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## What Teachers Need To Know About Translanguaging

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WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW  
ABOUT TRANSLANGUAGING

by

Thomas Snell

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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To these fierce and brilliant women, without whose wisdom and kindness

this project would not have been possible:

Ofelia García, Maria Cioè-Peña, Alisa Algava, Mandy Phillips, Maite Sánchez,

Sarah Vogel, Taeko Onishi, Rebecca DeCola, and Allison Snell.

*The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress.*

*This is education as the practice of freedom.*

-bell hooks

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The field of English as a Second Language (ESL) emerged largely from the landmark Supreme Court decision *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), which found that Chinese students in San Francisco's public schools were not being adequately served because they could not access the content of their course work in a language they could understand. As a result, a nationwide effort began to provide English language services to students of all ages who were learning English, hereafter referred to as emergent bilinguals (EBs). In the four decades since then, the practice of ESL has spread throughout the country, developed dozens of competing models and theories, and reached millions of both immigrant and native-born students speaking hundreds of different languages.

Despite these laudable efforts, the Supreme Court's decision had the effect of suppressing the emerging bilingual education movement that had recently gained unprecedented federal recognition in Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments of 1967. This law recognized the efforts of parents and communities to support their children to develop their home language abilities throughout their schooling, rather than making a quick transition to English-only education. Maintenance or developmental bilingual education, as it is typically known, was subverted, intentionally or otherwise, to transitional bilingual education, in which the students' home languages are used in school for a short period of time only, or not at all, with the expectation that students will learn exclusively in English as quickly as possible.



As a result, *Lau* has had the somewhat ironic impact of making the wide variety of home languages spoken by students less salient in schools, and consequently undermining many of the linguistic resources that emergent bilinguals have to offer.

Today in most mainstream schools the prevailing ethos is that English is the proper and primary language of instruction for all subjects outside of foreign languages. In New York City, where 11% of students are classified as English language learners (ELLs), and many more speak languages other than English at home, the vast majority of students receive content instruction in English exclusively. Many teachers are monolingual English speakers and most believe that it is the responsibility of the student--not the teacher or the school--to develop sufficient mastery of English in order to access academic content. ESL teachers are typically viewed as specialists who offer remediation to students who need additional support in attaining this mastery, and this maintains a deficit perspective in which emergent bilinguals are viewed as deficient in English language skills rather than advanced in their multilingual abilities. In fact, many content teachers are comfortable within the confines of their disciplinary boundaries and do not think of themselves as language teachers at all.

Having worked as an ESL teacher in New York City schools for a number of years, I began to question this regime of unexamined English dominance. I preferred not to think of myself as exclusively a language teacher, because I believe that language is most effectively acquired through content knowledge. At the same time, I wished that my colleagues would be more comfortable integrating explicit language teaching into their content instruction. Moreover, I was dissatisfied that some of them seemed to disavow completely any responsibility for helping emergent bilinguals develop their

abilities in any language--they preferred to see that as my job, as the supposed language specialist. As my own ideas about language and languaging began to evolve, and I was exposed to a translanguaging approach, I wondered, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?*

Whether we view ourselves as monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, it is important to recognize that language learning is something we do over a lifetime, not just as children or while we are in school. As we read new texts and dialogue with different people, we are constantly learning new words and phrases, novel uses of language, and new ways to define and explore emerging concepts. To say that only certain students are language learners is to overlook the lifelong process of language learning that we are all engaged in, deliberately or not. Accordingly, teachers have a powerful opportunity to model the humility and curiosity needed to continue learning and understanding the various languages we encounter and the various types of languaging we can do.

The more I reflected on my own practice, and observed the mainstream teachers around me, the more I began to realize how much power we wield as teachers in the choices we make around languaging with our students. Even adopting a tolerant approach to other languages in the classroom does not effectively decenter English or diminish its tendency to marginalize other legitimate forms of communicating and constructing knowledge. Emergent bilingual students have the opportunity to benefit greatly from their various linguistic resources, and yet as teachers, intentionally or not, well-meaning or otherwise, we may inadvertently disenfranchise our students in the ways that we use and prioritize English. In this way, translanguaging offers a unique

opportunity to use the power we have as educators to bring all of a student's abilities and resources to bear in their academic growth.

In a climate of accountability and increasing pressure to improve quantitative metrics, often based on factors well beyond our control, it can be challenging to introduce new approaches or expect seasoned teachers to make changes in their practice. However, I believe that the most successful schools create a space for peer-to-peer professional collaboration, where teachers learn directly from one another, sharing successes and failures and developing best practices together in a spirit of cooperation. Rather than having experts and consultants from outside the school community come in, I believe that teachers can develop more effective practice from their own deliberate experimentation and learning directly from one another through observation, discussion, and reflection. This not only reduces the pressure to conform to new expectations, but it frames new initiatives in terms of what is actually possible within the specific school environment. Additionally, it empowers teachers to trust themselves and one another to develop the most effective approaches in supporting their students, and makes it much more likely that teachers will adopt a common framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities unique to their schools. In this way, as I continued to reflect on translanguaging and how it might influence my practice, I began to think about ways to bring my emerging understanding to my colleagues in the way that would be most useful to them as well.

Finally, translanguaging encouraged me to continue to think beyond disciplinary boundaries, and gave me more confidence to pursue the integration of language and content I always believed was essential to my practice. While we are taught in teacher

training to conceive language and content objectives as separate, and indeed there is some use in this conceptual distinction, in practice we are never engaging exclusively in one or the other. I also believe that the most effective teacher and learning pushes against disciplinary boundaries as it becomes more integrated into students' understanding of the world and more relevant to their lives. Embracing the full complement of a student's linguistic resources, as translanguaging encourages us to do, speaks directly to an interdisciplinary approach to learning that is appropriate to any subject area, and has the potential to engage a much broader part of students' abilities and interests.

As we have seen, the current practice of ESL, by and large, draws from the implicit bias in the *Lau* decision to prioritize a transition to the dominance of English in schools, to the exclusion of home language abilities and with indifference to the promise of developmental bilingual education. As such, most teachers, monolingual or otherwise, rarely question the pervasiveness of English or think of themselves as agents within the contested grounds of language use in schools. However, the translanguaging approach encourages us to see all of a student's linguistic resources as valuable, while recognizing that we are all language learners throughout our lives. So if teachers are willing and able to learn from each other and share best practices in a spirit of professional collaboration, it is possible to deepen our practice and reach students more effectively by expanding both our understanding of how we use language and the opportunities that interdisciplinary teaching and learning can provide. For these reasons, I am interested to explore the research question, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?* In chapter 2, I will review the literature on both translanguaging and adult development in order to gain

a better understanding of how to begin an answer to this question. Chapter 3 describes the design and methods of the professional development project that I propose to answer this question, and chapter 4 provides a reflection on the project itself.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

In this chapter I review the literature relevant to the question, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?* In order to answer this question, I will first consider the theoretical basis for translanguaging, and the unique conceptual elements of a translanguaging approach. In the following section, I look more closely at the use of translanguaging in an educational context, and explore examples and practices that typify this unique approach. Having established a basic understanding of translanguaging in both theory and practice, I will look more broadly to the question of language access, and what a human rights perspective can tell us about linguistic rights as they apply to students and in schools. I will then turn to the question of adult development, specifically exploring what the literature says about how adults learn, grow, and change--in the hope that they might be amenable to adopting a translanguaging approach in their own classrooms. Finally, the summary will indicate what students have to gain from teachers and schools that use translanguaging.

#### **Translanguaging theory**

Translanguaging is an alternative perspective on language that stands in sharp contrast to structural linguistics and many of the traditional assumptions of linguistic theory. In this section, we review the orthodox conceptual foundations of language and

language learning, in contrast to the new and more relevant possibilities opened up by an ideological stance that embraces translanguaging.

Second language acquisition (SLA) theory has been strongly influenced by Chomsky's notion of an idealized native speaker, a theoretical person who demonstrates competence in a first language based on his access to universal grammar. Similarly, interlanguage, a supposed learner-created middle ground between the native and second languages, also presupposes an idealized native speaker, as does the concept of fossilization, or the persistence of errors in the second language. These concepts contribute to a monolingual bias in SLA research, where monolingualism is taken as a standard, norm, and unmarked category. This ignores not only the range of linguistic abilities that monolinguals demonstrate, but also frames bilinguals in a deficit perspective (May, 2014). More recent scholarship has challenged these and other foundational concepts of SLA, in some cases even calling into question the L1/ L2 distinction itself, as simultaneous learning of multiple languages is increasingly common in environments of multilingualism (Block, 2003; Johnson & Kachru, 1994; May, 2014; Sridhar, 1994).

In fact, the last 20 years have witnessed a shift away from Chomsky's decontextualized, individualistic view of language learning, towards an emphasis on the use and meaning of language in a broader social context (Firth & Wagner, 1997; May, 2014). When we look at how multilingual speakers use languages, we see them move fluidly between the different codes with which they are familiar, in a way that undermines the distinction between various languages. This encourages us to look at the social context of language use, and challenges the purely psychological view of language learning that has informed so much of SLA research and ESL practice (Auer, 2007; May,

2014). Structural linguistics has traditionally posited language as an autonomous, bounded system that can be studied scientifically, but this ignores the historical and cultural contexts from which specific languages, as we typically understand them today, emerged, and were defined, constructed, and bounded by nations with nation-building agendas (Bauman & Briggs, 2003; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

While we often accept that the borders between languages are natural, these borders were, in fact, invented by nations engaged in colonial, imperialist, or nationalist efforts over the last few centuries. Simultaneously, an ideology of languages emerged as bounded and separate entities that can be enumerated and classified. While these concepts are, indeed, useful for making sense of language use, they limit our understanding at the same time, because they obscure the fact that languages were invented to define people and create boundaries between us and them, self and other, colonizer and colonized, citizen and alien. The enumeration, definition, and classification of languages directly coincides with projects of nation-building and conquering in the colonial era, and this ideological framework has demonstrated remarkable persistence. In fact, states have constructed languages in order to enhance their own power (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Languages have been defined as the extension of a homogeneous and territorially grounded people, who have, in many cases, created institutions to standardize and monitor them continuously. Additionally, the belief persists in many places that the people of a nation should have just one shared language (Martin-Jones, Blackledge & Creese, 2012). However, it is important that we question these ideologies, and interrogate who benefits from them, who suffers, and what is lost in this perspective.



Schools have traditionally played an important role in maintaining the supposed borders between languages and the upholding some languages over others. They have frequently been tasked with propagating linguistic homogeneity, and have designed language instruction based on the assumption that knowledge of multiple languages can lead to supposed cross-contamination. Most importantly, they have often promoted a standard variety of a national language to the deliberate exclusion of others (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Hélot, 2012; Kubota, 2016).

Scholars working in the area of translanguaging have proposed an alternative perspective on language that opens up new possibilities for how we understand these issues. For example, instead of seeing languages as separate and bounded codes, we can look at all of the abilities a language user has as part of her *repertoire* (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Blommaert, 2010; Busch, 2012; García & Baetens Beardsmore, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010). The concept of repertoire allows us to see a language user's abilities as individual features within a disaggregated system; these features can be combined in an infinity of novel ways to create whatever meaning is appropriate to the situation at hand. This stands in contrast to the traditional view of language features belonging to one language only, with no application outside the boundaries of that specific code. Repertoire reflects an individual's life and experience, rather than an abstract concept of language as an impersonal system. In fact, the practices of multilingual speakers indicates that they do, in fact, choose the language features that conform best to their understanding of the context in order to communicate both effectively and authentically.

The idea of repertoire leads to a new conception of bilingualism that is neither additive nor subtractive, but rather *dynamic*. Both additive and subtractive bilingualism see languages as separate systems that either compete with one another in a learner's mind--in the case of subtractive bilingualism--or can co-exist somewhat peacefully, as in additive bilingualism (García & Flores, 2012). While additive bilingualism may recognize a common underlying proficiency (Cummins, 1979) that connects the two languages, it still maintains a segregation between the language features of the two supposedly separate systems. However, when we understand these features to be part of one integrated system, as in a linguistic repertoire, we approach bilingualism as dynamic (García & Baetens Beardsmore, 2009; García & Wei, 2014), in recognition of the interrelation that speakers themselves experience among the various language features at their disposal. García (2009; García & Kleifgen, 2010) has represented the idea of dynamic bilingualism with the analogy of an all-terrain vehicle that navigates the contested, uneven, and constantly shifting ground of intercommunication, adapting to external forces by drawing on whichever linguistic features are most appropriate for the situation.

The translanguaging perspective replaces the supposed fact of languages as discrete and bounded systems with the idea of *linguaging* as a process. Linguaging includes how we shape, remember, and communicate our experience, creating new meanings and interacting with the world as we use language. Linguaging is how we create knowledge and make our thinking real for others to understand. Linguaging is a social process, not something that individuals do in isolation, and it involves drawing on the full breadth of an individual's linguistic repertoire to make connections and meaning,

using creativity to move fluidly among the linguistic practices that are most appropriate in any given situation (Busch, 2012; García & Baetens Beardsmore, 2009; García & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2011).

As we have seen, the long-established view of languages as autonomous, discrete, and bounded-entities, corresponding neatly to a territorially bounded people, is yielding to a more modern and realistic view of a continuum of language features and abilities that exists primarily in the mind and experience of the people who use them. In this way, concepts such as L1 and L2, monolingualism, and the idealized native speaker may be less useful for understanding language than the newer ideas of languaging, repertoire, and dynamic bilingualism. In the next section, we look more closely at how these ideas find an application in educational settings, and what possibilities are opened up for teachers, students, and schools when we adopt a translanguaging perspective.

### **Translanguaging in education**

While languages and languaging permeate all aspects of culture, they have special relevance in schools due to the increasing diversity of our students and the role that schools have played in regulating and propagating specific language practices and excluding others. In this section, we explore the ways in which translanguaging can impact educational practice, along with the challenges and opportunities it presents for teachers and students.

Translanguaging has many powerful implications for education, beginning with the prefix *trans-*, with its implications of crossing or going beyond. García and Wei (2014) identify three of these implications: trans-spaces, transformation, and trans-disciplinary consequences.

*Trans-spaces* refers to the idea that language users, particularly learners and students, need not be bound by socially constructed systems as they bring their own experiences and subjectivities to the learning process. We create a translanguaging space when we allow ourselves to move freely among the various structures and systems that would seek to confine or isolate us. It is a space that multilingual speakers create for themselves, so that they may locate themselves in a larger space that is shared by others. It allows their personal experiences and values to exist in a shared dimension, in which their languaging is both creative and critical. That is, language features are combined in ways that both respect and break accepted norms, and language is used to question assumptions and problematize cultural and historical phenomena as appropriate (Wei, 2011).

Secondly, translanguaging in education is intentionally *transformative*, such that traditional understandings are uprooted and new voices are allowed to surface. It advances the concerns of social justice education and linguistic human rights, drawing on critical pedagogy to challenge existing social and cultural structures of language, learning, and education. Finally, translanguaging is *trans-disciplinary*, drawing both the psychological and social dimensions of language use, and seeking the interrelations between individual identities and social structures. It also challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries, encouraging us to find language learning opportunities in all areas of academic interest and inquiry (García & Wei, 2014).

The opportunities presented by translanguaging in education continue, beyond the crossing or going beyond as described above. For example, students benefit from the when they can move freely between the language practices that they know: they

demonstrate increased participation; better relationships between each other; and deeper understanding (Arthur & Martin, 2005; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Lin & Martin, 2005). Creese and Blackledge (2010) document how this “flexible bilingualism” de-emphasizes the borders between languages, boosts confidence, and bridges connections among students with their various areas of interest, experience, and knowledge. Students are better able to engage the audiences they intend to reach; show a greater ability to develop their own identities both within and beyond the institutions to which they belong; and recognize the specific and unique uses of all their language practices in negotiating meaning.

In building and sustaining a rich literacy practice through schooling, students are best served when they are allowed and encouraged to use all of their linguistic repertoire. Literacy skills grow faster and deeper when learners can use their pre-existing linguistic and cultural repertoire freely, learning through their prior knowledge rather than outside of it. In this way, language transcends its prior status as an object of study and becomes a means of acquiring new knowledge and experience. This allows students to have greater control over their learning; to learn more easily both within and beyond school; and increase their access to linguistic and cultural capital (Cummins, 2006; Hélot, 2012). This stance allows us to see the language learning process from the perspective of the learners themselves, rather than the traditional view of language as a remote, abstract code that somehow exists independently of the people who use it (García & Baetens Beardsmore, 2009). In this way, we understand language teaching and learning as something we do with students rather than to them, empowering them to be fully engaged participants in both school and the community (García & Flores, 2012).

Translanguaging is not a model invented in a laboratory--it is based directly on the practices that bilingual writers and speakers use in many other contexts, drawing freely and flexibly on their language resources as needed. In schools specifically, translanguaging allows teachers to use contrastive analysis of semantic and syntactic elements and structures to support the development of students' multilingual awareness and mobility (Cummins, 2008; García & Flores, 2012). García and Flores (2012) identify the principles of social justice and social practice, and the strategy of scaffolding, as essential to this process.

The first principle, attention to *social justice*, is based on the idea that meaningful education for emergent bilinguals is both critical and transformative, supporting students to develop the consciousness to challenge inequality and oppression. To this end, we are tasked with:

- Creating democratic spaces that allow for equal participation and create equity among the various languages and cultures that are present;
- Developing the home language practices and cultures of students and supporting them to understand how these practices are contested and challenged in various contexts;
- Maintaining high expectations for risk-taking, hard work, and rigorous content;
- Advocating for children, particularly as they are subject to language assessments that may be invalid or inequitable.

The second principle, attention to *social practice*, is based on creative experimentation with new ideas, collaboration, and the social construction of knowledge.

In that spirit, as educators we are challenged to:

- Support students to experience quality interactions and share ideas using all of their flexible language abilities;
- Teach discipline-specific language in conjunction with content;
- Use collaborative and cooperative learning strategies deliberately and creatively;
- Develop students' identity investment in content by attending to what is most relevant to their lives (García & Flores, 2012).

The strategy of *scaffolding* is based on Vygotsky's (1978) conception of the zone of proximal development, and has found wide application in the field of language learning (Walqui, 2006; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Scaffolding in the context of multilingual pedagogy involves:

- Routines that reflect students' interests, are varied, and draw on the context of the lesson;
- Contextualization in the home languages, cultural practice, and paralinguistic behaviors of students;
- Modeling language use through explicit think-alouds;
- Schema-building that draws on students' prior knowledge, previews content, and builds on all of students' language practices where appropriate;

- Multiple points of entry that allow students to access content through a variety of media and conceptual approaches, and to demonstrate their understanding authentically and with a variety of language practices as needed (García & Flores, 2012).

Translanguaging legitimizes the actual practice of multilingual students by recognizing the whole of their linguistic abilities, not only the parts that conform to standardized dialects of more powerful languages. It responds to the reality that they experience all of their linguistic abilities as part of one integrated system, rather than as closed and separate codes. It therefore allows teachers to build their practice on the whole of their students' abilities, rather than demanding that they suppress linguistic features that might actually help them to communicate and construct knowledge. This allows students to feel ownership over their language abilities and use, rather than ceding control of them to an external authority such as the teacher, school, or state (García & Kleyn, 2016a).

García and Kleyn (2016a) identify three areas of instruction where the strategic application of translanguaging theory can have an impact: stance, design, and shifts. In the climate of accountability and high-stakes testing, many schools have placed a huge emphasis on the teaching and learning of English (and math) to the exclusion of other languages and subjects. First of all, the translanguaging *stance* allows teachers to harness the full power of a student's linguistic resources to acquire content and skills. They choose to understand language from the perspective of the people who use it rather than from the perspective of the district or the state. Moreover, they can use the power that they have to invert the hierarchy of languages to empower multilingual students to



express themselves authentically and develop their skills and identities beyond what educational authorities have prescribed for them. Secondly, translinguaging *design* involves instructional planning that is collaborative and cooperative; built on the availability of multilingual resources; and creates space for all of a student's linguistic resources to be used (Celic & Seltzer, 2011; García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2016). Finally, translinguaging *shifts* are the moves that teachers make in response to the language that students actually use. This recognizes that no amount of planning, however thoughtful, can fully anticipate how students will respond--partly because each student's linguistic repertoire overlaps with many different languages (as they are socially constructed) and is unique to that individual.

Translinguaging also has some interesting applications for assessment. Instead of looking strictly at how students perform in one specific language, teachers can measure "general linguistic performances" (García & Kleyn, 2016a). That is, there is a distinction between the ability to demonstrate mastery of the semantic and syntactic features of one language, and the ability to engage in academic tasks--such as developing an argument, using textual evidence, identifying relevant details and main ideas, and so on. Accurate assessment can measure these abilities separately, thereby creating a more equitable environment for emergent bilinguals by allowing them to use the whole of their linguistic repertoire, just as monolingual students typically do.

In this section, we have looked at the implications of translinguaging theory in the field of education. We saw how it can create unique trans-spaces for new linguistic possibilities, and how it is both transformative and transdisciplinary by nature. We looked at how translinguaging enhances students' academic performances and social

experiences in school, and supports the development of a rich literary practice.

Translanguaging supports students to develop their multilingual awareness through attention to social justice, attention to social practice, and scaffolding. It is based on the way bilingual people actually use language, and thereby returns control of language use from school and state authorities to the students themselves. In order to accomplish this, instruction can adjust in the areas of stance, design, and shifts to make room for the whole of a student's linguistic repertoire. Finally, translanguaging opens up new possibilities for assessment in terms of general linguistic performance. In the section that follows, we consider how we can bring these understandings to inservice teachers so that they may integrate them into their practice.

### **Adult development**

As we have seen, some aspects of translanguaging are intuitive or already in place in classrooms, while others may be abstract, counter-intuitive, or challenging. Therefore, it is important to understand how adults learn in order to design a professional development experience on translanguaging that will be meaningful and have an impact on teachers' practice. In this section, we consider what makes professional development successful based on what research has shown about the process of adult development and change.

Kegan's (1994) constructive-developmental theory of adult learning contrasts informational learning and transformational learning. Informational learning involves training to impart new skills or information; transformational learning, on the other hand, involves education, which expands the way in which a person knows. This increases a learner's capacity, broadens her perspective, and makes it more likely she will effectively

handle complexities. Transformational learning involves self-examination, reflection, and revision of previously held assumptions (Drago-Severson, 2004). Since translanguaging theory challenges commonly-held assumptions about the form and structure of language, these steps may be essential for some people as they consider the translanguaging perspective for the first time.

If we want professional development to have an impact on participants, so that they leave the session ready to make a change in their thinking or practice, it is essential that we leverage adults' experience and the social context at hand. Positive adult learning opportunities begin with adults' experiences. It is essential to make room for adults' experiences in the learning process and to recognize that this is both a strength and starting point for learning new information. Therefore professional development must either be based on real knowledge of adults' experience, or make space for this experience to be relevant and find application to the subject at hand (Merriam & Clark, 2006). At the same time, adult learning is most effective when it is situated in a social context. Social interaction promotes the neural plasticity that enhances adults' ability to take in new information. The brain itself is designed to share experiences in order to add to existing knowledge (Johnson & Taylor, 2006). Connection to other people enhances our ability to truly develop through learning. This happens through sharing, reflection, and the opportunity to test out new perspectives (Merriam & Clark, 2006). Effective learning experiences for adults are therefore interactive and social, and also allow time for processing, reflection, and connection.

While experience and social context are critical in developing effective professional development, it is equally important to recognize the various stages of

making change and the obstacles and opportunities unique to each one. Unfortunately, due to defensiveness or demoralization, some adult learners may be in a precontemplation stage where they do not intend to make a change. Others may be ambivalent about change because they do not yet understand how the benefits outweigh the costs; this is the contemplation stage. Adults in the preparation stage can see how the benefits exceed the costs and intend to take action imminently, generally because they have experienced a conscious-raising event or had an opportunity for self-reevaluation. In the action stage, adult learners are leveraging helping relationships or behavior modifying strategies to effect the change (Prochaska & Prochaska, 1999). Effective professional development gives adult learners a chance to identify and reflect on their current stage relative to the change opportunities with which they are presented.

Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano and Asghar (2013) have identified “four pillar practices for growth” that inform impactful professional development. *Teaming* supports reflection, builds connections, and deepens capacity. It allows participants to surface and critique assumptions and creates a supportive context for considering new viewpoints. *Providing leadership roles* allows participants to take on new challenges with the appropriate supports, and recognizes that all adults in a school building have important roles to play in affecting change. Leadership roles, when offered intentionally and thoughtfully, are individualized opportunities for growth, rather than just additional responsibilities. *Collegial inquiry* is the conversation that allows participants to reflect and share their intellectual and ideological commitments. It develops the capacity for change at the individual and institutional levels, supports reflective practice, and creates more positive and trusting communities. Finally, *mentoring* enhances performance and

helps practitioners manage challenges. It reduces isolation, is mutually beneficial for all participants, and supports teachers to develop new and more effective practices.

In this section, we reviewed research on adult development that can form the basis of effective professional development. The constructive-developmental theory of adult learning outlines the powerful possibilities of transformational learning, which can shift how adults know and support them to revise previously held beliefs. We saw how drawing on adults' experience and leveraging the social context of learning can enhance professional development, and considered the various stages that support or inhibit the process of change. Finally, we considered the four pillars of teaming, leadership, inquiry, and mentoring that can be components of powerful professional learning opportunities. In the next section, we look more closely at professional development for translanguaging specifically, to see what gaps in the research still exist in this area.

### **Professional development for translanguaging: Principles for inservice learning**

Since translanguaging is a relative new concept in the fields of ESL and bilingual education, it has not yet penetrated many teacher education programs or professional development organizations. As a result, many teachers of emergent bilinguals are not yet aware of the power and potential of translanguaging, neither is there a robust body of research on how to remedy this this situation. In this section, we look at the work of scholars who have sought to bring a better understanding of language learning to inservice teachers in recent years.

Fillmore and Snow (2000) call attention to what they see as a profound absence of expertise on language among education practitioners, and assert that a focus on language is essential for teachers in all content areas. They identify numerous facts about language

which they see as crucial for teachers to know, such as the differences and similarities between vernacular and standard dialects. Vernacular dialects are just as useful and regular as standard ones, and students need to know that their language variety is respected in school. It is natural for individuals to maintain more than one dialect, therefore learning academic English does not need to be a subtractive process. Academic English is subject-specific, relatively decontextualized, and requires explicit teaching for students to gain mastery. While they surface a number of key understandings about language that teachers should have--many of which are relevant to translanguaging--and they describe a series of courses in educational linguistics that preservice teachers could take, they do not say much about how to effectively bring these understandings to inservice teachers through professional development.

DeJong and Harper (2005), in an article on preparation for mainstream teachers, draw a distinction between “just good teaching” (or “JGT”) and the specific instructional and dispositional moves that teachers must make to reach emergent bilinguals effectively. Their point is that JGT is erroneously assumed to be sufficient to reach emergent bilinguals, but in fact there is much more that teachers need to know and be able to do. For example, they note that there is a linguistic foundation to all content knowledge that teachers frequently assume is available to all students, however in the case of emergent bilinguals this must be explicitly surfaced and taught. They also call attention to the strategy of scaffolding and the specific nature of academic language in the content areas. Critically, they recognize some of the misconceptions that mainstream teachers may hold about emergent bilinguals: that use of their home language reflects a lack of ability in English; that they are subject to language confusion or may need referral to special

education services; or that students' pronunciation of English correlates with their overall proficiency or understanding. They encourage teachers not to see the influence of the home language on students' writing as a deficit simply because it is non-standard, and to use the home language as a support for students to organize their their writing and thinking. Finally, they note the damage that can be caused by a misguided "English-only" policy in the classroom, in terms of limiting students' access to knowledge and devaluing their unique assets and abilities. Many of these insights anticipate or are aligned with translanguaging in one way or another, but the authors seem not to be aware of or interested in translanguaging specifically. In addition, given their focus on preservice teachers, they leave unexplored the ways in which we might bring these understanding to inservice teachers to enhance their practice.

Silva, Weinburgh and Smith (2015) describe a professional development experience for teachers of emergent bilinguals that was based on a university/ district partnership. They identify several factors that contributed to the success of the project: co-teaching opportunities between the university professor and district staff; ongoing discussions of scholarly reading and research connected to their areas of interest; opportunities to integrate curriculum topics across disciplinary boundaries; and time for reflection among peers. Their model for professional development was deliberately collaborative and practice-based, but it was primarily focused on sheltered instruction rather than translanguaging. In fact, despite the apparent success of their efforts in developing new instructional strategies and practices in math and science for emergent bilinguals, they make no mention of students' home language abilities or how these might have contributed to their learning. They offer helpful insights for successful professional

development, but their approach to emergent bilinguals seems not quite compatible with translanguaging.

Another university/ district partnership known as CUNY-NYSIEB (City University of New York--New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals) is described in García and Kleyn (2016b). Like the previous partnership, it too was based on collaboration between university researchers and inservice teachers; however, this project was explicitly designed to bring translanguaging theory into practice to improve the education of emergent bilinguals. In fact, they sought a thorough integration of theory, research, and practice throughout the project. Participating schools agreed to two non-negotiable principles: seeing bilingualism as a resource in education, and supporting a school-wide multilingual ecology. Professional development engaged both school leaders and teachers, and used publications created by CUNY-NYSIEB for that purpose. Leadership seminars used a *collaborative descriptive inquiry* approach (García & Traugh, 2002), a phenomenologically-grounded protocol for exploring student work. The teachers who participated in the professional development succeeded to the extent that they were willing to take risks, demonstrate leadership potential, and were willing to be coached, modeled for, or to co-teach with the CUNY-NYSIEB team on translanguaging practices. They identified the unique nature of their collaboration as *transformative action research*, because it sought to transform not only teachers' practices but also their understanding of language itself through translanguaging theory.

Since translanguaging theory's point of departure is the internal reality of the bilingual student, rather than the external demands of district, state, and national mandates, it creates opportunities for emergent bilinguals by asking teachers to take a



critical stance toward top-down education policy. As a result, training in and implementation of translanguaging theory in schools must be collaborative, so that teachers can pool resources and strength to take risks that might be daunting to take on alone. Additionally, having outsiders such as university researchers become part of the school community builds trust and confidence as educators explore the new roles and possibilities that translanguaging offers (García & Kleyn, 2016c).

Kleyn (2016) identifies eight areas in which teacher education, for both preservice and inservice teachers, can be reformed to support translanguaging. These include:

- providing additional training for faculty
- creating course content that focuses on emergent bilinguals
- cultivating an inclusive classroom culture
- planning for translanguaging in curricula and assessments
- linking translanguaging to learning standards
- practicing translanguaging in action
- exploring how translanguaging applies to a variety of schools contexts
- developing a translanguaging social justice stance

These principles demonstrate how all teachers can benefit from professional development in translanguaging, and how it is not intended to be confined strictly to bilingual programs or ESL teachers. While her description seems most applicable to preservice teachers or teacher education in a university setting, her powerful vision for translanguaging illustrates how all teachers can use it to enhance their practice.

In this section, we reviewed how scholars are beginning to identify the misconceptions that many teachers have held about language and emergent bilinguals,

and identify ways to improve teacher training and professional development to correct this. Since translanguaging is a relatively new idea in language teaching and learning, it has not yet impacted many teacher training programs at the university level, and professional development opportunities have been limited. Additionally, we have seen two examples of effective partnerships between universities and districts to improve instruction for emergent bilinguals, one of which was explicitly based on translanguaging theory. In the following section, we connect this literature to the research question, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?*

### **Professional development for translanguaging: Next steps**

Translanguaging is a powerful theoretical framework with wide-ranging implications for all teachers and students. This is because language is the medium through which knowledge is created and transmitted, and that academic content knowledge is based on a linguistic foundation that teachers and students must effectively negotiate in order to be successful. Translanguaging theory, therefore, does not simply apply to emergent bilinguals or their teachers (Kleyn, 2016), but rather invites everyone to creatively and critically (Wei, 2011) use our languaging abilities and repertoires to collaborate in the construction of knowledge.

The scholarly literature on translanguaging is beginning to illustrate the conceptual understandings that teachers can use to transform their approach to language and multilingualism. At the same time, more resources are emerging to help teachers implement translanguaging principles and practices in their work. This literature forms a

basis for beginning to answer the question, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?*

However, implicit in this question is the problem of how to we bring this information and perspective to teachers, given all the pressures and forces to which they are subject within and beyond their schools. For it is not enough simply to identify what opportunities there are to improve instruction, but rather we must seek the best ways to take advantage of these opportunities. In this way, the available research on adult development can be a guide to creating the learning experiences that teachers need to learn about translanguaging and discover how to implement it in their schools and classrooms.

In fact, some of these efforts are already underway as partnerships between universities and schools districts (García & Kleyn, 2016b). Principles for effective training in translanguaging and key understandings that can be shared by all educators are beginning to emerge (García & Kleyn, 2016c; Kleyn, 2016). However, this work is still in its early stages, and since this project has only been taken up by a limited number of scholars in the last few years, a consensus has yet to emerge on what is the best way forward.

### **Summary**

Translanguaging is theoretical perspective on language based on the concepts of dynamic bilingualism, language repertoire, and the social construction of language boundaries. It invites us to view language--or rather, languaging--from the perspective of the people who use it rather than from the institutions that would protect or reproduce it. In the field of education specifically, it has a rich array of implications, such as

encouraging us to focus on the social practice of language, and to occupy a position aligned with social justice. It draws on long-established strategies such as scaffolding, but does so in such a way as to transform the classroom space and create new learning opportunities for students by returning control of the linguistic environment to them.

In order to bring a deeper understanding of the principles and practice of translanguaging, we need to understand how adults learn and what are the foundations of effective professional development for teachers. More specifically, we can learn from explorations of common misunderstandings about language in schools, as well as prior efforts to develop teachers' abilities and confidence with translanguaging through successful partnerships between districts and universities.

In the following section, we will see how a professional development experience can be designed and implemented to bring some of these resources and understandings to a school that has not been exposed to them. Drawing on the success of prior efforts and the literature available on translanguaging theory and practice, this project seeks to transform teachers' understanding of language and their students' languaging by answering the question, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?*

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

This chapter provides an overview of the methods and design of the project that addresses the question, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?* Beginning with an review of the translanguaging approach as a research paradigm, I then discuss the type of interactive, collaborative, peer-led professional development that I believe is most effective. I then describe the setting and audience of the project, and describe the project in greater detail. The final section is a timeline for completion of the project.

### Research paradigm

Translanguaging is both epistemic and practical--that is, it is a way of conceptualizing language, as well as a method that guides language instruction and use in classroom settings. Theoretically, translanguaging is based on the concept of linguistic repertoire, where the totality of language features to which a person has access are understood as part of an integrated, disaggregated system. This is in contrast to the traditional understanding of languages such as English, Spanish, etc., as bounded, separate entities. In the place of languages with strict boundaries as independent, abstract systems, translanguaging recognizes languaging, which is the process of using and combining the various language features to which a speaker has access, regardless of the abstract language system to which they supposedly belong, to create the meaning that is most appropriate to the context at hand.

Understanding translanguaging involves a switch from viewing a language as an abstract, bounded system that we master, to languaging as drawing on language features as available and appropriate. This challenges many sacred beliefs about language, such as mother tongue, L1 and L2, as well as the stability of concepts like English, Spanish, etc. These abstractions are useful up to a certain point, but they do not capture the ways in which bilingual speakers actually use, create, and acquire language, nor do they support emergent bilinguals to develop their competencies and access their full abilities in schools. Among the goals of this project is to open up a translanguaging space (Wei, 2011; García & Wei, 2014) that allows speakers to move freely between different codes, draw on their unique experiences and environments, and to combine language features in ways that are both creative and critical.

### **Choice of method**

The method of this project is an interactive, collaborative, peer-led professional development session. Adults learn best in an interactive environment where they can process and manipulate new information directly and actively as they learn it. Effective professional development is collaborative because adults working together allows them to build a shared understanding of new material, air concerns and answer questions, and work together to situate information in the specific contexts in which they work. Peer-led professional development breaks down the divide between audience and expert, allowing teachers to learn from each other, to feel free to make and learn from mistakes and misconceptions, and to establish a framework for continuing collaboration beyond the session.

**Setting and audience**

The setting for this project is the weekly professional development time after school on Mondays that most New York City public schools have implemented since the most recent teacher contract was ratified several years ago. More specifically, the project will take place at Lyons Community School in Brooklyn, New York, where I worked as an ESL teacher for four years, and from which I am currently on leave. Lyons is an unscreened public school that serves students in grades 6-12, most of whom are black and Latinx, and many of whom experience poverty--in other words, its demographic is typical of a New York City public school. The audience will be self-selecting non-ESL teachers from all grades and disciplines who want to learn more about serving emergent bilinguals. The presentation will take place over a period of 65 minutes during one day after school.

**Project description**

The project is an interactive slideshow on translanguaging, with presenter's notes and frequent breaks for interaction and discussion. Its purpose is to expand the participants' conceptual understanding of language and the processes by which language is used and learned, so that they may be more comfortable thinking of themselves as language teachers, regardless of their discipline. While I believe that both teachers and students have much to gain from the adoption of translanguaging practices, this presentation seeks primarily to introduce translanguaging as a theory and an approach to teaching. Using the slideshow as a point of departure for interaction, discussion, and reflection, I will introduce the concept of translanguaging and its conceptual foundations, drawing a contrast between this and traditional ways of thinking about languages. Then

we will explore some applications of translanguaging in educational contexts, and discuss how these enhance the learning environment. Finally, we will reflect on what we have learned, pose questions for the future, and speculate about how we might apply this new understanding moving forward.

**Timeline**

October: Complete background research on project; finish revisions to chapters 1-3.

November: Design and complete project. Contact school to arrange scheduling of professional development session.

December: Implement project. Complete chapter 4. Finalize and submit capstone.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reflection

This project was an attempt to answer the question, *what do non-ESL teachers need to know about translanguaging in order to support their emergent bilingual students?* While I have had experience as a student of translanguaging theory, and a trainer of adults, this was my first attempt to combine those two roles into a coherent project. This section reviews some of the challenges of implementing the project; the role of the literature review in its success; some of its limitations and shortcomings; and finally, some thoughts about how I might continue to do this kind of work.

Since I had some familiarity with my audience, having been a part of this particular school community for a number of years, I had some credibility at the start of the session. This put me at ease and made the whole process somewhat smoother. At the same time, my explicit goal was to challenge and possibly up-end some dearly-held and often unexamined assumptions about language, which can be not only difficult for all involved, but also counter-intuitive or even threatening. As a result, I found that I needed to open up even more space than I had anticipated for questioning and discussion within the presentation, to allow the participants to process the new information, or to make connections to prior learning or to students with whom they currently work. I also noticed that their questions and comments were unusually thought provoking in many cases, and merited careful consideration before moving on.

Completing the literature review was, in some ways, the best possible preparation for designing, creating, and implementing this project. Having a familiarity with the available literature on translanguaging helped me respond to participants' questions effectively. Texts such as García and Kleyn (2016) were inspirational in establishing a context for my work, helping me that I am not alone in bringing these ideas to teachers in the field.

Among the limitations of this project is the fact that it was a one-time professional development workshop, which, as a rule, are not nearly as effective as an ongoing series of workshops. I did offer to follow up with any participant who wanted more information, or simply to continue the conversation, and a few people expressed interest in that. While I do intend to keep my promise to them, that leaves most other participants without an obvious path to learning more about this topic in a collaborative way.

A project like this would definitely be more effective if it were part of a series of learning opportunities. Participants would be expected to do work outside of the workshops, such as reading professional texts, as well as implementing translanguaging classroom strategies as appropriate. The model of a professional learning community, one that is ongoing, decentralized, collaborative, and participant-driven could be a much better way to introduce translanguaging into schools in a meaningful and lasting way.

For me one of the main benefits of this project was gaining a deeper familiarity with translanguaging theory and becoming more comfortable in introducing it to teachers not yet acquainted with it. In this way, I hope to have more opportunities to bring this work to other schools and teachers, and to support them in evolving their professional practice. While I do not consider myself an expert on this topic, it is something I feel

passionate about and want to continue to study, and I also believe that the perspective on language implicit in translanguaging allows us to understand emergent bilinguals, and, indeed, all students, in a more realistic and humane way. For this reason, I want to continue talking and thinking about this as much as possible, and make myself available as a resource to teachers and schools who want to evolve in this direction.

This chapter has reviewed the project after its completion, and assessed some of its challenges. I have also evaluated the usefulness of the literature review, as well as looked at some of the project's shortcomings. Additionally, I have imagined how I might improve this project to make it more effective, as well as how I might continue to work on these issues and bring this understanding to more teachers in the field.

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