

# Reading Bilingual Books: Students Learn English While Acquiring Knowledge about American Cultural Traditions and Places

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**ABSTRACT:** This article describes a pilot study conducted in an elementary school in Torremaggiore, Italy. Pre-service teachers (PSTs) (i.e., undergraduate college students) wrote bilingual English/Italian informational texts and used them in conjunction with a variety of translanguaging strategies to support Italian children's acquisition of English and knowledge of American culture. Immediately following instruction with each book, copies of the texts were given to the children for take-home practice. A week after all instruction was completed, the children were asked to write in their native language and tell what they enjoyed most about the PSTs' visit. Selected children from the group also responded to an oral interview. A content analysis of their translated responses revealed children's impressions about the benefit of using bilingual texts for learning English and gaining knowledge of American culture.

*The article includes all nine of the NAPDS Nine Essentials: 1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; 2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; 3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; 4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; 5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; 6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved; 7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration; 8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and 9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.*

The International Professional Development Site (IPDS) program is an extension of an already well-established consortium of 45 elementary schools serving the Department of Elementary Education and Reading (EER) at Buffalo State College. In general, teachers from these PDSs serve the department in mentoring childhood and early childhood majors during pre-student teaching field events associated with their methods courses in literacy, social studies, mathematics, and science as well as the culminating student teaching experience.

Enhanced regulations leading to teacher certification in New York State over the past two decades have increasingly limited childhood and early childhood majors' opportunities to partake in semester abroad options recognized as increasing participants' global awareness and intercultural sensitivities (Marx & Moss, 2011). Thus, in the past five years, four short term possibilities to study abroad have been created by the EER Department: three-week options to observe and teach at IPDS sites in Santiago, Chile; Zambia in South Africa; the Dominican Republic; and Torremaggiore, Italy. Each of these options has a

specific mission for participating pre-service teachers based on the needs of the international site.

The IPDS option organized by Maria (first author) is located in Torremaggiore, a small medieval town in the Province of Foggia in the Apulia region of southeast Italy known for its production of wine and olives. The school, San Giovanni Bosco, is the only elementary public school in the town and is situated in two buildings: one serving children in the early childhood domain, including Pre-K, Kindergarten, and Grade 1, and the other serving children from grade two through grade five. Approximately 300 children, most of Italian descent, are currently enrolled in the school; less than 3% are children of Eastern European families who have recently immigrated to the area.

## Background

Maria developed the partnership with the San Giovanni Bosco elementary school in 2013. At this site, pre-student teaching candidates from Buffalo State College have the option of

spending three weeks of their January interim term observing and providing children at the school with instruction in English as a second language (L2). For the PST (pre-service teacher) participants, it is expected that the short-term experience at this IPDS would broaden their cross cultural/global awareness while simultaneously developing their sensitivities to the needs of children in the process of acquiring English as a L2, particularly the specific dynamics associated with planning for instruction focused on language learning.

Prior to traveling to Torremaggiore for the first time in January 2014, the project facilitators provided the PSTs with a variety of children's books, including monolingual (English) and bilingual (Italian/English) texts; this resulted in lesson planning for the Italian students that focused mainly on English vocabulary development. Once at the site and working with intermediate students, Smartboard presentations were used – ones requiring the Italian students to orally repeat printed English words that were paired with pictures and/or diagrams; all were associated with content curriculum (e.g., the planets of the solar system or the stages in the metamorphosis of a butterfly). Children in grades 1-6 at the school enjoyed several game-like activities, particularly those that called for physical actions in response to spoken English directions called out by a PST (e.g., Simon Says) or ones involving a sing along of repetitive verses (e.g., Row, Row, Row Your Boat). In the primary grades, children were allowed to manipulate a number of concrete representations of animals, colors, or numbers. The children repeated the English name for each object as the PST said it aloud; then, they identified separate items in English without a prompting.

The focus during this first year (January, 2015) was to determine the impact of PSTs' instruction directly related to the acquisition of English vocabulary. Results were measured informally through pre and post assessments of students' oral reading accuracy and comprehension of short English passages read independently (i.e., two forms of one or two passages that were 25 to 50 words in length). The English teacher at the school provided the passages; she determined that the topics and readability levels for each were appropriate for the children being assessed. These informal measures were administered by the PSTs who noted miscues (i.e., errors) and comprehension level according to typical protocol for oral reading and retelling assessments. Results revealed that, while students' fluency in reading English was adequate for each administration, their comprehension of content read in English was very limited. Discussions with the English teacher at the school supported this observation of students' limited comprehension when reading in English.

Retrospective reflections on the nature of the lesson plans constructed by the PSTs during the first year noted the preponderance of focus on vocabulary development – a skill which, according to Au (1993), is necessary, but not sufficient for understanding when reading in a L2. Albeit, this focus on vocabulary development was attributed to limited availability of independent or instructional level monolingual/bilingual text

resources; the currently available bilingual texts that displayed content in two languages seemed to be too challenging, requiring much vocabulary pre-teaching. In addition, children did not have access to personal copies of the texts for practice or individual copies for reading while the PSTs engaged them in guided and/or close reading in English. Bilingual Italian/English books – ones containing narrative or informational texts that children could independently read and practice reading silently and orally – were not widely available at the school.

With data from the initial experience, Maria developed a new pre-travel curriculum for the group of PSTs who would work at the Italian PDS in January 2016 – one focused on instructional methods and materials intended to address this apparent deficiency in comprehension. One of the major assignments in the course curriculum was the development of easy to read English/Italian bilingual texts related to topics about which the Italian children had previously posed inquiries (e.g., American places, sports, holidays). By piquing interest with texts, illustrations, and mode of delivery as well as providing instructional levels texts with L1 (i.e., readers' first language) translations, students' motivation to engage and persist was expected to increase, resulting in increased fluency with English as well as new knowledge about American cultural traditional and places.

## Purpose of the Study

In the second year of the partnership, a pilot study was conducted to examine the efficacy of using bilingual (English/Italian) informational texts written by the participating PSTs to promote reading interest, comprehension in English, and knowledge of American culture. The decision to have the PSTs write the books was fostered by the fact that purchase of such appropriately leveled texts for distribution and use by the children was not financially viable.

To stimulate interest for the reading the children would be asked to do, texts were written in response to inquiries repeatedly made by the children at San Giovanni Bosco during the first year – ones focused on places, sports, holidays, and other events related to American culture and traditions. The purpose of the study was to investigate several questions associated with the use of bilingual books for instruction in the L2 (i.e., reader's second language), specifically to enhance English vocabulary, comprehension, and knowledge about American culture. PSTs' reaction to this instructional experience was also a factor that was evaluated.

Specific questions guiding this study were:

1. Did the bilingual texts that PSTs constructed promote emerging bilinguals' comprehension of texts written in the L2 while expanding their knowledge of American culture?
2. To what degree did the children engage with the bilingual texts?

3. How did the PSTs feel about the construction and use of bilingual texts they had made for the Italian learners?

## Conceptualization of the Purpose of the Study

The study involved merging the principles of working with a partnership school in a setting where children's L1 was different from the L1 of the PSTs with principles for effective instruction in reading comprehension and language acquisition when working with English language learners (ELLs). Along with results on children's performance, data on PSTs' reflections related to this experience illuminated perceptions on how resources and pedagogy impact students' achievement and engagement.

## Literature Review

It is estimated that over a billion people are learning English as a second language. These imposing estimates are driven by worldwide workplace requirements that the English language be used to communicate (Bentley, 2014).

With English language acquisition being of extreme importance in today's global community, it is essential that general education teachers have an awareness of second language students' learning needs, possess sensitivity to the challenges of learning a L2, and are prepared to teach students with respect for their interests as well as their linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds (Harper & de Jong, 2004). For success in school and in the workplace that awaits them after high school graduation, ELLs need to learn academic English (i.e., terminology in disciplines, directives for tasks) in addition to the conversational English used in interactions in and out of school.

While oral language develops quickly through social interactions and immersion, "academic language proficiency develops at a much slower rate" (de Jong & Harper, 2005, p. 104). The latter is complex in both oral and written forms and competence quickly becomes critical for ELLs' successful participation, learning, and achievement in the L2 (Goldenberg, 2008). Teachers need to "implement instructional approaches that foster students' development of academic literacy practices" (Ramos, 2014, p. 655) as well as create an environment that fosters dialog around subject content, ideas, relationships, and questions that seek clarification when there is confusion in the L2 (Hayes & Zacarian, 2010), expanding students' knowledge of vocabulary and subject content.

Students who have limited vocabularies in either their native language L1 and/or the L2 often struggle to understand grade-level text, particularly informational texts. For those reading in their L2, this is especially true (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2010) since they must integrate word reading and meaning processing simultaneously. In such cases, the materials used for L2 instruction should be at children's independent and/or instructional level, contain interesting content, and have

accessible L1 translations as a scaffold for understanding text written in the L2 (Brown, 2004; Shea & Roberts, 2016; Semingson, Pole, & Tommerdahl, 2015). Comprehension improves, as navigating L2 text is facilitated with L1 translations, but pre-reading schema building and vocabulary development will still be needed with some texts. Bilingual texts written at learners' independent and instructional levels can be useful instructional tools for learning a new language and curricular content (Celic and Seltzer, 2013).

Jiminez, Garcia, and Pearson (1996) note that L2 learners also struggle in constructing meaning with a text when the cultural background and experiences they bring to it differ from the general schema of those the author expected to be in an audience of readers. English language learners (ELLs) in other countries as well as ELLs born in the United States can be expected to have schema that differs from what the author of a text in English assumes they have; some may also have gaps in their education that impact background knowledge, especially for academic learning. "Cross linguistic differences at the phrase, sentence, and discourse level" (Harper & de Jong, 2004, p. 157) can be particularly confusing when *translanguaging* or endeavoring to make meaning with the text. *Translanguaging* involves using one's entire linguistic repertoire (i.e., all known languages) to strategically select linguistic features in the language used in the moment to communicate effectively (Celic & Selzer, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). According to Celic and Seltzer (2013) "emerging bilinguals are unable to understand instruction in another language." (p.5); they emphasize the need for students to apply translanguaging strategies when reading in the L2 in order to comprehend and meet the challenges of academic tasks.

Confusions can also stem from the multiple ways in which authors create cohesion in text. For example, the use of transition words such as *nonetheless*, *moreover*, or *therefore* need to be understood for their purpose and relationship to sentences prior and following the words if comprehension is to be achieved (Harper & de Jong, 2004). ELLs need extensive supportive practice in applying literacy skills and strategies used in their L1 to navigate text in English (Harper & de Jong, 2004).

Whenever possible, Graves, Juel, and Graves (2007) suggest "it may be useful to introduce a strategy in a student's native language and use it with native language material before helping students transfer its use to English material" (p. 291). Opportunities to express thinking, confusion, and understanding are essential for ELLs. Collaborative analysis of words and text increases ELLs' word learning and overall comprehension (da Silva, 2001; Li, 2012; Shea & Roberts, 2016). Sometimes, a simple translation of the English word to the ELL's first language is all that is needed. At other times, the concept behind the new English word must be translated before it can be understood (Tompkins, 2013). Meeting new words repeatedly in meaningful contexts and having rich discussion on their meanings as well as the message in the text ensures that these become part of a student's lexicon (Shea, 2011).

To motivate this deciphering and deconstructing of text, quality literature needs to be used because it gives purpose to the hard work. Such text engages students' hearts and minds, taking them beyond the mechanical aspects of learning a L2; it makes the processes of learning from text attractive (Collier & Slater, 1997). Literature stimulates interactions; readers typically want to talk about the information, characters, message, moral, issues, or common themes in the human experience to uncover multiple layers of meaning (Lazar, 1993). "Even in its simplest forms, it [literature] invites us to go beyond what is said to what is implied. Since it suggests many ideas with few words, literature is ideal for generating language discussion" (Hismanoglu, 2005, p. 56). da Silva (2001) suggests that various genres of literature are appropriate for learners from intermediate level onward.

Texts used particularly for facilitating learning in a student's L2 should provide repetition of high frequency vocabulary in meaningful context, repeated common phrases, sociolinguistic constructions, and include visuals that aid decoding and understanding as well as the sense of accomplishment that completing a text brings (Brown, 2004). When reading, L2 students should strategically deconstruct text and discuss its content in their L1 as well as their L2. Discussions should enhance students' understanding of the book's content (Collier & Slater, 1997). Hismanoglu (2005) comments "...an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion is guaranteed [with literature] since each person's perception is different... [This] establishes the tension that is necessary for a genuine exchange of ideas" (p. 56). A student-centered approach is recommended for instruction based on literature, starting with conversation that ensures literal understanding; this discourse becomes grist for higher-level interpretations, connections, evaluations, and conclusions that readers can explain and support (Hismanoglu, 2005). Follow up (i.e., to reading and discussion) activities should allow readers to use their understanding in creative ways, personalizing meanings they've constructed. Brown (2004) states "It is our sense of enjoyment, excitement, and emotional involvement that is a necessary condition for learning, and, using literature in the classroom can provide the content base for the magic" (p. 5). Learning a L2 and about the culture of its native country is facilitated when highly motivating literature at students' level is integrated into the curriculum.

## Theoretical Framework

In order to effectively use linguistic and comprehension strategies fluidly, readers need to have the prerequisite skills and select, integrate, and apply them flexibly in a process of *close reading*. Close reading is central to effective construction of meaning. It requires readers to carefully analyze texts through reading, rereading, and reflection as the reader builds understanding of "the central ideas . . . the meanings of individual words . . . the development of ideas over the course of the text [and] arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole" (PARCC, 2011, p. 7). Close reading calls for selective rereading to focus on the text for important words, the sequence of events

or presentation of ideas, and connections across sentences, sections and paragraphs, but it equally involves the reader's transactional (Rosenblatt, 1978) experience — the thoughts, memories, and emotions that spur and sustain the reader's engagement with a text (Beers & Probst, 2013). Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory describes the natural integration of degrees of alternating between an efferent stance (i.e., seeking information) and an aesthetic one (i.e., experiencing emotional reactions) while reading; the pattern of stances used becomes personal and also related strategically to the content read. This active engagement by the reader enhances meaning construction. The resources used and pedagogy applied in this study stimulated such merger of stances by readers.

## Methodology

Qualitative data from multiple sources were analyzed. Observations of PSTs' instruction and class discussion with the books were analyzed to determine the level of students' engagement, acquisition of English vocabulary, recall, understanding of content, and reaction to working with bilingual texts and their American teachers. Written responses (i.e., from one class of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students) to a prompt that requested a description of what they enjoyed most about working with the American teachers and the responses of three children interviewed individually were also analyzed. PSTs' personal reflections, expressed in daily blogs, were analyzed for their perceptions related to teaching in a diverse (i.e., culturally different) setting, using the bilingual texts, and reactions to experiences in the country and community.

## Participants

Participants were seven undergraduate PSTs from Buffalo State — one majoring in exceptional education, two in art education, and the rest majoring in elementary education and reading. While children in various grades open to us at the school (Grades 1-5) were exposed to the bilingual books written by the PSTs, the impact of the study on the children's interest and comprehension of the books focused on 22 fifth graders at the school; all of these students had been receiving English instruction from our IPDS liaison at the school for about four hours each week since entering 2nd grade. It was noted, as in the previous year, that while these children had a stock of vocabulary words that they could articulate and understand in English, their conversational skills were limited to simple questions and responses. The children very rarely engaged in the reading of texts in English beyond isolated vocabulary or simple sentences displayed on the Smartboard, possibly because of the limited accessibility of bilingual children's books that were easy enough for them to negotiate independently or with guidance during reading instruction.

## Materials

Seven bilingual books were created — each one by a participating PST. Aside from key words in each title — ones that revealed and

piqued interest in the content of the book (e.g., baseball, basketball, Niagara Falls, New York City) – these bilingual books had readability levels ranging from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade level. They were much easier to read than books used the previous year. As such, these books were mostly at an independent or instructional level for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in the study.

Each PST wrote her book in English with each page developed on a PowerPoint slide accompanied by a photo related to the text; images were often retrieved from the Internet. The English drafts were edited by Maria. Despite the limitations of *Google Translate*, a software package available on the Internet for translating English to Italian, the PSTs were still asked to enter the text they retrieved from it on the PowerPoint slides they created. Since none of the PSTs had command of the Italian language themselves, it was assumed that the exercise of procuring the Google translation would provide them with some exposure to Italian words and expressions, helping them when they interacted with the children. The rough Italian translation on the bilingual PowerPoint versions for each book was then edited for syntactic and semantic accuracy by an instructor of Italian in the Modern Languages Department at the University of Buffalo. Once a bilingual book was deemed in good shape, it was transferred by its author onto Snapfish, a digital photo printing service that enabled the PSTs to craft their PowerPoint slides into a hard or soft cover book, giving it a finished professional appearance.

Multiple copies of the PowerPoint slides for each book were photocopied. These fifth-grade students received copies for take home practice after the PST author had engaged them in guided instruction of her book. Flash drives containing the slides, embellished with video, were often used to support facets of group instruction with the fifth graders; related games, reinforcing word learning and comprehension, were also directed by the PST as follow-up activities.

## List of Books

*Halloween* (Elizabeth)  
*Welcome to my City/ Benvenuti Nella Mia Citta* (Cindy)  
*Let's Play Ball / Giochiamo a Baseball* (Ashley)  
*Niagara Falls/ Le Cascade di Niagara* (Symone)  
*Fourth of July/ Il Quattro di Luglio* (Elizabeth)  
*Basketball/ Palecanestra* (Yasmine)  
*American Artists/ LeArtisti Americani* (Mary Cate)

## Data Sources

Three measures were utilized to determine the fifth-grade children's response to the books. Measure one required all fifth graders to write a paragraph or more in their native language describing what they enjoyed most about the time they spent with the PSTs (i.e., "their American teachers") while they were at the school. Students were also given several oral prompts about items they could discuss with reference to their views on the instruction they had received. These included:

1. What did you learn from the books that you didn't know before reading them?
2. What did you learn from the books you were given to take home?
3. What did you do with the books you were given?
4. What did you think of other activities the American teachers provided?

The second measure embraced individual interviews using several questions. Ashley, the PST who crafted the questions, posed the following prompts in English in each interview, with each question being reiterated in Italian when needed.

1. Which book read to you by the American teachers was your favorite?
2. What did you learn from the book that you did not know before?
  - a. Tell me as much as you can remember?
3. Which of the books do you feel was the most difficult to read and why?
4. What did you do with the books we gave you?
5. What did they (i.e., anyone with whom you shared the book) have to say about the books? (Ask whether the child is referring to family members)

Three children, selected by the classroom teacher, had an opportunity to individually respond to the questions presented by the PST; they tended to extend and/or elaborate on what they had expressed in their written response. Maria translated each English question into Italian and wrote the child's responses in Italian for later English translation. The limited number of these follow-up interviews occurred due to time constraints pertaining to events scheduled at the school that could not be altered.

The third measure consisted of the blogs the PSTs were asked to keep during their time in Torremaggiore. These were focused on travel experiences, working with each other, collaborating with peers, the professors, and teachers at the site, teaching experiences, interactions with children and the community, and any other reflections or reactions they wanted to include. They were also asked to express their observations and reflections related to using bilingual books in this teaching experience. This allowed a glimpse of PSTs' ability to reflect as teachers on the impact of their instruction and experiences at the site and immersion in the culture.

## Procedures

Over a series of 10 school days while the PSTs were at the site, the fifth graders were exposed to several bilingual books; each time, the read-aloud or guided reading lesson was conducted by one or two PSTs who co-taught the lesson based on a bilingual book.

With each presentation, the children received a photocopy of the book to follow along as the teacher referred to it. Various strategies were used to present the texts to the children. In most

cases, children were exposed to interactive read-alouds (Hoyt, 2007). Following read-aloud protocol, the children heard a page of the text being read aloud by the PST in English; then, a student was asked to read it in Italian. A slow, but expressive, reading of the English text followed; children echoed the PST's model, line by line. On other occasions, the children were guided in close reading of the text, searching for information to respond to questions posed by the PST (e.g., a word or sentence found in the text). Certain books (e.g., the baseball and basketball books) were projected to the Smartboard so that children could ask and answer questions about details, follow a text that included a sing along of a short song, or view a video related to the text that was read. Follow-up activities to the guided readings stimulated active participation (e.g., team games involving immediate articulation of English words from the book read as pictures of target words were displayed). Finally, children were encouraged to take the photocopies of bilingual books home to reread. In this way they practiced reading in English and shared the material with family members.

Finally, because the work with the children was compressed, assessments of their learning experiences were conducted on the last day of the visit. In both cases the children were directed to write and speak their responses in Italian. Content analysis of the children's written and spoken views as they pertained to the given prompts were later translated for the presentation of results below.

### Validity and Reliability

This qualitative research was a pilot study that allowed pre-service teachers to construct and use curricular material for instruction in a classroom where Italian speaking students were learning English as a second language. Thus, it was limited with regard to time and subjects. It was conducted over a 10-day period while the pre-service teachers were visiting the school and community and working in the school as part of a methods course. Subjects were a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class of 22 students. The purpose was to determine whether interactive read-alouds with bilingual books showed potential for efficacy as one procedure for students' acquisition of a L2, calling for further mixed methods research (i.e., using both quantitative and qualitative methods) over a longer period with more participants to measure long term effects.

All students in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class participated in the interactive read-aloud lessons that were observed by the researchers and wrote a paragraph (or more) in response to a prompt that called for a reflection on their experience with the American teachers. A few students were interviewed to further explore their written responses and extend information on reactions to the experience. As a qualitative pilot study, the approach follows a different paradigm from that of quantitative research (Kuhn, 1970) that characterizes phenomena (e.g., behaviors, knowledge) as measurable fragments that can be quantitatively gathered and analyzed (Winter, 2000). Reliability and validity for qualitative research can be established, but it will

align with the perspectives and constructs of the paradigm undergirding the qualitative processes (Patton, 2001).

Qualitative research is "any kind of research that produces findings that are not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Patton, 2001, p. 39). It attempts to describe, understand, and draw conclusions about phenomena as it is observed in the natural contexts (i.e., real world settings) in which it occurs; in educational qualitative research, that would be the classroom and/or school (Patton, 2001). The use of observation, interview, and subjects' oral and written responses are common methods for gathering data, resulting in a different kind of knowledge about the phenomena (Winter, 2000). While Stenbacka (2001) argued that "the concept of reliability in qualitative research is irrelevant, Patton (2001) stated that qualitative research should be concerned about both reliability and validity, but in ways that differ from the quantitative researcher.

Winter (2000) states that validity in qualitative research is a "contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the process and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects" (p. 1). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the qualitative researcher ask, "How can an inquirer persuade his/her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290). To answer that question, Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to concepts of quality, rigor, and trustworthiness when considering the validity of a study. These attributes are verified by examining the raw data (e.g., artifacts, surveys, interviews), data analysis products (e.g., categories or patterns discerned), and observational notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (2001) asserts that reliability is a consequence of validity established in a qualitative study since "there can be no validity without reliability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Triangulation, a strategy for improving validity, can also be applied in qualitative research; it involves multiple methods of data collecting aligned with the purpose of the research (Johnson, 1997). Triangulation has been defined as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). The pilot study described followed these tenets for qualitative research.

### Results

It was quite obvious that the children appreciated having the bilingual books. Informal observations of students' participation (i.e., by PSTs, the professors, classroom teachers, and the English teacher) during the read-alouds and guided reading lessons, discussion of the content in texts, and participation in follow-up activities reflected that students had acquired additional English vocabulary, knowledge of American cultural holidays and places, and increased confidence when reading in English. Students often expressed their thinking using an integration of languages (i.e., their L1 and L2) with enthusiasm and passion to make a point or share an idea; they were translanguaging or applying

their whole linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively. Categories noted in the analysis of data (i.e., from observations of classroom lessons and interactions, students' written response to the prompt described, students' comments in an interview or in the classroom) focused on recognition of what was learned from the content of the books, enjoyment of the interactive read-aloud, follow-up activities or classroom discussions, use of the copies of books at home to reread alone and with others, and reading the books as posted at the teacher's website (<http://wlasquola.altervista.org/wlasquola>).

All of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade subjects mentioned that they enjoyed the various activities associated with the books they were exposed to whether they were presented as an interactive read aloud or in a guided reading lesson. Mariachiarra summarized general receptivity to the PSTs and the various strategies they used in conjunction with the bilingual books presented.

*I liked most when Cindy and Yasmine (the PSTs) formed us into two groups. First we read with Yasmine the book about basketball, and later with Cindy, we read the book about New York City, the Big Apple. Cindy told us she was from Queens, N.Y. and all the places in the book were places she had been. After we read the books we played squad games for points about the vocabulary in the books just as if it were a basketball game. Then afterwards we saw a video about basketball and Cindy and Yasmine granted us copies of the books before they left. This experience was most enjoyable. (translation)*

Vincenzo was pleased to meet the author of "Let's Play Ball." He wrote:

*I liked most Ashley's story because she wrote it and because she read it with such love. She recounted for us the story of baseball. Then there was Cindy who recounted for us the story about the city where she lives in America, and what they eat there, and she told us of the best places in her city. For me this experience and stories were the best. I hope they come again.*

Most of the children reflected on their favorite books, but Federico was most political in revealing his choices:

*I loved it when we talked about baseball and learning things about the sport. I like to be able to learn more things about America and the English language. I like all the other stories as well. So in summary, I don't know how to choose which of the various stories /activities I liked best because I liked them all. I enjoyed myself and it was wonderful to have them teach us.*

## Answers to Questions Posed in the Study

As noted previously, there were three questions that guided this study: 1. Did the bilingual texts that PSTs constructed promote emerging bilinguals' comprehension of texts written

in the L2 while expanding their knowledge of American culture? 2. To what degree did the children engage with the bilingual texts?

In combination, Questions 1 and 2 sought to determine whether the bilingual texts constructed by the PSTs benefited the children's understanding of texts written in the L2 and increased their understanding of American culture. In response to these two questions, the written remarks by the children, as well as their oral responses when they were interviewed, reflected the children's positive feelings about learning English as well as facets of American culture. At the heart of this positive attitude about learning was the guided interaction they experienced with the bilingual texts at school as well as the practice with the books at home. Writing about a book featuring paintings of American artists, Lorenzo wrote about his appreciation for the ability to access the Italian text, his engagement with the creative aspect of making up a story, and the process of working with learning new vocabulary.

*I liked that when we read the pages to the book and that there was also the Italian translation. . . .She (The PST) showed us paintings done by American artists and we were asked to make up a story relating to a picture. Later, I enjoyed when we went into the multimedia laboratory because there they displayed pictures related to the book for which we had to say the English words.*

In the interviews which were conducted, Martina noted that she had learned several things about American culture by having these bilingual books to read.

*I didn't know that Americans celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in the summer and that they had fireworks. I loved the song in the baseball book. I loved the various gestures we had to make when we sang it. When I read these books it gave me a chance to learn English better.*

Benito spoke about the ease of one book as opposed to another and what he learned from each.

*The baseball book was the easiest. There were persons whose roles were easy to remember because the pronunciation of them was similar to Italian. . . . The New York book was the most difficult because there were many strange names (words) in it that I didn't recognize. I learned a little about the taxis in New York, and about skyscrapers. I didn't know about them. Having a chance to read allowed me to learn new words and get more understanding about the topic.*

Michele noted two books as his favorite, the one about the Big Apple and the one about baseball. Reflecting on the Big Apple, he recalled reading about the metro, sports teams (i.e., noting football and baseball), the parks, and taxis. He noted:

*I'd like to visit New York and see their modes of travel. I'll use them when I go there.*

And about baseball, he noted:

*I'd like to get tickets to see what the players do.*

The three children who were interviewed all noted that they shared the books they received with their family members. Martina indicated that her mother tried to read the English while her sister listened. Benito also shared the book with his family. His father enjoyed reading the baseball book while his mom enjoyed the book about the Fourth of July. He also remarked that the books were very nice; they gave him new understandings about the topics and would be a nice memory of his childhood. Michele noted that he read the books in English and Italian to his family, including his grandparents. Then they all practice reading in English. He added, *reading is important for the future. If we can't read we can't get ahead.*

## The Pre-Service Teachers

Question 3 asked: How did the pre-service teachers feel about the construction and use of the bilingual texts they made as resources for teaching English and comprehension to these 5<sup>th</sup> grade students?

The PSTs' blogs over the course of their experience at the school were reviewed to note the various impressions they had on the efficacy of using bilingual books for teaching English to ELLs. All seemed to have positive feelings about the success of their lessons in terms of expanding children's L2, noting the bilingual nature of the books they had created as promoting the scaffolding that helped children to translanguage. Writing about her lesson using the bilingual book she created, Ashley shared her rationale for a successful lesson.

*Today I taught a lesson about a book that I created about Baseball. It is a bilingual book, so the text is written in English and Italian. This is to help students build their understanding of the English using their primary language for support. Students learned about the components of baseball including the equipment used, positions, and how to play the game. They all really enjoyed "practicing" being baseball players by pretending to be the different players (throwing a pretend ball, swinging a bat, catching a ball etc.) This helped them comprehend the vocabulary in the book. . . .After the activity, I played a video of the song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" and used the lyrics on the screen to teach them the song. We practiced it several times and they seemed to get it pretty well by the end. I think they really enjoyed learning about a culture that is new to them.*

Cindy wrote the following.

*During my time teaching today I introduced my book on New York City to the students and explained that I lived in New*

*York City and the book will explain my lifestyle. The students seemed excited because they heard about New York City.*

*For my lesson, I would read a paragraph from the book and then have one student read the Italian paragraph and then choral read the English portion again. For each page with a new vocabulary word, I defined the word using a picture to help explain. The students would respond in Italian when they understood the definition for better clarification. Some of my vocabulary words were at a higher level. In order to explain New York City, there are certain words that are to be used that other cities/states do not use. Such is the word "borough" which was explained as a "town" for the students. The word "skyscraper" is a word that the students do not use often because there are no skyscrapers in Torremaggiore. Although some of the words were not in their speaking vocabulary, I think the lesson was great for the students because they were exposed to words that represent a different culture.*

The two Elizabeths (PSTs) co-taught a themed lesson on holidays, using the bilingual books they had created. They effectively adjusted to the needs of the children as they moved along in their joint plan.

*On Wednesday, Elizabeth and I taught a lesson to a fifth-grade class involving our books. Hers was about Halloween . . . and mine was on the Fourth of July. . . so our lesson was holiday themed. I read my story first. Each child had a printed copy to follow along as they read the Italian version and I would read it in English. I then had the students repeat the English in order to practice their reading and pronunciation of the lesson. Afterwards, my follow-up activity was creating a Venn diagram on the chalkboard that compared our Independence Day to Italy's Republic Day. This holiday is also celebrated as a day of Independence as it marks when the monarchy was abolished in Italy. At first it was difficult to tell the students what I was doing since the teacher didn't know any English and the students' knowledge of the English language was limited. Eventually, after I began writing on the board and demonstrating what I wanted, they were able to figure it out and follow along. Elizabeth then read her book and played a hangman game using English vocabulary from both of our books. I think quite a bit of learning went on and so the lesson was a success.*

Clearly, the reflections of these PSTs reiterated a common theme; their bilingual books facilitated the translanguaging effect necessary for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade subjects to make connections from English to their L1, facilitating and enhancing engagement and comprehension when reading in the L2.

## Conclusions

It appears that this short-term opportunity to support the L2 development of children at the San Giovanni Bosco IPDS was successful in supporting development in English as well as



expanding their understanding of American culture and places. The bilingual books PSTs created as part of their pre-trip course were extremely effective as resources for this instruction and learning. Book construction prepared the PSTs with a repertoire of materials from which they could create meaningful lessons that integrated speaking, listening, and reading in the L2. In the process, PSTs had opportunity to create resources for their instruction, integrate teaching strategies for comprehension instruction, plan and implement enjoyable follow-up activities that foster practice with new learning, and learn some Italian while working with children and teachers at the site. Beyond this, the interaction provided children with copies of the books that they could take home for practice and share with their parents and siblings—extending their learning as they share and teach family members using the books. Their responses seemed to indicate that translanguaging had occurred as they read, supporting meaning-making during the reading process. The creation of the bilingual books was concluded to be a worthwhile project for the pre-IPDS course – one that should be continued in subsequent semesters when the short-term study abroad journey occurs. <sup>SUP</sup>

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