"We Can Be Bilingual Rather Than an English Learner"

Transnational Teachers Developing Strength-Based, Language-Focused Pedagogy

Emily Zoeller &Allison Briceño

Abstract

Transnational educators can be a tremendous resource for bi/multilingual students, but teacher preparation has not adequately supported their pedagogical development for teaching writing to bi/multilinguals in U.S. contexts. Using three cases from a qualitative self-study, we explore the narratives of three transnational teachers in a biliteracy development course and how a transliteracy practice shaped their understanding of language-focused writing pedagogy. Transliteracy is an innovative approach that applies a bilingual lens to student observation, teaching, and reflection. Data included coursework and interviews and were analyzed iteratively. Findings reveal that participants developed knowledge of language as a system, language as practice, and language as identity; the integration of this knowledge supported strength-based, language-focused pedagogy. Approaches that develop understanding of language through practice, like transliteracy, respond to a call

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to prepare educators with robust pedagogies that debunk deficit norms, embrace bi/multilingualism, and can support transnational teachers in their transition to teaching in the United States.

Introduction

On her first day of teaching in the United States, Lía attended her new school’s staff development. Leaders launched that year’s school improvement focus on writing through a newly adopted curriculum. The approach, with its focus on the writing process and collaboration, differed considerably from Lía’s pedagogy as a teacher in Chile. She recalled her former teacher guide that provided daily lesson plans on grammar points, which Lía’s students, all home-language Spanish speakers, would routinely apply in their workbooks. Lía’s current students were a new demographic to her, coming from both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking homes and speaking a form of dynamic bilingualism to which Lía was unaccustomed. The new writing curriculum was not intentionally designed to meet the needs of bi/multilingual writers in the school, so Lía was assigned to provide writing support to these learners by pushing into multiple classrooms. No guidance was offered on how to “support”; she was charged with its design and delivery. A colleague warned Lía to expect deficits in writing abilities, especially following interrupted schooling during the pandemic.

Bilingual transnational teachers like Lía often fill open positions in the United States during teacher shortages and provide bilingual support to bi/multilingual learners (Han, 2004), despite their prior teaching experience in their home countries being predominantly in monolingual settings. In addition to encountering cultural and linguistic differences in the United States, they must navigate pedagogical differences from their prior work in their home countries (Bovill et al., 2015). Recent studies have suggested that teacher preparation can support developing teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and clarity (Alfaro, 2018; Briceño & Zoeller, 2022; Collins & España, 2019). However, scholarship has not adequately examined the unique experiences of transnational teachers and the new knowledge that can be helpful for shaping pedagogy in a U.S. context, especially in developing understanding about language. To address this gap, we explored how a Transliteracy approach—one that deepens teacher knowledge about language and engages them in strength-based observation and teaching—could support transnational teachers in enacting language-focused writing instruction.

The purpose of this study was to examine the development of pedagogy among three transnational teachers using a Transliteracy approach. We begin with a discussion on transnational educators, illustrating factors that influence their teaching experience in the United States and making a case for teacher preparation that examines language pedagogy. We offer a theoretical framework of language as a system, language as practice, and language as identity, and we provide a description of the Transliteracy approach under study. We then share research methodology and findings that explain how Transliteracy practices shaped participants’ understand-

ings of language and strength-based pedagogy. We argue that teacher preparation can support transnational teachers in developing robust writing pedagogy for bi/multilingual youth in U.S. schools.

Like others (Brisk & Kaveh, 2019), we have selected the term *bi/multilingual* to reflect speaking two or more languages. We acknowledge that the term *bilingual* is more commonly used, and we maintain it in cases where we reference concepts in literature (e.g., bilingual education). Participants and researchers in this study identify as bilingual and not multilingual, and we use language accordingly.

Transnational Teachers in the United States

Transnationalism has been defined as "the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space" (Ong, 1999, p. 4); transnational processes and practices differ according to many factors, including one's national background, one's legal status, the length of time one has lived in the United States, the frequency of trips "home," and the emotional pull of a home community that may or may not exist (Warriner, 2007). The population of transnational teachers in the United States is relatively large, if difficult to identify. As of 2018, 32% of adult immigrants arrived to the United States holding bachelor's degrees, and of those, education is the fifth most common industry in which they are employed. Nine percent of immigrants with BAs work in education, composing 12% of all workers in the industry (Olsen-Medina & Batalova, 2020). Navigating U.S. systems as a transnational teacher is complex, requiring integration of new cultural values and linguistic practices of the adoptive community with norms and traditions from home.

Transnational teachers and bi/multilingual youths are situated in varied U.S. academic program models (Sugarman, 2018). As bi/multilinguals, many transnational teachers work in bilingual education settings with the aim of developing bilingualism and biliteracy through instruction delivered in two languages; others are in transitional bilingual settings, using home language as a foundation for learning English. Often, as with two of the participants in this study, transnational teachers serve bi/multilingual students in settings labeled English-only*,* providing home language support to assist development of English literacy and proficiency.

Transnationals, as teachers or students, draw upon early literacy socialization from their home countries; their literacy paths and their literate identities are shaped by how this knowledge is treated in their new contexts (Taira, 2019). One study, which echoes our participants' experiences, described how a transnational Dominican high school student experienced the abrupt shift from competence in her home country's literacy practices to confusion in understanding the literacy of her new country. Identity as a failing or successful student was mediated by instruction that honored diverse literacy practices and adequately scaffolded for language demands in the curricula (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). These findings point to the importance of valuing all literacies within the transnational literate repertoire.

In the midwestern state where this study took place, transnational teachers are required to take teacher preparation coursework to acquire a state teaching license. During this coursework, teacher candidates might examine their own *cuentos* (narratives) and linguistic profiles to interpret their own cultural identity, reflecting on their own sociolinguistic backgrounds within their own sociolinguistic contexts (Hernandez, 2017; Jackson et al., 2010). This is important because many transnational teachers were educated in monolingual settings rather than language contact zones (Pratt, 1991) like the United States, shaping their understanding of language (Hernandez, 2017). As such, teacher preparation should support transnational teachers in understanding classroom language policy and in developing lessons that organize for purposeful use of both languages (Hernandez, 2017). In fact, previous research has shown that transnational teachers can ignore transnational students’ identities if structures are not in place (Taira, 2019).

Transnational teachers can be supported in navigating their new teaching and learning environments while harnessing their own experiences, knowledge, and perspectives. The subsequent reflection often leads to “perspective transformation,” which can improve teaching practice (Smith, 2009, p. 111). The current study provides a structure—the Transliteracy process—to help teachers identify and build on students’ language resources and foster bi/multilingual identities across different linguistic settings. The application of the Transliteracy approach to both monolingual and bilingual classroom settings is important in considering how to prepare transnational teachers to best serve bi/multilingual youths.

Perspectives on Language Pedagogy

Teacher education does not sufficiently prepare teachers with knowledge of language and pedagogy. Although significant prior research has argued for linguistics and language development to feature prominently in teacher preparation (Adger et al., 2018; Fillmore & Snow, 2018; Palmer & Martínez, 2013, 2016), nationally, 70% of teachers report that they have not received adequate preparation to meet the needs of bi/multilingual students (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). As such, similar to Jensen and colleagues (2021), the theoretical framework includes three perspectives on language learning that are critical for the preparation of transnational teachers for U.S. classrooms: language as a system, language as practice, and language as identity.

Language as a System

Teachers need to know how language works (Fillmore & Snow, 2018). We describe *language as a system* through the perspective of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), holding that language develops by interaction and meaning making in one’s environment, based on a system of choices of language structures used to achieve a communicative purpose (Halliday, 2014; Halliday & Hasan, 1985). These

purposes may be organized by genre, or recognizable combinations of content, language features, function, and situation (Prior, 2009). The study of disciplinary language and grammar provides a "tool kit" of possibilities (Rose & Martin, 2012), situating students as the protagonists.

In practice, teachers apply language as a system by specifying the genre-related linguistic resources and making those language features the focus of discussion and engagement. For example, teachers support students to present about an experiment's findings by using "depersonalized" voice through nominalization and passive voice (Buxton et al., 2013) or to write personal narratives with language for expressing ideas using adverbial phrases to describe time, place, and manner (Humphrey et al., 2012).

Knowledge of language as a system, often missing from teacher education and even TESOL preparation (Andrews, 2007; Macken-Horarik et al., 2015), equips teachers in recognizing disciplinary language so they can make the relevant language features visible for students. Several studies in the last decade have examined a functional view of language in teacher preparation, illustrating how informed and explicit language instruction can enhance language awareness and cultural literacy (Achugar, 2009; Achugar & Colombi, 2008; Allen & Maxim, 2011). In one study with Latinx teacher participants, an SFL approach fostered "critical consciousness about the role of language, variation in language, and how language is used to represent the social roles in society" (Colombi, 2015, p. 12). It is important to note that functional approaches to language pedagogy are not transformative in and of themselves, and some implementations have been critiqued for privileging school-based genres through norms of "academic language" and Whiteness (Accurso & Mizell, 2020; Balderas et al., 2022).

Language as Practice

Language as practice developed in response to the functional view, with scholars arguing that while language as a system is important for teachers to understand, they should also consider the ways in which bi/multilinguals employ their full linguistic and semiotic repertoires (García & Li, 2014; Palmer & Martínez, 2013, 2016). This perspective views language not as a bounded system but rather as action that emerges within social and cultural contexts and often includes a hybridity of registers and political languages (García, 2009; Pennycook, 2010). Language as practice normalizes bilingualism and the ways bi/multilinguals draw from their language resources interchangeably, especially in a U.S. context, where exposure to two languages from a young age has become increasingly common (Pratt, 1991). Research that has explored language as practice points to a bilingual lens as holding potential for drawing on students' hybrid languaging practices as resources for teaching and learning (García, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2020; Palmer & Martínez, 2016). If they know how, teachers can leverage dynamic bilingualism and students'

home language resources as pedagogical tools (García, 2020; Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Palmer & Martínez, 2016).

To learn about how a student employs their bi/multilingual resources, teachers can observe oral and written samples cross-linguistically (Briceño & Zoeller, 2022; Butvilofsky et al., 2020; Domke & Cárdenas Curiel, 2021; Escamilla et al., 2018). Identifying students' bi/multilingual resources allows educators to validate the language and literacy knowledge students bring from home and provide opportunities to draw from their entire repertoire in academic settings (García & Kleifgen, 2020; Soltero-González & Butvilofsky, 2016).

Language as Identity

Like Norton (2010), we view language as both a linguistic system and a social practice by which identities are negotiated. Identity and language are dynamic, interrelated constructs that vary by context and are dependent on power relations. Teachers' beliefs about language stem from their own lived experiences with language, and these experiences strongly influence their pedagogy (Briceño, 2018; Martínez et al., 2015; Palmer & Martínez, 2013).

Language as identity is reflected in pedagogy that understands and fosters the role of language and language variations in students' identity development. Lynch (2018) showed how one bilingual teacher successfully engaged an immigrant student by leveraging her identity, specifically the linguistic, social, and familial forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) she brought from Cuba. Teachers may hold identity positions that constrain opportunities for learners to speak, read, or write, thereby limiting their learning opportunities (Norton, 2010). As such, making space for bi/multilingual practices, including cross-linguistic pedagogy, can affirm students' bi/multilingual identity, develop pride in Spanish, and deepen student motivation to develop English (Welch, 2015). Palmer and Martínez (2013, 2016) referred to practices such as this as *thinking beyond language* and recommended that teachers consider the broader societal power structures and how to intentionally deconstruct asymmetrical power relations that are propagated through language beliefs and practices.

Fielding (2016) found that teachers' explicit attention to language acceptance and building students' confidence led to the development of positive bilingual identities that supported language acquisition. However, without carefully considering their language pedagogy, teachers can inadvertently subordinate students' identities, limiting their access to language-learning opportunities as well as more powerful identities (Lee, 2008). For example, a cross-case study of three Mexican and Mexican American teachers showed that the transnational teacher's well-intended linguistic purism stemmed from her primarily monolingual identity and her lived experience of language as a proxy for social class in Mexico. Her desire for her students to learn what she perceived to be formal, standard Spanish and English (separately) resulted in the rejection of students' hybrid language practices, devalu-

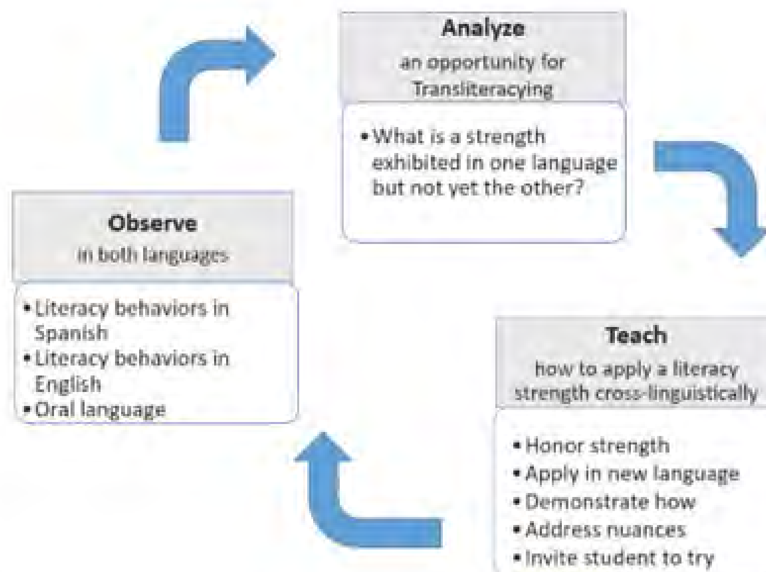
ing their language and identity as language learners (Briceño, 2018). While this case is certainly not representative of all transnational educators, it demonstrates how one transnational teacher's beliefs about language interfered with her ability to effectively teach bi/multilingual youths in the United States. To overcome such classroom dynamics, teachers must develop a deep understanding of language as identity (Norton, 2010).

A Transliteracy Approach to Writing Pedagogy

These perspectives of language—as a system, as practice, and as identity—undergird the innovative approach to writing pedagogy under study, which we will now describe. Williams (1994) coined the terms *transliteracy* and *translanguaging* in his dissertation. Although translanguaging has been highlighted in the literature recently (e.g., García et al., 2017; García & Kleifgen, 2020; García & Li, 2014), we revive the term *transliteracy* to describe a specific writing pedagogy that identifies and leverages students' bi/multilingual strengths and incorporates language as a critical part of writing instruction (Briceño & Zoeller, 2022). Figure 1 illustrates the stages of the transliteracy cycle: holistic observation, strength-based analysis, and cross-linguistic instruction.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the transliteracy process begins with teachers observing students' oral language and literacy behaviors in the language of instruction

Figure 1
A Transliteracy Circle



and the students’ home languages (in these cases, Spanish). A holistic analysis (Escamilla et al., 2018) of a child’s writing follows to identify strengths that were evident in one or both languages; this observation framework is located in Appendix A. Teachers then select a particular competency that was evident in one language and not the other and develop a language-focused mini-lesson to leverage the skill across languages. Through a prompting model (Appendix B), the mini-lesson honors that strength, connects it to the new language, demonstrates how, addresses any relevant linguistic nuances, and invites the student to implement. The transliteracy approach engages *language as practice* through observation of student oral language behaviors and *language as a system* by analyzing language demands inherent in particular writing tasks, comparing with what students already know and can do, and designing teaching that makes this language visible. *Language as identity* is harnessed by honoring and teaching to students’ individual languaging practice (assets) and embracing the bilingualism of student and teacher. (For a detailed explanation of the Transliteracy process, see Zoeller & Briceño, 2021, 2022.)

Methods

In a review of 100 years of education research, Langer-Osuna and Nasir (2016) reminded us, “Discourses of schooling typically center on identities of the dominant culture, such that histories of power relations and privilege become invisible and unmarked” (p. 731). To combat this trend, we use three cases from a larger self-study that explored the transliteracy practice. The cases highlight the experiences of three immigrant Latinx teachers of color whose voices may otherwise be silenced among the predominantly White teacher population in the United States. A cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) of three transnational teachers was completed to enable comparisons across teachers; the cases are used as “multiple exemplars” that provide an opportunity for “interpretive synthesis” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 174). By examining these cases, we build on Langer-Osuna and Nasir’s (2016) recommendation to explore questions related to identity development and knowledge generation, including how they are created, where, by whom, and for whom.

Context and Participants

This study examined transnational teachers’ use of biliteracy within a bounded context (Merriam, 1998) at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest during a semester-long course, Biliteracy Development, taught by Author 1. The course was primarily conducted in Spanish. Participants selected a focal student and completed two transliteracy cycles following the process in Figure 1. We applied purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009) to the population of 22 teachers in the course. To minimize bias, the second author recruited participants via Zoom at the course’s completion, and Author 1 was unaware of who chose to participate until after grades were submitted.

The participants were three transnational teachers earning their bilingual educator licenses in a graduate education program. The teachers grew up speaking Spanish in Spanish-speaking countries, where they had been teachers previously; they learned English as a second language. One teacher was in a two-way immersion dual-language setting, and the other two were bilingual support teachers in English-medium settings. All three teachers selected focal students who were also transnational. The decision to include participants from both English-only and bilingual classrooms was intentional and contributes to our understanding of how teachers across contexts build on students' bilingual strengths and practices (Palmer & Martínez, 2016). Table 1 shares the demographic information of the participants and their focal students.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data included the participants' coursework and semistructured interviews of 40–60 minutes that were conducted within 3 weeks of course completion. The coursework included two transliteracy cycles with the following components: (a) discussion board posts, where participants shared what they had learned about different aspects of biliteracy and what they had learned informally about their focal students; (b) observation frameworks that detailed students' literacy knowledge in Spanish and English and included reflection questions that addressed linguistic and literacy strengths across languages; (c) a plan for cross-linguistic teaching based on previously exhibited strengths; and (d) written reflections on each of the transliteracy cycles. Participant quotes are from interviews and written reflections. Data were bilingual (Spanish/English), as students were able to submit all assignments using either or both languages.

Table 1
Participants and Focal Students

Participant	*Country of origin*	*Years teaching*	*School district*	*Program model*	*Focal student*
Savannah	Mexico	12 total (8 Mexico, 4 United States)	suburban	two-way immersion	Lara, 7th grade, from Colombia, a few months in the United States
Raquel	Peru	20 total (6 Peru, 14 United States)	rural	English with native language support	Julia, 10th grade, from Mexico, 3 years in the United States
Lía	Chile	7 total (6 Chile, 1 United States)	urban	English with native language support	Valentina, 10th grade, from Venezuela, 2 years in the United States

Data analysis was iterative, with the first round being a preliminary exploratory analysis, reviewing the data for each participant in their entirety to understand the essence of the individual experiences (Saldaña, 2016). In a second round of coding, we analyzed the interviews deductively to deepen our understanding of the participants' transnational and bilingual experiences as immigrants of color through their words (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), focusing on aspects of cultural and linguistic identity. We next analyzed course assignments to understand teachers' developing knowledge about the role of language in biliteracy development, language pedagogy, and biliterate writing practices (e.g., Butvilofsky et al., 2020). *Knowledge about language* (KAL) included child codes, such as teaching language features in writing, noticing examples of cross-language transfer, or recognizing language similarities and differences. A fourth round of coding was inductive (Merriam, 2009), deepening the emerging relationship between participants' lived experiences (identity), language beliefs and practices, and their biliterate writing pedagogy. This inductive coding revealed how participants integrated views of language. All data were coded by both authors; each author was the first coder for half the data and the second coder for the other half. When discrepancies arose, the researchers acted as "critical friends," per self-study design, until conclusions were reached (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 21). Following the coding, we graphically organized the codes into a conceptual map to guide how we communicate the themes that emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Researcher positionality is important, as we share others' stories through our lenses. Our understanding of ourselves, our biases, and our privilege impacts our work (Lather, 1993). Both authors were born in the United States and are White sequential bilingual speakers of English and then Spanish. Currently bilingual teacher educators, we are both former bilingual classroom teachers, biliteracy specialists, and coaches who each has more than 15 years of experience in public school settings serving large populations of multilingual students. Author 2 is the result of her family's assimilation and language loss and consequently seeks to support students and families in sustaining their language and culture. Author 1's career as a bilingual educator was in urban public schools, where she fought to name and combat the systemic racism and linguicism she observed. We understand the privilege afforded us as language-majority speakers and the potential impact on researcher–participant relationship. To mitigate this power dynamic, we provided the option to interview with either researcher and for the interview to happen in either language. Because we do not share the transnational experiences of our participants, we took precautions to reduce our own potential biases and tell their stories in ways that authentically reflect their lived experiences, such as member checks and triangulating multiple sources of data. As critically conscious bilingual teacher educators, we choose to highlight and center the experiences of female Latinx immigrant teachers.

Findings

Data analysis revealed how participants' new knowledge of language shaped strength-based, language-focused pedagogy. Their interviews and Transliteracy observations, lesson plans, and reflections revealed new understandings of language in four ways: (a) knowledge of language as a system; (b) knowledge of language as practice; (c) knowledge of language as identity; and, importantly, (d) the integration of language as system, practice, and identity in their practice. Through the lens of their experience as transnationals, they broadened and deepened their concept of what language is, how it works, why it is important, and what it represents; this new learning shaped their developing understanding of strength-based, language-focused writing pedagogy for bi/multilingual youth in the United States. These themes, though consistent, were revealed in unique ways by each participant.

Lía: "I Used to Be Smart in My Country"

Lía, described in the opening, had 6 years experience as a teacher in Chile. Upon moving to the United States, she was hired as a bilingual support teacher in 10th grade, providing push-in support to bi/multilinguals in three different English-medium classrooms. For Lía, transliteracy observation and teaching meant "bringing consciousness to the learnings or the assets or the knowledge that students already have." She reported how she valued students' prior knowledge from their home countries, explaining to her students, "We don't have to erase that; you can bring that here, and it's going to be part of your success." This perspective differs from previous research showing that transnational students' literacies are neglected in school, even by transnational teachers (Taira, 2019).

Lía worked closely with Valentina, a Venezuelan student who had arrived in the United States 2 years prior. According to Lía, Valentina was considered "a very strong student in her former education in Venezuela," when she was struggling academically with a monolingual teacher, Valentina was assigned to Lía for home language support. In science and social studies, Valentina was expected to accomplish content-specific writing projects. So, Lía explored the types of language required for content writing and designed Transliteracy instruction to observe Valentina's writing in both languages and apply strengths from one language to the other.

Lía described how transliteracy deepened her knowledge of how language works as a system, including aspects of language associated with particular disciplines (Adger et al., 2018) and how certain language features need to be explicitly taught for students like Valentina to have access. Lía had experience teaching writing in her home country; however, her former students, as proficient speakers, did not require intentionally designed instruction for language learners. Through transliteracy, Lía reported gaining new knowledge about how writing in different genres requires specific language forms and features:

> I remember the text [we read in class] that has all different types of texts that you could develop with the students, depending on your content. And like I said before, that's one of the things that I didn't really have very clear, kind of a struggle. For example, when it came to one of the skills that I asked my students to do, it was critically communicating the results [of a science experiment]. But I wasn't very sure about how I wanted them to communicate the results in a written piece, so I feel like those ideas can help to see that more clearly.

Analyzing her student's writing led Lía to notice that Valentina had not yet acquired the English linguistic structures needed for the required genre, reporting the result of an experiment. Lía's example illustrates her shifts in knowledge and pedagogy: She gained knowledge that genres employ unique language structures and then designed writing instruction that made language visible.

A developing understanding of language as identity surfaced in Lía's written reflections and interview, as she reflected on tendencies for bi/multilinguals to be perceived through the lens of just one language (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021) and how the cross-linguistic nature of Transliteracy offers space to honor identity through a bi/multilingual lens:

> I feel like what is being honored, it's all the knowledge and expertise and background that [students] bring to the classroom and to the country. And I think it's especially important because maybe you have an accent or you make mistakes or you don't find the words or sometimes it's just hard for you. It's very easy to feel like, "I used to be smart in my country." I feel like it's the same for my students.

Lía connected her transnational experience with that of her students, conveying how her identity was negatively impacted by how her abilities were perceived through a monolingual lens. For her, transliteracy provided an opportunity to combat this. She concluded by explaining the shift in her thinking about language as identity from a deficit lens to a strength-based perception, stating, "I mean, it seems like you are always going to be an English language learner even after you graduate. So it's like, I mean, we can change that, we can be bilingual rather than an English learner."

Savannah:
"En Nuestros Países de Origen Hemos Tenido una Enseñanza Muy Diferente" (In Our Home Countries We Have Had a Very Different Teaching Approach)

Savannah was born and raised in Mexico City, where she taught for 8 years before moving to the United States. Even after 4 years, Savannah self-identified as "a newcomer like my students." At the time of this study, she was in her first year of teaching in a newly implemented dual-language immersion program. Savannah worked as a bilingual support teacher for middle school students, providing small-group and individualized instruction in Spanish language arts and social studies with a focus on writing. Describing her job, Savannah explicitly connected

her home language to her identity, stating, "Estoy orgullosa de enseñar mi primer idioma—parte de lo que yo soy" (I am proud to teach my first language—part of who I am).

During her time in the United States, Savannah reported learning a new pedagogy that centered students and language as a resource for meaning making. In Mexico, her writing instruction focused on mechanics, primarily through independent practice. According to Savannah, for transnational teachers, writing pedagogy in the United States was new and different. She contrasted her former teaching with the individualized, meaning-based instruction she was expected to deliver in the United States, stating, "En nuestros países de origen hemos tenido una enseñanza muy diferente" (In our home countries we have had a very different teaching approach).

Savannah also explained that systematically observing student writing and having a framework for what to look for deepened her knowledge of language as a system in writing. This was the first time Savannah was exposed to the idea that writing can be observed through the layers of writing discourse, sentence construction, and word choice (Escamilla et al., 2014). Reflecting on her observation, she explained, "Puedo tener una comprensión más profunda de los factores que puedo destacar en la escritura de todos mis alumnos" (I can have a deeper understanding of the factors I can highlight in all my students' writing). Similar to other participants, Savannah expanded her understanding of writing through close examination of her student's language choices and behaviors.

Savannah worked with a seventh-grade student, Lara, a newcomer from Colombia; her charge was to support Lara in English writing development through the construction of an opinion essay. For Savannah, the transliteracy approach deepened her understanding of language as practice and enabled her to explore "the learning and intellectual potential of students' everyday language practices, such as translating, interpreting, and other forms of translanguaging" (Palmer & Martínez, 2016, p. 382). In her work with Lara, she emphasized the importance of conveying message first and foremost and allowing space for language hybridity. She explained the approach used with Lara and other students:

> Yo pienso que se está honrando a los estudiantes cuando se les reconoce su idioma dominante, pienso que se les honra cuando se les permite expresarse en el idioma. . . . Se sienten en confianza, y piensan que se les está honrando su identidad, su cultura, su idioma materno.
>
> (I think that it is honoring students when their dominant language is recognized, I think they are honored when they are allowed to express themselves in the language. . . . They feel confidence, and they think that their identity, their culture, and their home language are being honored.)

Savannah shared her developing understanding of how teachers can leverage students' home language practices and how language is part of students' developing identities.

Raquel:
“It [Transliteracy] Will Allow Me to Teach My Students to Their Potential”

Raquel’s interview began with her explaining how she was motivated to provide her students with transliteracy instruction that she herself was denied. Originally from Peru, Raquel reflected on her own experience moving to the United States as “complete immersion” in the language without help, guidance, or support in learning English. Now here for more than a decade, she identifies as someone who was able to survive, but recognizes her own gaps in language learning. Raquel sought to offer a different experience to Julia, a 10th-grade student who moved to the United States from Mexico 3 years prior. Raquel’s own experience as a transnational motivated her to honor and build on students’ home languages and teach literacy through a language-focused lens.

As a specialist providing push-in support to bi/multilinguals in different classrooms, Raquel commented that transliteracy offered her “a way to organize my teaching.” Through transliteracy, Raquel demonstrated new knowledge of language as a system. Raquel designed a writing prompt intending to harness Julia’s experience, inviting a personal narrative about confronting challenges in her new country. When Raquel analyzed the writing samples in both languages, she became aware of certain language features that were inherent in narrative writing and adapted her subsequent instruction:

> We paid close attention to the use of language for expressing ideas, language for connecting ideas, for interaction, and for creating cohesive texts. I am in the process of creating a useful chart with the most frequent words/expressions for students to use in their narratives.

Observation led Raquel to realize that she had not introduced these functions of language in her initial teaching and that she could better prepare students like Julia by clarifying the language of narrative writing and explicitly teaching it. This contrasts previous findings on teaching transnational adolescent writers, where, “although teachers seemed to expect something specific [in writing], they often failed to convey to students what it was” (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007, p. 584). Raquel’s teaching example, though somewhat simple, illustrates a shift in developing knowledge of language and language pedagogy.

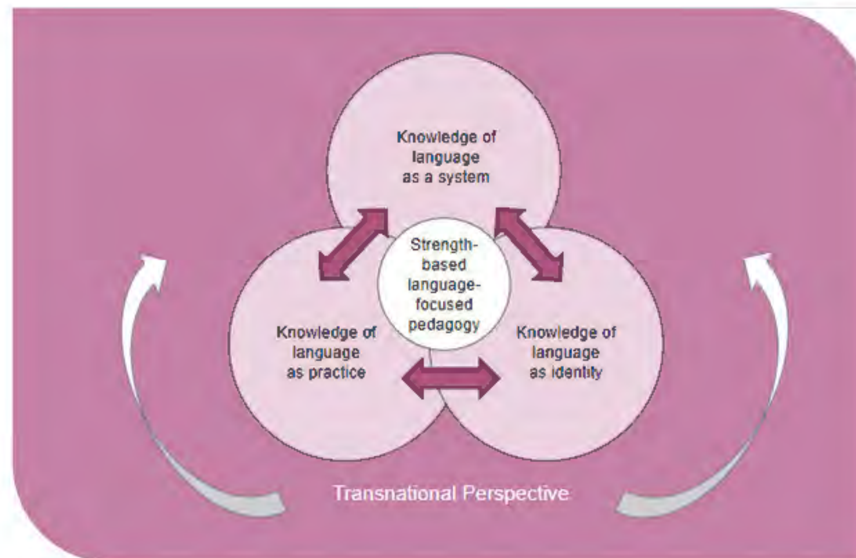
Raquel’s writing observations also shaped her understanding of language as practice. She described her typical practice in relation to the transliteracy assignment, explaining, “I don’t [normally] sit down individually with each student and see what they understand and what they know, right? So this has been different.” The close observation and accompanying reflection positioned Raquel to interpret writing samples through a bilingual lens. Raquel noticed some words in her student’s Spanish writing sample that were borrowed from English, such as *improvar* (to improve) and *mis grados*, referring to the grades earned on assignments. She also noticed that the student’s English writing sample applied some Spanish structures

to English phrases, as in the following excerpt: "This helps me to understand that is okay if you don't speak the language others do because with the time you can get along with people if you keep trying." Using a holistic bilingual lens, Raquel interpreted the structures "is ok" and "with the time" as ones that applied Spanish language structure to English. Raquel credited the holistic writing analysis for setting her up to recognize that these examples reflected linguistic resourcefulness. She learned that rather than viewing the student's language as errors, she could honor their language as approximations that reflected dynamic bilingualism.

Integration of Language Perspectives: Language-Focused, Strength-Based Instruction

As illustrated in the preceding sections, each teacher uniquely constructed knowledge of language that reflected her understandings of language as a system, language as practice, and language as identity. Though these views are often framed as distinct perspectives, kept separate and even competing with one another, participants in our study revealed their integration. This knowledge, shaped by the teachers' cultural and linguistic lens, reflected existing language perspectives and extended them to transnational teacher experiences. Figure 2 shows how, through the teachers' transnational lens, the different perspectives of language are integrated to shape strength-based, language-focused pedagogy.

Figure 2
Integration of Language Perspectives to Develop Strength-Based, Language-Focused Pedagogy



Significantly, teachers demonstrated an integration of the different types of linguistic knowledge, discussing them both individually and together, revealing how the multiple views helped them teach bi/multilingual learners. The transliteracy practice shaped the teachers’ understandings of the bi/multilingual writer by requiring a close observation of students that drew on multifaceted perspectives of language—an understanding that would not be complete through the adoption of any one view in isolation. By uniting these perspectives, and fueled by their perspectives as transnational bilinguals, participants were able to design instruction that recognized and leveraged students’ linguistic strengths.

For example, Raquel discussed a pedagogical shift that took place as a result of observing across languages:

> I definitely think *honor* had been one of the things that I could have been forgetting to do. . . . The Transliteracy model has helped me to recognize and understand my student’s writing capabilities across languages. Observing what students can do in one language alongside the other language gives me an array of information of what the students are capable of.

Raquel gained clarity in asset-based pedagogy that fostered her student’s development in writing, but also an understanding of what it means to be bilingual. She then created a lesson based on paragraph structure, harnessing her student’s capabilities in Spanish and explicitly teaching this technique for English writing. Raquel and others could center instruction on student strengths because of their understanding of language as structure, practice, and identity. As transnational teachers whose lived experiences reflected bilingualism, recognizing student strengths—in any language—was necessary for learning and critical for identity development.

Integration of different types of knowledge of language fostered instruction that gave attention both to language demands in a text and to honoring the language coming from students. When asked to compare the transliteracy approach with others she had carried out or observed, Lía responded,

> I have listened before in previous classes about the importance of the language objective . . . for example, so here’s the mistake, so let’s fix the mistake and let’s teach the right way to do it. . . . I don’t feel like that way is my style of pedagogy. . . . So this is more laid out. . . . We can think about a huge paragraph, or we can think about a bigger piece of a paper or assignment. It’s not just, let’s focus today on the participle. It’s like, let’s see. Let’s see how based on what you do, we can work it. So it’s more considering what the students bring rather than what the teachers decide that the students need to learn.

Lía’s quote reflects her emerging development of pedagogy for teaching language. She described her former understanding of teaching language as a system using the example of teaching “the participle” and acknowledged a new understanding of incorporating language as practice, including “what the students bring.” Transliteracy shaped Lía’s concept of language instruction, offering clarity on instruction that centers student linguistic resources.

Savannah developed knowledge of language as a system, language as practice, and language as identity, as well as understanding of how the three perspectives can be integrated to support student learning through strength-based, language-focused pedagogy. She stated, "La capitalización de las letras, la gramática y todo eso todavía tiene mucho sentido cuando se apoya uno su primer idioma. . . . Pienso que la identidad influye el aprendizaje" (Letter capitalization, grammar, and all of this still makes a lot of sense when it is supported by your first language. . . . I think identity influences learning). In this quote and in Savannah's interview, she emphasized the importance of language functions like "grammar" as a critical component of her writing instruction. Savannah's shift, as she articulates, was realizing that she could teach these language forms by honoring how students *do bilingualism* (Auer, 1984). That is, instead of delivering instruction in only one language, thereby ignoring what they knew in the other, she could invite students to utilize both languages in service of the writing they were carrying out and in alignment with the language practices they seemed to be using. Savannah stated that "identity influences the learning," suggesting that instruction that focuses on language and reflects students' bi/multilingualism can cultivate students' identities as bi/multilinguals.

Discussion

The transnational participants expressed varying ways by which transliteracy practice shaped their understandings of language and teaching. The integration of the different theoretical frames of language (as system, practice, and identity) enabled the teachers to enact asset-based, language-focused pedagogy for bi/multilingual youths in the United States. The transliteracy process—observation, analysis, and strength-based instruction—supported teachers in noticing aspects of language systems that needed to be explicitly taught for students to develop as writers in a traditional academic context. Teachers also noticed how students utilized their full linguistic repertoire in their writing, recognizing and honoring the way students enacted their bi/multilingualism. Making connections with their own experiences as language learners brought depth to their observations and teaching and enabled them to enact language pedagogy that supported bi/multilingual identities.

Our findings reveal that teachers develop asset-based pedagogy when they apply a multifaceted perspective on language (language as system, practice, and identity) to understand and teach bi/multilingual writers. We respond to the call for a focus on methods and strategies to be replaced with "extraordinary pedagogies" reflecting a robust understanding of language and bilingualism (Palmer & Martínez, 2013), and we argue that such extraordinary pedagogies must integrate, and not isolate, perspectives on language. Viewing language *only* as a system can overemphasize language in text to the neglect of language resources coming from students, inadvertently imposing a White, monolingual norm of acceptable lan-

guage. Viewing language *only* as practice or *only* as identity might not sufficiently expose students to the genre-influenced language forms and functions needed to make meaning of text or to write the required genres. Instead of language as a system and language as practice/identity being polarized (Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Valdés, 2015, 2018), teacher preparation can help educators integrate these different perspectives to provide opportunities for bi/multilingual learners to learn disciplinary language and also “bring their entire selves—their language, with its multilingualism and multimodalities; their emotions; their bodies; and their lives—into the text” (García, 2020, p. 562). We join other scholars (Jensen et al., 2021; MacSwan, 2020; Molle & Wilfrid, 2021) in arguing that it is through an inclusive approach to language education, one that recognizes both disciplinary language *and* students’ diverse linguistic repertoires, that we can develop pedagogy that is equitable and transformative. To achieve this, teacher education must transcend the monoglossic norms that pervade bilingual education.

As cultural and linguistic models, transnational teachers have unique potential for promoting bi/multilingualism as an asset, shaping the learning and identity development of multilingual students. However, as depicted in our opening vignette, navigating a new country’s landscape can be challenging, especially in these politically charged times. To unlock transnational teachers’ potential, local and state departments of education and teacher education should support their transition to teaching in the United States. Professional learning must explore how the local culture influences students’ languaging practices and identities and how the culture, teaching, and their new students might differ from their prior experiences. Programs aimed specifically at supporting transnational teachers in U.S. schools can be developed and studied for their efficacy. As illustrated in this study, transnational teachers can, when supported, develop deep knowledge about language and apply it in personal ways that celebrate bi/multilingualism.

Though this study focused on transnational bilingual teachers, implications apply more broadly and illustrate Palmer and Martínez’s (2016) claim that “bilingualism can serve as a pedagogical resource even when monolingualism is the institutional norm and the official goal” (p. 380). In fact, two of the three teachers in the study were working in monolingual settings while honoring and leveraging students’ bi/multilingualism. Although the transnational teachers in this study were bilingual, similar teaching practices can be accomplished by monolingual English teachers (García et al., 2017; Seltzer, 2020). And because no more than 3% of students nationally are in bilingual classrooms (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015), it is critical that teacher preparation programs provide opportunities for teacher candidates to learn about language and language development in depth (language as a system, practice, and identity) and create opportunities for teacher candidates to identify and honor students’ linguistic assets across all grade levels and academic programs. Once systems are created, their efficacy may be studied through quantitative and qualitative data related to the teachers and also by examining student achievement outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has various limitations, including its exploratory nature and a small sample size that inhibits generalizability. Additionally, the data were self-reported and not triangulated with classroom observations or student achievement outcomes. Although teacher perceptions do not provide complete data, they are a useful point of departure for further exploration. Developing pedagogy that is truly extraordinary will require more depth and breadth than is possible in just one graduate course. Future research could explore the student learning experience via the transliteracy practice, its implementation with domestic teachers, or transnational teaching experiences longitudinally, noticing opportunities for tailored professional learning. A close examination of pedagogical development in participant home countries was beyond the scope of this study but could contribute to a better understanding of teacher knowledge and how this expertise could be honored in U.S. teaching settings.

Conclusion

The transnational teachers in this study gained knowledge about language perspectives by implementing a transliteracy approach to writing instruction. As bilinguals, they were able to connect personally to the language-learning identities of their transnational, bi/multilingual students. However, the U.S. educational context, expected pedagogy, and student languaging practices were new to them. The integration of perspectives of language as a system, language as practice, and language as identity enabled them to support students' language development in an expansive way, including their home language repertoires and cultural and linguistic identities. With bi/multilingual students underserved by schools across the country and in various academic settings (bilingual or otherwise), teacher preparation programs must focus their efforts on preparing all teachers to accelerate bi/multilingual student learning. Practices like transliteracy—ones that explore language in ways that are strength-based and language-centered—equip educators with knowledge and pedagogy that honor bi/multilingualism in all its richness and complexity.

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Appendix A

Transliteracy Observation Framework for Writing

Student: *Teacher:* *Date:*

Description: To carry out this observation, I . . .

	Observations in Spanish	*Observations in English*
Oral language utterance		
Discourse & content (organization and structure)		
Sentence/phrases		
Words		
Phonics/spelling		
Conventions (punctuation, capitalization, etc.)		

Language: Consider the child's languages. Consider language demands in the text or task. In what ways might language influence any of the above?

Holistic analysis: Look vertically. What do you notice about the child's behaviors across components? Look horizontally. What do you notice about the child's behaviors across languages?

Transliteracy opportunity: Identify strength(s) the child exhibits in one language but not yet in the other. This might be what you teach for in the mini-lesson.

Appendix B

Transliteracy Prompting Model

Teacher: Student:

Skill or strategy: Direction: ☐ from English to Spanish or ☐ from Spanish to English

Steps	*Purpose*	*Teacher script*
Honor	Honor and affirm an instance in which the student effectively used a specific skill or strategy in their reading or writing. Point to the specific example in the text; tell them what they did and why it was helpful.	
Apply	Explain that the skill can be applied to a text in the other language. Make the connection explicit and direct.	
Demonstrate	Reference a text in the other language, and have prepared a place in the text that lends itself to the desired skill. This might be a place in which the child was partially successful or not successful in their reading or writing. Model for the child how to try out the skill. Provide a think aloud, making transparent the in-the-head activities the student takes on.	
Identify differences or nuances	Consider aspects of the language that might be at play as this skill is applied in the other language (phonology, morphology, syntax, etc.) Make transparent these similarities or differences. Invite the child to engage in noticing and naming, building metalinguistic awareness.	
Invite	Direct the child to try out this skill in reading or writing, right then and there. In future sessions, kindly hold them accountable for utilizing the skill.	