an exit interview with the small group of teachers, one shared this about the videos the CUNY-NYSIEB team showed during several sessions of the PLC:

The videos you presented helped me see how to support kids during play...taking them where they're at and expanding from there. Now in the dramatic play it's beautiful. A lot is happening that wasn't before (Teacher A, December 2018).

Because the teachers had been interested in developing their facilitation of students' play-based learning, the CUNY-NYSIEB team took time to provide readings and videos and to engage the teachers in discussions about how students can be taught by leveraging the languaging they draw on in their play. By creating opportunities for students to play—something that has, more and more, been reduced in early childhood classrooms in the U.S.—and focusing explicitly on supporting students in their play, this teacher saw how "beautiful" the play centers could be and how much learning was taking place "that wasn't before."

Focusing specifically on language, another teacher shared this anecdote about her observations of students' play:

When kids are playing with a student who prefers a language, they are motivated to speak that language, even if they don't typically prefer that language (Teacher A, December 2018).

Here, the teacher is sharing that, for example, a student she might label as more "English-dominant" would use more Spanish to play with a peer she might label as "Spanish-dominant" and vice versa. This willingness on the part of students to play using the language they were less comfortable using demonstrates the flexibility of the play centers and the purposeful development of play scenarios that draw on students' translanguaging practices and cultural funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992). Both teachers' comments here demonstrate that they observed shifts in how their young students were playing and using language in the classroom. The first teacher expressly attributes this shift to what she learned in the PLC, a testament to the positive influence that professional learning can have for teachers. And the second teacher's comment demonstrates her attention to her students' languaging, an awareness that the CUNY-NYSIEB team aimed to cultivate through the PLC.

Though the team saw this kind of positive shift in teachers' attitudes towards play and towards the idea of teaching language through play, we also heard teachers express deficit thinking towards their students and their language practices. For example, during a different set of interviews, two different teachers made the following comments:

Teacher A: We have many Hispanic students who listen to Spanish at home but don't speak it. The rest are bilingual, they speak both languages well. One child doesn't dominate either language well, talks like baby talk. He'll say one thing half Spanish half English, it doesn't matter what week we're in (Interview, September 2018).

Teacher B: Most [students] prefer English, but that doesn't mean they're strong in English. Their Spanish is good but not strong. They don't have that strong background (Interview, September 2018).

Again, it is important to note that these teachers are Spanish-speaking Latinx teachers in a long-standing bilingual program. We include these examples not to demonize the teachers but to show just how deeply deficit-based ideologies run, even among people who identify as Latinx bilingual students' advocates and allies. When these teachers emphasize students' lack of ability in either English or Spanish or when they called their students "nilingües" (a play on the Spanish word *bilingüe* or bilingual by changing the "bi" to "ni," which means "non-lingual"), one can see evidence of deeply-held ideologies of what Rosa (2016), has called

'languagelessness', the idea that Latinx people in the U.S. who do not engage in monoglossic language practices do not have the ability to use either language well. Despite the work of the PLC—and despite other evidence of the teachers' embracing of a new lens on their young students' language practices—these teachers' commentary demonstrates just how difficult it can be to combat such deficit thinking about Latinx children, even among the most willing teachers.

5 **Where Do We Go from Here? Implications for Educators and School Leaders**

CUNY-NYSIEB's work at the Villa School has elicited ideas and implications for future work in early childhood classrooms. For example, in discussing the contradictory views and language ideologies communicated by the teachers at the school, the team thought about how we might encourage teachers to reflect further on how they teach, view, and (mis)understand young multilingual children and their families. One way to do this is to encourage *all* teachers to see these students and families through an assets-based lens and engage them in more authentic, powerful ways. We see great potential in questionnaire or language profile tools that bring forth family and community translanguaging practices and funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992). Thinking along these lines and inspired by Morell and Aponte's (2016) work (also see García et al. 2017, language profiling tool), the CUNY-NYSIEB team compiled this list of questions for teachers to ask the families of young emergent bilinguals:

Questions to Ask Families of Young Emergent Bilinguals

- What languages do your family members speak at home?
- In what language do you speak to your child most of the time?
- What languages does your child understand?
- In what language does your child speak to you... to others?
- What are some ways your child uses gestures or objects to communicate?
- In what language does your child attempt to read/write?
- In what languages do you sing, read, or tell stories to your child?
- How has your child learned English so far (television shows, siblings, child-care, etc.)?
- What are some of your interests? What do you feel comfortable sharing with our class community?

Inspired by the intake questions in [Right from the Start: A Protocol for Identifying and Planning Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals in Universal Prekindergarten](#) (Morell and Aponte 2016).

This kind of questionnaire—combined with tools like the Child Language Observation Protocol discussed earlier in this chapter—provides teachers with a more nuanced portrait of who students and their families are and how they language, which can, in turn, lead to shifts in instruction that leverage young emergent bilinguals’ rich linguistic repertoires towards new language practices, including those expected of them in school settings (García et al. 2017). It also provides teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their own preconceived notions about young emergent bilinguals and their families, something they can do in community with their colleagues, as the teachers at the Villa School did in their PLC.

Another idea that emerged from our work at the Villa School related to the teachers’ choices of texts. Though we did see students take traditional stories like *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and make them their own, we would like to see more early childhood educators choose books that are culturally sustaining and contain evidence of students’ language practices—not kept separate, but integrated into multilingual, multicultural stories (for a list of books and resources that feature characters from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, visit [CUNY-NYSIEB.org](#)). These texts make space for students to see themselves in the classroom *and* learn about the lives and experiences of others (Espinosa and Lehner-Quam 2019). Teachers could look for published stories that resonate with their students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as use students’ own stories as classroom texts. By bringing such texts into the classroom and designing opportunities for students to engage in play at centers that relate to these texts, teachers can build on students’ translanguaging and cultivate creative and engaging new learning opportunities.

Taking up a translanguaging lens on the language and literacy education of young emergent bilinguals means starting with the idea that these children are gifted language users: creative, highly aware, adept, and flexible. In addition to organizing their play around multilingual, multicultural texts, teachers could create opportunities for students to play and further build their critical multilingual awareness (Prasad 2018; Velasco and Fialais 2016). Teachers could organize their centers (as well as their whole-class instruction) around questions like, how do different people (their parents, a local shop owner, a neighbor) say different things? What words, phrases, songs, and stories are the same or different across languages and cultures? How do people communicate with *more* than just spoken

language? These are questions and topics about which young emergent bilinguals have much to offer, and it is incumbent upon teachers to invite them in.

For play to take hold in emergent bilinguals' classrooms, school administrators need to be on the same page as teachers. We advocate that there be a cohesive vision and policy about how play is incorporated into the school day and how it is sustained. We found that while teachers' practices are framed by their own personal belief systems and knowledge, their work is also impacted by how school administrators prioritize instructional initiatives and how they measure their effectiveness. Within this project, these tensions were evident in how the newly instituted space for play—center time—was implemented in actuality and how its effectiveness was measured. We believe that these tensions are not exclusive to these teachers and this school, but are the reality of many, if not, most programs.

The kindergarten teachers were the catalysts for finding time to reintroduce play into their days. While, by the end of the study, administration agreed to the schedule change to include center time, its frequency had been reduced and replaced with more targeted literacy instruction. It is important to point out that through the structured play sessions that the teachers set up, students' literacy skills were being supported through the relation of the centers to shared bilingual texts and the development of oral language. In addition, the administration wanted to see the results of center time which resulted in the creation of plays. While a play is an appropriate activity for kindergarten students, framing center time as resulting in a culminating activity both draws attention away from the importance of incremental work that happens over time within the centers and demonstrates how student-directed learning was redirected to meet the demands of the school. As demonstrated through the findings, full access to play and the language practices students use for that play, is critical to emergent bilinguals' language development and to teachers' understanding of students' language practices.

In short, our work at the Villa School has strengthened our stance that Latinx bilingual children language in ways that go beyond monolingual conceptions and play in creative ways that enable them to represent their learning, their prior knowledge, and ways of knowing. Too often, this languaging and play is viewed through a deficit lens, or is over-regulated, and these children are seen as lacking. By taking up a translanguaging, play-based lens on early childhood education, educators and schools can counter this deficit thinking and create powerful learning experiences for all emergent bilingual children.

References

- Ascenzi-Moreno, L. (2018). Translanguaging and Responsive Assessment Adaptations: Emergent Bilingual Readers through the Lens of Possibility. *Language Arts*, 95(6), 355–369.
- Baugh, J. (2017). Meaning-less differences: Exposing fallacies and flaws in “the word gap” hypothesis that conceal a dangerous “language trap” for low-income American families and their children. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 11(1), 39–51.
- Cummins, J. (1994). Semilingualism. In: R. R. Asher (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. (2nd ed.). (pp. 3812–3814). Oxford: Elsevier Science.
- Edwards, S. (2017). Play-based learning and intentional teaching: Forever different? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 42(2).
- Espinosa, C. & Lehner-Quam, A. (2019). Sustaining bilingualism: Multimodal arts experiences for young readers and writers. *Language Arts*, 96(4), 265–268.
- Celic, C. & Seltzer, K. (2013). *Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB guide for educators*. (Rev. ed.). New York: CUNY- New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals. <http://www.nysieb.ws.gc.cuny.edu/files/2013/03/Translanguaging-Guide-March-2013.pdf>. Accessed: January 7th 2020.
- Flores, N. (2016). A tale of two visions: Hegemonic Whiteness and bilingual education. *Educational Policy*, 30(1), 13–38.
- Flores, N. (2018). Making millions off of the 30-million-word gap. <https://educational-linguist.wordpress.com/2018/05/31/making-millions-off-of-the-30-million-word-gap/>. Accessed: January 7th 2020.
- Flores, N. & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 85(2), 149–171. <https://doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149>.
- García, O., Johnson, S., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The Translanguaging classroom. Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon.
- García, O. & Otheguy, R. (2016). Interrogating the language gap of young bilingual and bidialectal students. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 11(1), 52–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2016.1258190>.
- Hart, B. & Risley, R. (2003). The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3. *American Educator*, 27(1), 4–9. https://www.aft.org/ae/spring2003/hart_risley. Accessed: January 7th 2020.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D. & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141.
- Otheguy, R., García, O. & Reid, W. (2015). Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 6(3), 281–307. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2015-0014>.
- Prasad, G. L. (2018). ‘But do monolingual people really exist?’ Analysing elementary students’ contrasting representations of plurilingualism through sequential reflexive drawing. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 18(3), 315–334.
- Rosa, J. (2016). Standardization, racialization, languagelessness: Raciolinguistic ideologies across communicative contexts. *Linguistic Anthropology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12116>.

- Rosa, J. & Flores, N. (2017). Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404517000562>.
- Sánchez, M. T., García, O. & Solorza, C. (2017). Reframing language allocation policy in dual language bilingual education. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 41(1), 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2017.1405098>.
- Seltzer, K. (in press). “My English is its own rule”: Voicing a translanguaging sensibility through poetry. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*.
- Souto-Manning, M. & Rabadi-Raol, A. (2018). (Re)Centering quality in early childhood education: Toward intersectional justice for minoritized children. *Review of Research in Education*, 42, 203–225.
- Tazi Morell, Z. & Aponte, A. (2016). Right from the Start: A Protocol for Identifying and Planning Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals in Universal Prekindergarten. *Educator’s Voice*, 9, 12–25.
- Velasco, P. & Fialais, V. (2016). Moments of metalinguistic awareness in a Kindergarten class: translanguaging for simultaneous biliterate development. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 1–15.
- Welsch, J. (2008). Playing Within and Beyond the Story: Encouraging Book-Related Pretend Play. *Reading Teacher*, 62(2), 138–160.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

