



pan hasta
¡Hola! soy los gastos
el trabajo español
saludos muy la madre

FIVE CONSEJOS (TIPS) ON HOW TO NURTURE THE MANY LANGUAGES OF LITERACY FROM THE ELEMENTARY TO THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

By Elena Roa-Albert and Alexandra (Ale) Babino

Elena Roa-Albert is an immigrant with 7 years of experience as a bilingual teacher. Currently, she is a doctoral student in the Child Development and Early Education program at Texas Woman's University and a graduate research assistant for the Multilingual and Multicultural Studies program. Having personally experienced the challenges of learning a new language and adapting to academic environments in that language, she developed a deep passion for bilingual and multilingual education during her graduate studies. She focuses on the consequences of native language loss and is dedicated to advocating for equity in education and creating curricula that support emergent bilingual learners. She can be reached at gacosta4@twu.edu.

Alexandra (Ale) Babino is Associate Professor of Literacy and Language (author) at Texas Woman's University (TWU), where she teaches and researches at the intersection of bilingual and literacy education. Her work explores how power, systems, and languaging (re)form the identities and biliteracies of emergent bilinguals and their teachers. She is also the director of the Multilingual and Multicultural Studies master's program at TWU. For the past 6 years, she has been coeditor of the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers' Yearbook. Some of her most recent articles have been published in *Bilingual Research Journal*, *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, and *Journal of Literacy Research and Instruction*. She can be reached at ababino@twu.edu.

Abstract: This article emphasizes the importance of embracing and mobilizing students' linguistic practices, particularly in bilingual settings. The authors reflect on their experiences as bilingual teachers, initially correcting students' use of regional Spanish variations and translanguaging (mixing English and Spanish). However, through advanced studies, they recognized the validity of these practices and began fostering an inclusive classroom environment that honors students' linguistic identities across their literacies. They synthesize their pedagogical practices in five tips for Texas teachers—whether they consider themselves bilingual or not, so that they, too, can nurture the many languages of literacy.

Keywords: translanguaging, bilingualism, multimodal resources, inclusive education, language practices

As former bilingual literacy teachers, we have experienced the ups and downs and the ins and outs of what it means to nurture the many languages of literacy for elementary bilingual students. As bilingual people ourselves, we thought this would be a relatively easy feat. We were and are bilingual after all! However, through the years, we've both learned how much we would need to continue to reflect and learn about our own bilingual literacy journeys and how they were the same and different from the largely heritage bilingual, Mexican American students we taught (Muñoz & Babino, 2024). We've learned that there isn't just one bilingual Latinx experience; instead, our bi/multilingualism exists across a continuum of biliteracies, presenting very specific language and literacy needs in the classroom (Babino

& Muñoz, 2023). Elena, a first generation American from Venezuela, and Ale, a second generation Mexican American, held language ideologies, or beliefs about language, that actually limited the dynamic, creative, and beautiful biliteracies of our students (Henderson, 2017). Now, Elena is a doctoral student in Early Childhood Education and Ale is an Associate Professor at Texas Woman's University.

In this article, we share our top five tips—or, how we would say with our students, “*consejos*”—on how to nurture the many languages of literacy from the elementary to the college classroom. Whether you identify as bilingual or not or have ample or little experience in welcoming many languages and literacies into the classroom, we believe all teachers can implement these evidence-based practices for more expansive and joyful literacy learning. This article serves as a valuable resource not only for preservice teachers but also for experienced educators, offering strategies to support multilingual students better. It emphasizes shifting from traditional approaches like language separation and code-switching to a more dynamic, inclusive practice of translanguaging, where languages are not isolated by rigid rules. This holistic approach validates the diverse linguistic and cultural practices students bring to the classroom. The article also promotes critical conversations about language ideologies, encouraging teachers to reflect on and address their own biases toward what is considered “legitimate” language. Finally, practical strategies such as using multimodal resources, conducting classroom language audits, and creating critical translanguaging spaces are provided to help teachers move beyond theory and into actionable practice.

Be Brave to Model Your Own Language Practices

Our first consejo for teachers of bilingual students is to be brave to model your use of multiple languages. No matter your proficiencies or years of teaching experience, modeling your bi/multilingual language use normalizes and legitimizes bi/multilingualism. Even if you “just” took several years of a world language in high school or college, you can do this. Intersperse in your conversations what you know. Model asking for help from your students, “¿Cómo se dice? o ¿Cómo se pronuncia?” (How do you say or pronounce this?) are powerful moves that work in part to disrupt English hegemony, the power of English to dominate school spaces. This is especially important because bilingual Latinx often internalize that English is more important (Babino & Stewart, 2017) and only English is used in school spaces (Fallas-Escobar & Deroo, 2023). That is, even when bilingual Latinx take part in school programs that encourage using both languages, they still won't predictably use all of their languages and language varieties.

As elementary teachers, almost 100% of our students were Latinx, with varying proficiency levels in both Spanish

and English. We've also taught in a variety of bilingual programs, some with the sole goal of English proficiency and others with the goal of developing bilingual literacy and achieving grade level expectations. A common feature of many of these programs is separation of languages, or not mixing languages, during instruction. The goal here is to have extended time to develop each target language, whether it be English or Spanish (Howard et al., 2018).

“ This leads us to the concept of *translanguaging*, which is different from code-switching. ”

Some of our students have been more comfortable speaking English, while others preferred speaking Spanish. In Elena's district, the bilingual program required her to teach all subjects except math in Spanish. Still, most students tried to use Spanish exclusively in the early childhood classroom. Despite this emphasis, Elena did not force them to speak only in Spanish or correct them when they used English or Spanglish, a variety of Spanish with English features that is often regarded by bilingual Latinx as inferior to proper or academic English (Faltis, 2024).

This leads us to the concept of *translanguaging*, which is different from code-switching. Translanguaging views the linguistic practices of an emergent bilingual as an integrated whole—a flexible repertoire of linguistic tools. In this approach, individuals are encouraged to draw on all their linguistic knowledge to navigate between languages and communicate more effectively rather than seeing their language skills as separate, rigid entities that must remain distinct (Garcia et al., 2017). In contrast, code-switching refers to the ability of an emergent bilingual to switch between languages, such as when a bilingual student speaking in English with monolingual peers inserts a Spanish word into the conversation. However, code-switching operates under the premise that linguistic abilities from different languages should remain distinct, with each language being used in isolation according to its specific rules.

Previously, Elena believed that mixing English and Spanish in speech or writing was a grammatical mistake. Ale was brought up thinking mixing languages as *pocho*. (Pocho is a word, often used in a derogatory manner, to refer to Mexican Americans who are Americanized.) Through years of critical reflection, both Elena and Ale understand that translanguaging allows students to draw from their full linguistic repertoire to process information, make meaning, and communicate effectively (Zapata & Laman, 2016). Elena even realized that she uses

translanguaging at home with her family, unconsciously switching between languages when she could not find the right word in Spanish or English. Similarly, Ale realized that she unconsciously thought in both languages but often had to suppress one language in order to communicate monolingually in school settings as a bilingual teacher that required her to speak or use only one language at a time. Translanguaging freed both of us first as bilingual people and then as bilingual teachers to make space for all of what our students know and all of who they are.

When we model using all of our languages, speaking practices in our classrooms can be rich in translanguaging and multimodal communication. Students selected books in both languages and frequently asked for help translating English terms, especially during math, taught exclusively in English in Elena's district. Depending on their comfort level, Elena allowed them to choose videos in either English or Spanish. Although the ultimate goal of some bilingual programs is English fluency in the United States, we've encouraged our students to use their entire linguistic repertoire for assignments. In third grade, students were required to write in both English and Spanish. Elena allowed them to write in whichever language they were most comfortable with during the drafting process. For the final copy, Elena paired them with a partner who was more robust in the target language to provide support. Additionally, she permitted the use of digital translators like Google Translate or English-Spanish dictionaries.

Elena and Ale also modeled using their linguistic resources fully through their text selection. Offering books that reflect their social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds enabled us to address relevant and meaningful topics, helping students connect with the text and see themselves reflected in it (May et al., 2014). It all starts with first modeling our own bi/multilingualism across languages through translanguaging.

Sow Seeds of Multimodal Environmental Print

The most valuable resources in a classroom are what our students bring with them—their knowledge, linguistic practices, identities, and cultures. The first step in creating a multimodal classroom rich with learning opportunities is to get to know our students. Only then can we more fully and accurately represent them in our classroom environment. Even as experienced teachers, this is an evolving skill since the students in front of us change every year. Every year we will seek to learn from our new students in our new class at a new moment in time. We firmly believe that teachers must honor, explore, and give the appropriate value to their students' linguistic and cultural practices. We must view each student's cultural background as an asset to be celebrated and explored, not as a flaw that needs correction (Paris & Alim, 2017). This not only legitimizes their funds of knowledge, but it also

honors their funds of identity—that they have identities as knowledge producers that are just as legitimate as White students (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

With this mindset, we always sought to provide students with various ways to access information. This included printed texts in English, Spanish, and other languages, digital resources on platforms like Epic Books (<https://www.getepic.com>), presentations created using Pear Deck (<https://www.peardeck.com>) or Canva (<https://www.canva.com>), videos, and search engines like Kiddle (<https://www.kiddle.co>). When Elena taught third grade, she encouraged her students to explore information in both languages and utilize various multimodal resources. One project that exemplified this approach was a campaign design for an animal shelter. Some students recorded videos in Spanish, others in English, and some created posters with text and drawings, primarily in Spanish. They also made use of videos, educational apps like PebbleGo (<https://www.pebblego.com>) or Brain Pop (<https://www.brainpop.com>), and both printed and digital books. She did this by including physical materials in the classroom that spanned students' languages and literacies. Depending on where you are in your bi/multilingual teaching journey in the literacy classroom, you may start with including a certain number of resources in a lesson each week, to several times each week, and then every day to build up to using more multimodal multilingual resources.

Another example of Elena's students' use of multimodal resources and translanguaging practices occurred during a project where they created informational books and presentations about rainforest animals and plants. The first step was for each student to choose an animal and a plant to research. To support this, she showed them three different videos about rainforest life. Once they made their selections, they began their research using printed books from the school library, Kiddle and YouTube (<https://youtube.com>). These resources were available in both English and Spanish, allowing students to choose their preferred language. Since the final project was in English, Elena facilitated group work to help students support one another, especially those who found English challenging. They took notes, wrote their informational books, and ultimately presented their findings to the class through dioramas, posters, or digital presentations.

In addition to encouraging multimodal communication, Elena and Ale have incorporated various methods of content delivery in their classroom environments. For example, Elena used songs in both Spanish and English and showed videos of read-aloud sessions in both languages. She also encouraged her students to use printed texts, the internet, and apps on their iPads during research projects. In Ale's undergraduate literacy and bilingual classes, she encourages students to respond in discussion boards and to reader-response assignments in English, Spanish, or a combination of the two. She includes examples in Spanish,

English, or both in her online college classroom to enrich the online class environment.

The effective use of translanguageing and multimodal resources requires strategic planning for these practices to be meaningful. Teachers can engage in a language audit of their classrooms to see how many and what kinds of materials are available in each language. Ale learned that even when she thought she was including more resources in Spanish, the environmental print in her classroom told a different story: there was much more English representation than Spanish representation. Planning and fostering interaction and collaboration are essential in building this bilingual space. Ask your students for additions to the classroom environment. Invite them to work as language detectives to examine your classroom. Praise them for adding their work to the classroom environmental print. Como siempre (like always), we encourage teachers to not make perfection the enemy of good; that is, it doesn't have to be perfect, or students' languages don't have to be totally equally represented (yet) in every single content area to be meaningful. Start poco a poco (little by little) and go from there.

Send Consistent Invitations

During our careers as bilingual teachers, we've witnessed a significant shift in the bilingual student population. About a decade ago, most bilingual students were newcomers, predominantly Spanish speakers. However, today, many bilingual students are born and raised in the United States. As a result, English has become a significant influence on how they communicate and to what degree they maintain their Spanish language skills. In our classrooms, nearly all of our students blend English and Spanish when speaking and writing. With this in mind, we want our classrooms to be a space where students feel safe to be themselves, without sacrificing their identities to succeed. This includes our translanguaging modeling, or showing students how to use all of their language features without specific regard to staying in one "language." It further includes environmental print and explicit invitations for students to use their literacies across languages.

In previous sections, we've described why it is essential that we provide opportunities for students to use all the tools in their linguistic repertoire. But it is arguably just as important to consistently provide invitations to increase the use and prestige of the minoritized language, Spanish (Babino & Wickstrom, 2017). From early childhood we have seen—and research has consistently found—that young bilingual children as young as in kindergarten internalize the power of English. They even begin rejecting using Spanish and having a Spanish/bilingual identity (Chaparro, 2019). As a fourth grade bilingual teacher, who taught in a dual language program with the goal to develop both languages to high levels, Ale noticed students started to refuse using Spanish. They outright did not want to speak Spanish, write in Spanish, and take standardized

tests in Spanish. She was shocked and perplexed. For most of these students, Spanish was the dominant language at home; they had all participated in a dual language program for five years at that point. Most of their friends were bilingual, and at least half of their teachers were bilingual.

What was going on?

And more importantly, as a teacher, what could Ale do?

In cases like these, teachers can create a critical translanguageing space (Hamman-Ortiz, 2024), considering the purposes of translanguageing and what linguistic equity might look like in each circumstance. One facet of linguistic equity is providing space for students to use all of their languages and thereby be themselves with their whole identity as bilingual people. Another aspect of linguistic equity, as has been the focus of bilingual education legislation in the U.S., is developing English proficiency. We believe, along with others (Guerrero, 2023), that yet another facet of linguistic equity for bilingual Latinx is to provide steady opportunities to use and develop Spanish. So, when we discuss issuing invitations to students, it can come in the form of issuing invitations to translanguage. There may be other times where the invitations we issue are to encourage the development of the minoritized language, the one least likely to be used and developed—even with highly bilingual individuals.

One pedagogical response to encourage the minoritized language could be to strictly enforce Spanish use during Spanish time or in the Spanish classroom. Some teachers even go so far as to make a rule and create a classroom role of the "Spanish police," who quite literally policed students' language to ensure they were using the target language (Volk & Angelova, 2007). Another, less harsh response can be to consistently require students to repeat in Spanish what they said in English. Some teachers say something to the effect of "No entiendo. ¿Me lo dices en español?" (I don't understand. Can you tell me in Spanish?). While well-intentioned, these practices don't get to the heart of the matter of why students don't want to use Spanish.

Instead of these practices, we submit that critical translanguageing perspective can consider what the primary purpose of any assignment is: to develop a target language or to show what they know? What are the overall language practices and developmental skills the student has? What might be the right next step in their language development, taking the three types of linguistic equity into account: creating a translanguageing space, developing and showing proficiency in English, or developing and showing proficiency in Spanish? To honor their agency in their bilingual literacy development, we can offer invitations to use any particular language or combination of languages at any time. But that's not the only thing we can do. To get to the heart of the matter, we offer two more consejos (pieces of advice).

Make Space for Critical Conversations

As we've reflected on our experiences, we've realized just how pervasive language biases are. For example, Elena and Ale encountered prejudice against Chicano Spanish from other Spanish speakers who had emigrated from Mexico. "Native" English speakers, too, often dismissed certain pronunciations as "incorrect" simply because they didn't match the English accent. This made us confront our own biases towards different versions of Spanish and English spoken by second-generation Latinx.

We've learned that these biases don't just stay within individuals—they seep into our classrooms. Delpit (2006) discusses how judgments about a student's language practices can negatively affect their academic performance and overall well being. She argues that we, as teachers, shouldn't force students to adopt what's seen as the "appropriate" language practice. Instead, our job is to equip them with the knowledge and skills to make informed choices for themselves. But teachers are often stuck assessing and comparing students against standards based on White middle-class norms—standards that don't reflect the conditions or opportunities of most of our students. These assessments tend to highlight students' shortcomings rather than their growth. Although efforts have been made to change this, the White middle-class perspective still dominates our schools. When we design a curriculum, we must consider what our students bring with them and recognize their knowledge as an asset, not a deficit.

Thankfully, scholars and researchers are leading the way with new approaches that aim to right these wrongs. Paris and Alim (2017), for example, introduce culturally sustaining pedagogies—an approach that values students for who they are as individuals. In this framework, different cultures, languages, and communities are central to education, and differences are seen as assets rather than problems to be fixed. Even more so, they emphasize strengthening the cultural and linguistic practices of racialized students. Texas teachers can do this when we talk about the historical biases connected to different language practices, when we ask questions about who gets to decide what legitimate language is, and how we might use our languages for our own means. Consider it an ongoing conversation throughout the entire school year rather than a one-time chat in the moment (Babino & Wickstrom, 2017). Once again, this can start simply with a follow-up question when a student expresses not wanting to speak or use Spanish. We can gently probe, "Why is that?" or "Says who?" "Does that sound right?" or "How do you know?"

As part of this ongoing, yearlong critical conversation, we can also share our own stories, and invite other adults into the classroom to share. For Elena, affirming her students' cultural identities means actively engaging with their communities and bringing those communities into the

classroom. By inviting them to be a part of the educational process, we make their knowledge a foundational part of our curriculum. Ale often shared with her students and their families that only two of her abuelitos' (grandparents) ten grandchildren spoke Spanish. That is, 8 of 10 stopped speaking Spanish within one generation of coming to the United States! She continued to share with them how challenging it was for her to maintain and continue to develop Spanish, how she felt trying to talk with her primos mexicanos (Mexican cousins), and how frustrated she felt not being able to express herself as thoroughly in Spanish as she could in English. Wide-eyed, her students often grew silent. Maybe they considered another perspective. Maybe we opened the door to continue thinking about the place of languages in our lives.

Creating space for critical conversations about the power and ideologies connected to different languages and language practices is essential because it allows us to name and respond to our complex lived experience as social beings (Freire, 1996). It's one more step toward a more just and inclusive educational classroom—one that truly values every child for who they are and who they can more fully become.

Punctuate the Curriculum Cycle With Conferences

Paulo Freire (1996) once said that praxis is the symbiosis of reflection and action aimed at transforming the world. We think about this often because it reminds us that real change happens only when we put knowledge into practice. We can discuss countless pedagogies, methods, and theories, but the change we need will remain out of reach without a true commitment to implementing them. Periodic conferences with students throughout the school year can give students intentional time to reflect on how they are using and developing their languages for their own means. Ale has used a version of the survey in Figure 1 (see page 17) to invite continued reflection on students' literacies across their languages (Muñoz & Babino, 2024).

Biliteracy Practices Reflection

Part of the power in these conferences comes from the act of personal reflection: to stop, notice, and reflect on their language patterns in their lives. Another source of power is through discussing their literacy practices across languages. This creates a community of reflection, a third space, that further reinforces their identities and literacies. And yet another source of power comes through giving space to make goals for how students want to develop and use their languages—which can come through conferring with other classmates or the teacher. When we punctuate the curriculum cycle with personal reflection and conferences on students' literacies across languages, we engage in counter hegemonic practices that disrupt English hegemony.

Figure 1. Biliteracy Practices Reflection (Muñoz & Babino, 2024)

Parte A

¿Cuál opción representa mejor cómo te sientes sobre cada actividad? Marca la respuesta que representa mejor cómo usas tus biliteracidades.

Actividad de biliteracidad	Prefiero hacerlo en español .	Prefiero hacerlo en inglés .	Me gusta hacerlo igualmente en español y en inglés .	Prefiero hacerlo la mayor parte en español con un poco de inglés .	Prefiero hacerlo la mayor parte en inglés con un poco de español .
La lectura					
La escritura					
Escuchar música					
Ver la tele/los videos					
Platicar con amigos					
Platicar con vecinos					
Platicar con familiares mayores					
Platicar con familiares jóvenes					
Aprender algo en la escuela					

Note. The directions say “Which option best represents how you feel about each activity? Mark the response that best represents how you use your biliteracies. The titles across the top of the chart say: Biliteracy activity, “I prefer to do it in Spanish,” “I prefer to do it in English,” “I prefer to do it equally in Spanish or English,” “I prefer to do it mostly in Spanish with some English,” and “I prefer to do it mostly in English with some Spanish.” The biliteracy activities listed include: reading, writing, listening to music, watching TV/ videos, talking with friends, talking with neighbors, talking with older family members, talking with younger family members, learning something at school.

This journey of self-assessment and reflection isn’t just for students—it’s for us as educators too. As Muhammad (2021) advocates, we need to constantly revisit and revise our practices, prejudices, and beliefs. It is our sincere hope that these five consejos (tips) can encourage you in your journey of nurturing the many languages of literacy for your students in your own classroom, starting just one paso (step) at a time.

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