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# Focus: Culturally Sustaining Instruction

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# The Innovation of Translanguaging Pedagogy Enables Students to Use All of Their Tools

by Lizdelia Piñón, Ed.D.

On a rainy Monday morning in Chicago in 2004, I took the day off from my auditing job to observe my niece Lolita in kindergarten because she'd been crying and begging not to go to school every morning. I wondered what was happening to cause Lolita to hate kindergarten.

Upon entering the bilingual education class-room, I heard the teacher declare, "We don't speak Spanish during our science period!" This happened during circle time. Lolita was sitting on the rug listening to her classmate explain the butterfly lifecycle in Lolita's native Spanish. Lolita and her classmate were smartly using the resources of their different languages with very little regard for any artificial boundaries between English and Spanish. I watched with fascination as both languages allowed for more effective communication about the butterfly lifecycle.

To my horror, the teacher who made the declaration was a Spanish-speaking, Latina educator. I was angry that the teacher denied Lolita's use of her native language to comprehend the lesson. The teacher rendered Lolita mute during lessons taught in English because of her lack of English fluency. It seemed the teacher caused a 5-year-old child to feel like a failure because of a contrived boundary imposed on her use of language. I understood why Lolita hated school. Lolita's mom quickly spoke to the principal and the teacher, and they created

a plan to help Lolita learn English while still honoring the Spanish that she brought into the classroom.

The moment was life-altering for me. I decided to change careers and become an educator myself. I could not in good conscience overlook this teacher's linguistic oppression of her emergent bilingual students. With my new understanding, I felt empowered to do better by emergent bilingual students.

Now at IDRA, I support all the little Lolitas who speak in their native languages to learn academic content. I regularly connect with educators seeking to incorporate their emergent bilingual students' native languages during lessons. I show how a process called *translanguaging* can be the best approach for producing confident bilingual learners who enjoy school.

## Using Translanguaging to Support Learning

Through translanguaging, emergent bilingual students use all of their linguistic and cognitive resources to better understand content provided to them in a language they have just begun to learn. It involves educators recognizing students' dynamic bilingualism as an asset in the classroom rather elevating English above all other languages. It is a culturally-sustaining practice used for language development. (cont. on Page 2)

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(Translanguaging Allows Emergent Bilingual Students to Use All Their Tools, continued from Page 1)



This can be a powerful tool for learning. But it also can go against the grain for many educators who are accustomed to focusing emergent bilingual students solely on mastering the intricacies of a single new language while ignoring the student's home language skills. Instead, in translanguaging, educators value all students' linguistic resources and bring them to bear on the learning process in all contexts (Cioè-Peña & Snell, 2015).

Using translanguaging is a way to offer emergent bilingual students access to grade-level content in any type of program: bilingual education, dual language or English as a second language. Even though the lesson on the lifecycle of the butterfly was in English, Lolita was able to discuss the new information in Spanish with her classmate. She could see or hear the similarities in the words between the English target language (e.g., cycle) and her native Spanish (e.g., ciclo). Lolita's native Spanish served as a scaffold that bolstered her acquisition both of the English language and the butterfly lifecycle.

When teachers strategically integrate translanguaging into their plans, emergent bilingual students benefit from their whole linguistic repertoire (Cenoz, 2017). The brain does not isolate languages in a separate spaces. Students gain access to "academic content through the linguistic resources and communicative repertoires they bring to the classroom while simultaneously acquiring new ones" (Hornberger & Link, 2012). Educators can observe the negotiations and mediations used by emergent bilingual students during communication in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

This transformative pedagogy leverages bilingual students' multicompetence (García,

2009a). Otheguy, et al., represented translanguaging as "the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages" (2015).

The concept of translanguaging is relatively new in the field of bilingual education (García, 2009b; García, et al., 2017; García & Lin, 2017). It emerged as a direct response to the outdated policies and concepts inherent in the monolingual ideology of subtractive bilingual education in which teachers erect artificial barriers, such as the one Lolita experienced, between languages in classrooms (García, et al., 2017; García & Wei, 2015; Valdés, 2005).

Translanguaging pedagogy is an innovation for traditional bilingual programs because languages may flow fluidly within the classroom. By moving toward translanguaging pedagogy, we can bridge learning gaps among emergent bilingual students. García, et al., encourage bilingual educators to move from a monolingual ideology to a flexible biliteracy model. As educators engage in the practice of translanguaging pedagogy, they can provide empirical evidence of its efficacy in today's classrooms. (García, et al., 2017)

#### Implementing Translanguaging

The change can begin by applying a few of these simple ideas in the classroom.

- Display students' home language words alongside English words on a word board.
- Use bilingual texts for read-aloud opportunities and independent reading and practice.
- Have bilingual dictionaries and glossaries readily accessible in the classroom.

- Use mobile applications and translation soft ware to translate if needed.
- Pair students strategically to write in multiple languages.
- Welcome into the classroom family and community members as language partners.
- Ask students to share vocabulary being taught in different content areas in their home language.
- Find cognates where possible; in some cases, the written language may be different, but the sounds may be similar.
- Provide students with multilingual resources to support their work.
- Allow students to make journal entries in their home language or in English or both.
- Start an educator book club at your school or district.

Creating a translanguaging space that uses students' ways of knowing and entire linguistic repertoires is a powerful tool for learning and strengthens bilingual education. Let me know if you have questions or need assistance from the IDRA EAC-South to better serve your emergent bilingual students (lizdelia.pinon@idra.org).

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The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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# Let the Youth Speak for Themselves – Fostering Substantive Conversations and Advocacy in the Classroom

by Paula Johnson, Ph.D.

Our goal as educators, parents and community members is to provide the best for the next generation. We make decisions with the best intentions. From conception on, there are a million choices that influence a student's life. Some are minor. Some are huge. Take a moment to consider how many of them are informed by the students themselves. Our youth are telling us what they want and what they need. It is time that we listen.

Teachers spend years engaging students through strategies like cooperative working groups, turn and talks, and think-pair-shares, that give students the opportunity to talk in small settings. We teach them to give input in class discussions. Students learn the art of negotiation in speech through persuasive arguments. Students have ongoing chances for developing self-advocacy as they grow.

At home, they navigate the joys of the teenage years by preparing arguments for securing later bedtimes, getting the newest phones or earning the privilege of going out with friends. To support independent thinking and selection processing when children are small, parents and teachers offer several opportunities for students to make their own choices. We let them pick out their clothes, which book to read or which activity to participate in. We offer choices and give them space to decide.

Critical thinking, problem solving and solution making are highly encouraged skills in education. Classrooms across the globe promote the development of these abilities through a variety of strategies, including student dialogue, persuasive writing and debate.

But our current social climate is exposing a large number of adults who lean more toward a "children should be seen and not heard" attitude. It seems that when marginalized, underserved and underrepresented youth do speak out about controversial issues, pedagogy plans

and real-life practice begin to diverge. Youth face opposition when what they have to say is not in alignment with the adults making the decisions.

How can we raise the next generation to think for themselves if we oppose them when it is most critical? Instead, we should be amplifying these voices that have something to say, but don't have access to the microphone (IDRA, 2021). It's their future! We should want their input. The only way to ensure that the next generation achieves educational justice and equity is to let them contribute to the goals and objectives that will impact them most.

Alexandria City Public Schools' Equity for All 2025 campaign in Virginia focuses on racial equity. In 2020, Superintendent Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings and the district launched a strategic plan where equity is at the center of all they do. The district believes that racial equity will be achieved "when race does not determine quality of life, opportunities and outcomes" (2020).

By placing equity as a pillar of the community, leaders sought out and amplified voices from across the district. Teachers, students, families and members from the entire city of Alexandria engaged in the planning process. The district formed multiple citywide partnerships to support students' social, emotional and academic needs and to encourage their advocacy for social change.

Another conversation that students are weighing in on involves a disheartening nationwide attack on books that focus on race, gender and sexuality (Latham Sikes, 2022). Loud politicians, parents and activists are weaponizing legislation to censor a growing list of books they have labeled "pornographic," "divisive" or "incendiary," books that largely target LGBTQ authors and texts, as well as books on race and racism. Students turn to these books to gain (cont. on Page 4)

Our youth are telling us what they want and what they need. It is time that we listen.

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new perspectives and to see the world through others' experiences to seek affirmation of their own experiences. When people attack these books, their authors or the subject matter, they are preventing any possibility for necessary conversations. They are essentially cultivating a climate for increased bullying, harassment and violence. We are in dire need of many more courageous and critical conversations to address the needs of our students, families and communities.

Substantive conversations help students develop and evaluate arguments and evidence in support from different points of view (Carter Andrews, et al., 2018). Unfortunately, many teachers are ill-equipped to lead discussions on sensitive subject matters like racism and sexual identity. Teacher preparation programs must provide future teachers with the tools to "cultivate school and classroom culture and climate that emanate humanity, dignity and respect for all" (Carter Andrews, et al., 2018).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire says, "Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom." Furthermore, when education is a catalyst for freedom, "men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world." (Freire, 2000)

Representation matters. Those who truly believe this invite students as thought partners. Who better to help us determine the next steps toward their future? Students belong in focus groups. Youth representatives should be part of every district and campus equity and diversity planning committee. Student leaders should be consulted on every decision that has the potential to impact their lives. Youth are the voice of the people. The only way to know if we are on the right path is to ask the ones for which the destination is planned.

This is not the first time that youth are leading the charge for freedom. For example, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick") was one of the key organizations during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. SNCC members, mostly college students, were integral in the March on Washington, sit-ins, Freedom Rides

### Award-winning PBS Series about Unsung Women Who Changed History Now Available with Spanish Subtitles

#### IDRA Partners with Unladylike2020 to Share Inclusive Materials for Students

In honor of International Women's Day on March 8, the award-winning series Unladylike2020 launched its content for viewing and streaming with Spanish subtitling. The series tells the inspiring stories of little-known heroines and the women who follow in their footsteps. IDRA is partnering with Unladylike2020 to give students access to inspiring stories representing diverse cultural backgrounds. The subtitled digital series and supporting educational resources, that focus on women who accomplished great things before women had the right to vote, is available starting this month for Women's History Month.

"All students deserve to see themselves in their curriculum and deserve the opportunity to think critically about how history is relevant to our communities today," said Celina Moreno, J.D., IDRA President & CEO. "We are excited to partner with Unladylike2020 to share this dynamic tool in English and Spanish with educators, students and communities."

The digital short films, and the free digital learning resources created for each, available with Spanish translation and closed captioning on the American Masters YouTube





channel, PBS LearningMedia, and the PBS Documentaries channel on Amazon Prime.

The Unladylike2020 stories focus on intrepid women from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who managed to break into new professions, step into leadership roles, and fight for suffrage and an end to discrimination. The materials include free lesson plans for middle and high school, as well as guides for hosting your own screening, to generate dialog about women in your community.

### https://idra.news/Unladylike2020cc

and multiple voter education projects. Based in Georgia, these young leaders fought to end segregation and advance social equality.

Our youth leaders of today are a growing force that we must uplift if we ever hope to achieve these goals. The SNCC Legacy Project (SLP) is alive and well today. Its mission statement declares: "Built into our efforts is the determination to see that our legacy, the legacy of the freedom struggle, is passed from our generation to future generations. A Luta Continua! (The struggle continues!)" (2022).

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## Families Celebrate Excellent Biliteracy Programs

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., & Alejandra Salazar Gonzalez

While biliteracy enhances students' career options for a stable economic future in an increasingly globalized economy, its value extends far beyond material and economic benefits. Self-concept, self-value and family connections blossom when a student's home language and culture are maintained in tandem with English fluency and literacy. When schools support students to graduate fully biliterate, they build individual student self-worth, familial connections and economic utility.

Multilingual instruction has historically been an opportunity provided to children of wealthy families. Yet students who come from recent immigrant Spanish-speaking families typically are not expected to be proficient in more than one language. We still see schooling environments that force them to set aside their home language to become proficient in English.

Recent immigrant families hope that their children will be fluent and proficient in both. In the South Texas border region, school districts with comprehensive K-12 dual language programs are making that dream a reality.

In December of 2020, after a leadership change in their district, IDRA Education CAFE members in south Texas were concerned that the district might phase out its K-12 bilingual-biliterate program. Some school board members did not appear to understand the program. Family members came together to meet with the school board urging that the program be made permanent.

"Before we had this bilingual program, our children felt ashamed and embarrassed to speak Spanish," said Vicky Saldaña. The bilingual program "helped them to be more proud of themselves and proud of their language, the language that their parents and grandparents speak at home... Now they can communicate in both languages."

Olivia Ortega also testified before the school board: "Without the [K-12 bilingual-biliterate] program, communication between families would be lost. Many young people cannot communicate with their parents or grandparents because they only speak English. For me, it is very important, as a mother, that they have this language."

Language is not just a way to communicate with one another; it is also a way to understand oneself and one's history and remain connected to it. In multiple community forums recently, parents spoke on how fluency in the home language supports student self-concept.

María Esparza stated, "We want [dual language/biliteracy] to be a fact, to be reality... that our children in our community do not forget their own roots and that we know where we come from and where we are today."

Parents described the wider opportunities their students would have with strong biliteracy. "Just the fact of knowing two languages opens a lot of doors," stated Zoila M.\* "It's something that at the beginning may not be seen as something important because we already speak the language at the house. We already know the basics. But when they are able to communicate (cont. on Page 6)

"Without the [K-12 bilingual-biliterate] program, communication between families would be lost. There are young people who cannot communicate with their parents, with their grandparents because they only speak English."



See video of Education CAFE members who testified before their school board to support the K-12 bilingual-biliterate program.

https://idra.news/EdCAFEstory

# IDRA Launches 'Southern Education Equity Network' to Support Family & Community Advocates

## SEEN's New Virtual Tool Will Help Students, Families and Educators Stand Up for Accurate and Inclusive Education

As small but loud factions attack public education, students and families across the U.S. South are pushing back. IDRA's new Southern Education Equity Network (SEEN) trains and assists communities in improving education policy and practice across the South and provides an online and mobile space for community members and coalitions to coordinate their advocacy.

"It is more important than ever that we stand united and help one another stand up for our students' futures," said Terrence Wilson, J.D, IDRA's regional policy and community engagement director based in Atlanta. "We are excited to elevate IDRA's community-centered advocacy across the South, ensuring that underserved students and families are seen and heard and have an opportunity to participate in the policymaking process that impacts them."

Community advocates are working together to expand culturallysustaining teaching that accurately portrays the contributions of all communities. They oppose classroom censorship and book banning, want to eliminate discipline and policing practices that adversely impact students of color, and want to confront systemic racism in education policy. SEEN partners in Georgia and Texas include Deep Center, Excellence & Advancement Foundation, Georgia Educators for Equity and Justice, Georgia Youth Justice Coalition, and South Fulton Arrow Youth Council.

SEEN builds on the intergenerational community-building IDRA has led for years to secure education opportunities for all students.



The network also supports the work of **IDRA's Education CAFEs** (Community Action Forums for Excellence) as they expand across the U.S. South. An Education CAFE is a family-led group, rooted in a community-based organization rather than on a single campus, focused on collaborating with schools to improve the success of students in the community.

The dynamic SEEN site features facts about key issues, news alerts and a forum to help communities stay connected and share lessons learned while organizing for excellent and equitable schools. It also provides tools for advocacy skill-building, such as learning how to testify before a legislative committee.

The Southern Education Equity Network is generously supported by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

### www.idraseen.org

(Families Celebrate Excellent Biliteracy Programs, continued from Page 5)

at a higher level, they express not just the common language, but... a professional language, it will definitely open doors for them. And not only that, it embraces their roots. They're not ashamed of coming from a Mexican family. They bring that into wherever they go. That makes us proud as parents, having them embrace their roots and culture and everything that we are at home. Bring it in and be proud. Be proud of where we are coming from and where we are going to go from there."

As a result, the school board unanimously passed a policy statement for its K-12 biliteracy program to ensure its stability. Students in the bilingual-biliterate program receive the state's biliteracy seal on their diploma.

We interviewed students who reflected on the importance and wide-reaching benefits of their model dual language program.

High school junior, Eunice Reyna, said: "The importance of a biliteracy program is to learn to communicate with others [even if] they don't know English or Spanish... It's a great opportunity to communicate with your community and help other people."

Melenie M.,\* a high school senior, added: [Biliteracy] "is important; it gives you new opportunities. It's definitely a bridge between the two worlds. At home, my dad only speaks Spanish, and at school, it's mostly all English. But the

biliteracy and, especially the [K-12 bilingual-biliterate] program, really helped me kind-of fill that gap and be able to learn both of the languages in an academic setting and be more prepared... for the professional world and the workforce."

Biliteracy is a many-splendored gift. Just ask the parents and students themselves.

Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is IDRA's family engagement coordinator and directs IDRA Education CAFE work. Comments and questions may be directed to him via email at aurelio.montemayor@idra.org. Alejandra Salazar Gonzalez is a community engagement intern at IDRA. Comments and questions may be directed to her via email at allie.salazar@idra.org.

\*last name omitted for privacy

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## An Introduction to Culturally Sustaining Practices in the Classroom

by Sulema Carreón-Sánchez, Ph.D.

Culturally sustaining instruction is a researchbased approach that links students' cultures, languages and life experiences within the classroom environment. These connections help students access rigorous curriculum and develop higher-level academic skills.

When using culturally sustaining practices, educators deliberately create a classroom environment that acknowledges all students, connecting cultural experiences within daily instruction, embracing students' native language and their families as assets to learning at school and home, and communicating clear high expectations for all students.

Making these connections is especially important today as students and schools face the lingering effects of COVID-19, school shutdowns, interrupted instruction and social stress. Following are examples of introductory culturally sustaining practices.

- · Make students feel comfortable and open to sharing. For example, share your own experience about a subject first and then facilitate students in communicating their own experiences with each other in pairs or small groups before asking some to share with the whole class.
- Use all sensory modalities (listening, speaking, reading and writing, movement) to introduce information while incorporating student experiences.

- · Listen to your students. Take time to let them share traditions, holidays, and family or other cultural activities they enjoy. Discuss ideas for incorporating these into classroom activities.
- · Choose content with stories and poems that reflect the culture of the students.
- Continuously build authentic relationships with students and their families. Invite families into the classroom. They can read a book from their tradition or talk about a part of their culture that ties to your lesson.
- Visit your school library and your community's public library for resources, like eBooks, audiobooks, movies and related books.

See the IDRA EAC-South's set of materials on culturally sustaining instruction and leadership for engaging with families and students from marginalized communities (Johnson, 2021).

#### Resources

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See the IDRA EAC-South's set of materials on culturally sustaining instruction and leadership www.idra.org/eac-south

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### **New Classnotes Podcast Episodes**

In Classnotes Podcast episode 220, Dr. Nilka Avilés talks with Dr. Encarnacion Garza about the benefits for school leaders of practicing deliberate critical reflection.

In episodes 218 and 219, Dr. Stephanie Garcia talks with two young women of color who are passionate about their pursuit of STEM.









