Translanguaging *Tareas*: Emergent Bilingual Youth as Language Brokers for Homework in Immigrant Families

“**M**y mom wants to talk to you,” said eight-year-old Nico Saucedo as soon as he saw me. I was one of Nico’s regular tutors at the Mexican American Network of Students (MANOS) after-school homework assistance program (names of the program and participants are pseudonyms). I greeted his mother Evelyn and him, and then she said something to Nico in Spanish; he set down his backpack, opened it, and pulled out a piece of paper. He handed me his language arts spelling test from the previous week. The first thing I saw was the large 55% written across the top in red ink.

Twenty-eight-year old Evelyn had several questions and concerns to share with me about the score, and thankfully Nico was there to language broker between Spanish and English for us. I considered myself an emergent bilingual with regards to my Spanish, so I therefore depended on Nico to communicate with Evelyn. I looked over the exam to offer a quick analysis and suggest ways to improve his scores. I noticed two words omitting consonants (“baring”/“barin” and “cranky”/“craky”), two rearranged with consonants in different order (“protest”/“portest” and “market”/“martek”), and one word with an additional vowel (“wading”/“weading”). Nico’s teacher deducted 20 points for these misspelled words and another 25 points for incorrectly using the words he spelled correctly (“grasp,” “mar,” “billow,” “grumble,” and “glance”) in a sentence.

“Tell her that it looks like we need to practice with some of your consonants and writing sentences with your words.”

He said to Evelyn, “**Mami, Steve me dijo que . . . yo necesito ayuda con los . . . los conso—consonants y con mis sentences.”

Evelyn nodded and offered Nico the Spanish translation of consonant, *consonante*—a cognate she understood in the context of her son’s translation. Evelyn, though, wanted further translation of “sentences”: “¿consonantes y qué?”

Nico clarified: “Las lineas de las palabras.” (The lines of words.)


I wrote the word “sentences,” and Evelyn and Nico practiced it together, spelling it and using it in a sentence. Nico then further mediated communication between Evelyn and me when, as a trio, we strategized a plan for action: we agreed that together Nico, Evelyn, and a MANOS mentor would produce a weekly list of spelling words with their Spanish translations, along with short sentences in English with Spanish translations for Evelyn to practice. Evelyn proposed making the lists during the beginning of each week in order to allow enough time preparation for Friday exams. For the remainder of the session, I assisted Nico and Evelyn with his writing and math homework. When we finished, we practiced using both English and Spanish-English dictionaries and writing sentences from Nico’s vocabulary words for the current week, as well as for those words he misspelled on his previous exam.

I begin with this brief narration from the MANOS homework program to illustrate how parents, mentees, and mentors communicated with one another to extend group-learning activities involving interaction and cooperative leadership outside of a school setting (Orellana, 2009). Nico’s emergent bilingualism enacted through his language brokering, however, was not graded or assessed for proficiency, unlike his English spelling. If so, perhaps
his language brokering would have been rewarded for its intelligence, such as when he translated “sentence” metaphorically as a “line of words” into Spanish. Positioning students like Nico as emergent bilinguals rather than as English language learners reorients language standardization from deficit models to linguistic abilities and creative practices like language brokering (García & Kleifgen, 2010). Emergent bilinguals are adept at leveraging their linguistic abilities in myriad ways as they develop flexible, discursive resources to optimize their abilities to make meaning for themselves and audiences through their translanguaging (García, 2012).

Emergent bilinguals expand their translanguaging repertoires as they develop stocks of practical experiences from which to strategically respond to schoolwork and academic uses of language (García, 2009; García & Kleifgen, 2010; García, Flores, & Woodley, 2012). Translanguaging treats the hybrid sense-making practices of emergent bilinguals as additive for language development, and strongly counters subtractive English-only pedagogies (García, 2011a; García & Kleifgen, 2010). Even when encountering monolingualized language arts homework, emergent bilingual students strategize from their stocks of translanguaging practices to make meaning in English. Outside the MANOS program, emergent bilingual youth had plenty of opportunities to practice translanguaging as they regularly helped to negotiate English for their parents. The MANOS youths’ literacy repertoires effectively increased through communication about homework in their families. Mentees expanded their abilities to translate and interpret complex information in their family lives that would never be fully evaluated in their schooling (García, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Valdés, 2003), but that schools seemed to expect or even demand in terms of family involvement and real-world relevance.

The ability to language broker is an expression of bilingual competency; in order to understand better the social and academic benefits language brokering might have for emergent bilingual children, we must appreciate how it and other such day-to-day translanguaging practices function in the lives of multilingual families negotiating monolingual homework. Analyzing these moments of homework help narrated as translanguaging events provides glimpses into how emergent bilinguals respond to homework by engaging their bilingual repertoires. In this article, I portray two translanguaging events that demonstrate how MANOS mentees, their mothers, and adult mentors collaboratively enacted dynamic forms of bilingualism when responding to English language homework assignments. The translanguaging events offer insight into translanguaging practices and parental involvement in an intimate setting with an attitude that embraces bilingualism amid classroom Standard English language learning constraints (Hernández-Zamora, 2010; Murillo, 2012).

Translanguaging and MANOS

Youth Translanguaging Homework: Practices, Tactics, Strategies

 Barely recognized or integrated into school-based language arts curricula, the translanguaging practices performed by young emergent bilinguals have highly valued community-based functions (García, 2011a; García, 2011c). Language brokering is one such practice—a fundamental one to understanding the engagement of social relations in bilingual and bicultural experiences of families in immigrant, language-minoritized communities. Language brokers are translation liaisons who influence exchanges between individuals (Orellana, 2009). As participants, they assume resourceful and influential communicative agency.

Language-brokering research (Guerra, 1998; Orellana, 2009; Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido, 2001, 2003; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Tse, 1995; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002) has examined the complex maneuvers of youths who translate, interpret, and mediate oral and written texts during adult-to-adult conversations. Dorner,
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My fieldwork occurred at the MANOS site, in the basement of a Catholic church located in one of New York City’s outer boroughs. The church donated the unused space to MANOS for its program site. Historically, the vicinity had been the receiving area for successive waves of immigrants. At the time of this study, the neighborhood was one of New York City’s Mexican immigrant barrios. Like several Little Mexicos in the city, Mexican immigrants initially concentrated in the middle of this predominantly Puerto Rican quarter (Smith, 2006, pp. 19–20, 30–34). Because of the racial diversity of New York City, the boroughs’ Little Mexicos were often ethnically and racially diverse, but they tend to emerge around areas with relatively recent Spanish-speaking migrants from Latin America (Bergad, 2005).

By 2010, Mexicans composed 14.3% of the total Latino population, with a growth rate of nearly 10% between 1990 and 2010 (Bergad, 2011). According to 2000 Census data, close to 60% of the New York Mexican population 25 years or older had not completed high school. In 2008, this number was at 54% (Ramos, Franklin, Suleiman Gonzalez, & Abina-Sotomayor, 2011, p. 8). By 2010, the amount had decreased to 49% (Bergad, 2013). Though these statistics demonstrate significant improvement, they also justify the importance of studying grassroots programs like MANOS that serve the growing, underserved Mexican immigrant community of New York City.

The MANOS mentors varied in age from 16 to late 50s. The majority were young professionals in their twenties who volunteered once or twice a week. Several arrived to the program directly after working or taking classes, and a few came from distant parts of other boroughs. The vast majority of the mentors were Mexican Americans and first-generation college students. Several mentors were from different regions of the United States attending college in New York City. There was also a steady stream of local high school students and international university students meeting service-learning and/or community service requirements. All mentors spoke and wrote English; some were more fluent in Spanish than others. Four of the

Orellana, & Li-Grining (2007) offer one of the only studies to document the academic benefits for language brokers. They find in their sample “higher levels of language brokering were significantly linked to better scores on fifth- and sixth-grade standardized reading tests” (p. 451). This suggests that language brokering, among other translanguaging practices, could be further emphasized in elementary schools that seek to empower students and acknowledge the strengths of emergent bilingualism, particularly in group learning situations. Emergent bilinguals build cooperative group skills when working in teams where their translanguaging practices are valued. Their translanguaging repertoires position them as leaders, able to respond effectively for communication.

MANOS: Serving a Community Need

This article draws from a larger research project into how emergent bilingualism transformed family relations and structured educational ambitions among MANOS families and mentors. Ten first-generation, Mexican-origin immigrant families (10 mothers, 22 children) living in New York City were the focus of my study, all members of MANOS—a small, underfunded, self-sustained educational mentoring program whose core of 11 dedicated volunteers were also study participants. The grassroots organization offered free after-school tutoring services while also promoting active family involvement in schooling and positive views toward ethnic and linguistic identities. As a researcher and MANOS mentor, I followed the organization’s ups and downs for six years as it struggled with day-to-day operations. I collected over 3,000 pages of field notes and interview transcripts, 85 minutes of video footage, 160 hours of audio recordings, 500 photographs, and 300 photocopies of student homework. I coded this data according to discourse features, particularly moments of language brokering among other translanguaging events.

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eleven mentors in the study claimed Spanish as their heritage language. For the remaining seven, Spanish was their second language. For one mentor, Mandarin was the heritage language, Spanish her second, and English her third. Mentors who had the capacities to use Spanish when communicating with MANOS families did so. Children of parents also helped with language-brokering duties to parents and young children who had little comprehension of English.

**Brokering Homework & Audiences during Translanguaging Events**

As previously mentioned, the language-brokering practices involved with homework at MANOS were translanguaging events. The translanguaging event is an analytical unit situated in local contexts where texts are integral to bilingual exchanges and collaborative interpretations. I recorded translanguaging events at MANOS, examining instances of language brokering through the data. I used the contextual frame of the translanguaging event to situate literacy activities between specific actors in local moments when different players pool their bilingual resources strategically. Heath (1983) defines such communicative actions as “literacy events”—analytical units in which writing, reading, or speaking mediate participants’ agencies and relationships (p. 200).

For this study, I want to reframe Heath’s literacy event as a translanguaging event—a multilingual collaborative practice shuttling between

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### NOW ACT!

#### Homework Strategies for Translanguaging Homework

Here are three pedagogical strategies educators could employ right away to translanguage language arts courses. These methods seek to utilize and promote students’ emergent bilingualism as sources for study, and to increase family engagement when conducting student-oriented research projects in communities (García, 2012).

1. Educators must acknowledge the academic benefits of studying emergent bilingual students’ autobiographies. Writing courses at all levels stand to gain by incorporating ethnography and autoethnography projects that take students into communities to conduct field research as homework. Students’ interviews should be transcribed with attention to accents and translations when necessary. To further gain social perspectives, have students engage in ethnographic homework projects involving groups of students of different backgrounds, each taking part in researching the homes and languages of classmates for writing. Students would practice reflexive critical thinking skills, resulting in relevant language arts homework projects rooted in students’ lived experiences.

2. Homework assignments that offer language minority parents more elaborate instructions or homework assistance guides can help to foster and express appreciation for parents in their children’s educational trajectories. With such guides, parents could share the information with mentors for homework help. Likewise, more detailed teacher comments on report cards would also be beneficial, allowing language brokers and mentors to assist in plans of action for family involvement for success. Teachers must be willing to accept that language minority parents are co-teachers of their children.

3. Emergent bilinguals perform translanguaging acts—code-meshed ways of languaging that skillfully articulate identity and power relations. Emergent bilingual students bring language brokering skills to all classrooms. Encouraging language brokering inside classrooms is the first step in recognizing it as a translanguaging tool. As multilingualism and globalization continue to shape one another, all students will develop multilingual proficiencies. One possibility for approaching this as a pedagogical opportunity is to affirm the positive attributes related to children’s translanguaging, as well as the positive attributes of children’s emergent bilingualism, ultimately developing a greater appreciation for these skills in curricula.
languages while responding to texts and situated in local contexts involving emergent bilinguals (García, 2011a, 2012). I treat language brokering as one translanguaging tactic that MANOS mentees enacted as they, parents, and mentors collaborated while doing homework.

When considering the triadic configurations between MANOS families and its volunteer mentors who, like myself, were not fluent in Spanish, language brokering established connections between mentors and mothers. This allowed the mentees welcome bilingual participation with adults and participation in a form of community membership demonstrating positive school values through role modeling. Emergent bilingual youth at MANOS also came into contact with bilingual mentors, and this opened up the opportunity to model translanguaging practices.

The two following examples of translanguaging events offer glimpses at how agents and actors enact translanguaging tactics while responding to homework assignments. The examples demonstrate how MANOS mentees and mentors extended emergent bilingualism to monolingual parents. In each translanguaging event, I offer a brief analysis identifying points or spaces for pedagogical intervention.

Translanguaging Event One

Reina completed the secundaria (middle school) in Puebla, Mexico, and then went directly to work to help support her widowed and disabled father. She migrated to California in 1998 at 19 years old and subsequently moved to the east coast in 2002. She eventually earned her General Educational Development (G.E.D.) diploma in Spanish at a community college. She had more educational credentials than most parents at MANOS, but she still felt frustrated when helping her children with their homework in English. She was concerned about her son, fourth-grader Felix. To Reina, he seemed unwilling to take school seriously. For his part, Felix was aggravated with his mother’s concerns. They were frustrated with one another.

On this day of homework help, 22-year-old Liana found herself mentoring Felix and Reina in preparation for his upcoming English language arts exam. Felix was to compose essays organized from writing webs. The method of organization of formal writing was not something that came with everyday use and practice outside of school contexts, so it was going to be a lesson for both mother and son. Though Liana was bilingual, she encouraged Felix’s translanguaging practices when doing homework. She understood the importance of both observing and modeling language brokering: she only stepped in with assistance when Felix had difficulty.

The content for Felix’s first writing homework assignment asked him to think back to his earlier years at school to consider what he had learned since he was in kindergarten. It was a reflective essay, requesting three examples and a writing web. Liana, a psychology undergraduate, used writing webs for her own writing assignments. She also had a few years of tutoring experience at MANOS and could reapply her use of webs to working with Felix and Reina.

According to Liana, her main purpose in demonstrating writing webs was to “help him with keeping his ideas in order, and also to help him brainstorm and connect ideas that are alike. That’s important for essays, so it’s good to know at his age” (personal communication, April 25, 2011). Felix had to compose two essays this day, however, and Liana saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate one example of a writing web, and to allow Felix and Reina to try their hands at collaborating on the second. It was a smart way for Liana to step away and allow Reina to put to practice her observations of Liana’s strategies. Liana jokingly told me after the tutoring session that Reina was “maybe paying more attention than Felix” (personal communication, April 25, 2011).

As Felix generated different skills he’d been learning since he was five, Reina contributed to the brainstorming by throwing out ideas in Spanish. Felix responded in Spanish and English, but only to himself, as he knew Liana spoke Spanish.
At different points, he also asked Liana questions in Spanish. In English, Liana instructed Felix to make a series of circles from one drawn at the center. Felix explained to his mother that the web was a way for him “para elegir ideas para escribir mi ensayo” (to choose ideas to write my essay). He indicated that the lines of the web connected the essay’s thematic main points to its supporting ideas.

Felix drew numerous lines and circles connecting from the central circle. Liana stopped him then, telling him to wait, because he had to think of ideas before filling in the circles. Liana was going to allow Felix to keep the excess of circles he had drawn, but Reina thought it a better idea if he erased and started over, which Felix did (see Fig. 1).

Liana modeled filling in the circles. She wrote “5 years old” at the center. She asked Felix about something he learned when he was five, and she also made the suggestion to think back to kindergarten. As quickly as Felix brainstormed “write neater,” “how to do addition and subtraction,” “tie my shoes,” “how to ride a horse,” and “read,” Liana lined these up at the top of the page. She continued with “count to 100”; “clean house—mop—toys”; “how to carry [sic] sister—mom showed me how—hard to take care of kids when small”; “how to be brave—horses.” Felix rode a horse when he was five, and that was an important event for him.

How to carry his sister was an addition from Reina, and this is why Felix included the line “mom showed me how.” Reina contributed to each support topic her son generated, asking him questions in Spanish, which he translated into English for the web, while also seeking advice from Liana in English. When Reina had questions about definitions of words or pronunciations, she asked Liana in Spanish, to which both Felix and she responded in English.

Felix completed the essay using his web with minimal help from Liana, aside from a proofreading at the end where she found some small mistakes with his spelling. Reina observed to make sure that Felix’s penmanship remained legible, “en letra bonita,” and when it was deemed sloppy by her, she enforced corrections. Reina also softly read his essay to herself when he completed it.

The focus of Felix’s second homework essay was to depict a hypothetical meeting with anyone the author wanted to know and to explain why that person was chosen. Immediately, Felix drew several circles before generating ideas to fill them. Before beginning the project, Liana—in Spanish—made sure that both Reina and Felix understood what the essay asked him to write about. In Spanish, Felix and Reina discussed and generated ideas in response to the prompt. Felix decided on his great grandfather. Reina was pleased with this decision, as it was one of her suggestions. She reminded Felix he was named after his bisabuelo—a detail previously unknown to Felix.

The core of the essay, as the center of the web read, was “Meet my great grandfather [Felix] as a little boy.” Felix’s second web was composed by mother and son with minimal input from Liana.
This translanguaging event demonstrates Felix bridging interaction between Reina, Liana, and his homework. The homework assignment required language brokers, and Felix took the lead to engage his audience. Felix language brokered for Reina by explaining the assignment’s English content. Her previous experiences with writing essays for her G.E.D. had prepared her with knowledge of similar genre forms. Felix used language brokering tactically to communicate the assignment’s content, thus presenting her the opportunity to teach her son about his family history. Reina’s involvement became central to Felix’s assignment about his great grandfather. Liana, the experienced homework mentor, encouraged the subject matter and Felix’s language brokering, as she seemed to intuit it would be necessary for his to draw from the language strengths of his emergent bilingualism.

As Liana modeled the form of structured free-writing, Felix and Reina both learned by example and practice. Felix also benefitted from the collaboration with his mother during the homework session. What he learned about his family history was a “fund of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) that Reina taught him, a lesson expressed with expertise. As they completed the assignment, first in webbing and then in essay form, the trio continued to compose the project, interspersed with some small talk in English and Spanish.

**Translanguaging Event Two**

Seven-year-old Flor was practicing her writing with her mother Linda and MANOS mentor Amy. Flor had completed her packet weeks back, but she still came to MANOS at Linda’s behest so she could practice writing.

When they finished with the essays, an energized Felix thanked Liana for her help and said he was going to show his father Ernesto the essay he wrote about his grandfather, because, according to Felix, “It will make him happy because my dad loves my bisabuelo.” Reina was also pleased with Felix’s response to the assignment. Both Reina and Liana agreed that he appeared motivated and curious. Liana credited this to the subject matter of family genealogy and stories.
practices of MANOS youth as they negotiated meanings with emergent bilingual parents. “I like watching the kids act like teachers when they speak Spanish, and they practice helping their parents, which is big,” Amy said (personal interview, June 2011). Amy had recently graduated with an economics degree but was considering pursuing teaching because of her MANOS mentoring experience.

On this August evening, Amy asked Flor to write about her summer, suggesting that she list some of the highlights so she could read about them. As with the previous translanguaging event with Felix and Reina, Flor and Linda brainstormed ideas in Spanish before Flor composed in English. Figure 3 illustrates the sentences Flor wrote.

Flor’s composition illustrates her translanguaging as she inventively captures in writing how she makes sense of what she hears. Her spelling narrates the phonetic approximations she used when “sounding out” the words as she wrote them. Multilingual tutor Amy was familiar enough with Flor’s writing to see the strengths of her tactics without stopping her as she spelled words her own way. She did not correct Flor as she composed her lines. Rather, she allowed Flor to continue translanguaging as she wrote. Amy, like Liana in the previous example, also invited writing as a vehicle to discovery while guiding mentees with academic language practices. When Flor completed her text, Amy was able to negotiate the sense of the text as she read it aloud to Linda and Flor.

Flor language brokered for Linda when Amy spoke, but she didn’t language broker for Amy when Linda spoke; she was aware that Amy understood her mother’s Spanish. As she read, however, Amy needed clarification of two words—“canos” and “ganos.”

“Changos,” said Flor, meaning “monkeys” in English.

“¿Changos?” asked Linda.

“Sí mami, me encanta los changos” (yes, mom, I love the monkeys), said Flor. “They are my favorites,” she said to Amy.

Linda, Flor, and Amy shared smiles.

Amy asked, “And how do you say chango in English?”

“Monkey!” Flor said.

Linda demonstrated how to write chango for Flor as Amy observed. Flor watched her closely and, on her own, imitated what she saw. Linda spoke each letter as Flor wrote. When Flor finished this task, she wrote “monkey,” saying each letter aloud with Linda and Amy. Flor then passed her pencil to Linda and asked her to copy what she had modeled.

“I can help my mom, too,” Flor said to Amy.

Flor’s English literacy had increased a great deal over the course of the previous school year. Amy had watched Flor develop as an emergent bilingual, though it took her some time initially to get familiar with Flor’s writing and the phonics of what she believed Flor heard when she spelled words. Amy noted that Flor’s sentences made grammatical sense to her, and that Flor had begun to capitalize proper nouns, use more punctuation, and write fewer of her letters backwards (Aug. 2010–Dec. 2011). Amy had mentored Flor for a few years, as well as her older siblings, 13-year-old Jesús and 11-year-old Marisol. Through her sustained engagement with the MANOS program, Amy had learned alongside Flor and Linda and become familiar with her mentee’s literacy practices.

As for the English words that Flor struggled with (“sanar”/summer, “Brob”/“Bras”/Bronx, “hodbro”/
Linda had an idea: she made flashcards for herself that indicated how to pronounce the words with Spanish phonemes, including phonetic inflections over certain clusters of sounds, as well as other marginal comments (Kalmar, 2001). For the word harbor, for example, she wrote on her note card *jar bur* with the English spelling below. She did the same for *took*, which she wrote as *tuc*, approximating as best she could with Spanish notation a guide for English pronunciation. This strategy allowed her to more finely articulate on the card what the words should sound like when pronounced aloud, thereby, in some respect, acknowledging that the English speaker’s “h” is pronounced much as the Spanish speaker’s “j.” She made cards for several additional words that Amy noted gave Flor difficulty, along with small one- to three-word definitions written in Spanish. She worked on some of these at MANOS with Flor, and again later when they went home. She used these cards to practice in spelling drills with her daughter.

The creative expressions of *jar bur* and *hodbro* for harbor exemplify translanguaging tactics that

**FOR INQUISTEMITIVE MINDS**

These resources provide different approaches to incorporating and analyzing translanguaging practices, such as language brokering, paraphrasing, code-switching, and translation. The films and podcasts offer the perspectives of emergent bilingual youths.

**Kid Translators**

*From a Morning Edition* newscast by Richard Gonzales (2003): The story reported on California Assembly Bill 292, legislation that would have prohibited the practice of using children as translators for their immigrant parents in business transactions.


**Medical Language Brokers**

This *Youth Radio* podcast (2006) also responded to California Assembly Bill 292, but from the perspective of a youth language broker. The reporter also interviewed the bill’s author, Assemblyman Leland Yee.


This related *Teach Youth Radio* (2007) script for a performance piece dramatizing language brokering in the medical context further contextualizes the pressures of youth speaking between and for adults. Also included are ideas and suggestions for lesson plans.


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exercise phonics. Emergent bilinguals are attuned to phonology and have acute awareness for accents. Flor and Linda both composed what they heard phonetically, each drawing from their experiential knowledge about sounds of English and Spanish. Likewise, they both gained valuable translanguaging experiences at the MANOS program that would expand their creative repertoires. Flor’s translanguaging tactics for engaging her mother’s English bilingualism were modeled after Amy’s example. Flor imitated Amy as she quizzed her mother and “assigned” small pieces of homework for her to complete alongside her. Linda, too, enjoyed learning alongside her daughter, and she made space for increased participation through her flashcards—an intelligent strategy that would help her to help her daughter.

Amy’s informal assignment was monolingualized in its framing, but the collaboration between mother, daughter, and mentor happened collectively through translanguaging. Instances of Flor’s language brokering were encouraged by Amy, as was Linda’s participation in Flor’s composition. It was important for Amy to demonstrate to Linda how deficit views of Flor’s writing could overlook the strengths of her emergent bilingualism and her active engagement. For Linda, this translanguaging event illustrated models for collaboration and positive views for multilingualism, despite academic monolingual constraints. As Linda learned to quiz her daughter with English words, she also found ways to increase her English vocabulary and pronunciation. Flor offered her enjoyment of this as she actively participated, noting, “I can help my mom, too.” Amy modeled the sociocultural learning practices of mentorship by helping Flor with homework as Linda observed, actively participated, and even modeled further skills.

Schooling Values and School Values

These two translanguaging events from the MANOS after-school program demonstrate how emergent bilingual youth involved their mothers and mentors in their homework assignments while expanding their mothers’ bilingual and biliterate development as well as their own. These triads

Teaching Linguistic Tolerance for Immigrant Students

In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 227, mandating that California English learners be taught overwhelmingly in English through immersion programs not normally expected to exceed one year. The short film Immersion (2009) narrates the predicament of a creative emergent bilingual student coping with language differences at school. There are accompanying lesson plan materials available on the film’s official website.


Translanguaging Guide for Educators

An educator’s guide developed by the City University of New York/New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals funded by the New York State Education Department. The guide offers practical assistance on how to use translanguaging to help facilitate learning content for emergent bilingual students.


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Mentored homework interventions are zones of proximal development—in either after-school programs or school–community collaborations—that applaud more inclusive appreciation for emergent bilingual families’ translanguaging literacies.

At MANOS, parent involvement increased when guided by culturally sensitive mentors who were aware of the pedagogical tools that leverage translanguaging practices. For teachers, this could potentially reshape how we think about homework that involves language minority parents and their increased access to collaboration and meaningful homework participation. Meeting the families’ homework needs often proved tricky, however. Mentors were sometimes not aware of tutoring strategies like constructing writing webs, eliciting free writing, or modeling effective reading practices. They also were not always trained as educators, and most had little to no teaching experience. Experience with schooling as students seemed to be their entryway into helping mentees with schoolwork, but after volunteering for several sessions and becoming familiar with mentees and parents, mentors began to develop tutoring strategies. At the beginning of each fall semester, a group of seasoned MANOS mentors also conducted a workshop on helping with homework. The sessions provided role-playing games and also discussions about discipline, time management, educational games, and bilingualism.

In the case of the MANOS program, mentors encouraged pride in students’ home language and translanguaging tactics. The introduction of school language within homes tends to cause strains for parents and children because of miscommunications between realms, further distancing the mistaken perceptions of division between the two contexts (Orellana, 2009). Without assurance and mentorship, youth language brokers might turn to the dominant language and internalize a perceived “lack” in the home language, imposing a type of self-censorship that leads to a diminished reliance on the home language as a form of everyday communication. MANOS was a safe space, distant enough from schools to allow for immigrant mothers to learn about schoolwork without having to
interact with school officials who sometimes intimidated them.

The ease of speaking in Spanish, of course, facilitated this most. The setting for language brokering at MANOS involved bilingual youth mediating institutional and family communication in a constellation of homework texts in Spanish and English, which in turn produced constellations of effects in their academic translanguaging tactics. MANOS youth felt proud facilitating communication about their homework with their parents. Recognizing and encouraging this sense of pride is of the utmost importance because it fosters positive academic attitudes for emergent bilingual families.

Suggestions

For busy teachers, there are a number of relevant ways to incorporate translanguaging practices into teaching. Assignments that ask students to gather field notes of language uses in their homes and communities can invite diverse participants as informants, including individuals who speak, read, and write different languages. Teams of students taking on projects in which they explore the languages and literacies of their classmates have much to offer when sharing language differences among the classroom community. Students called upon to translanguage fieldwork data in discussion workshops demonstrate to fellow fieldworkers how tactics to interpret language are enhanced with bilingualism. Similarly, assignments that exhibit translations encourage bilingual participation from students. Foreign language videos or news clips that include English subtitles—for example—are excellent texts for analyzing and critiquing translations. For emergent bilingual students, this could invite their participation and expertise, while also exposing the entire class to the translanguaging practices of their classmates.

Educators who recognize the emergent bilingual repertoires of students acknowledge an additive, translingual approach to language learning (Canagarajah, 2013). We can structure assignments and units that seek to encourage translanguaging events by inviting students to language broker, translate, paraphrase, and code-switch, reflexively calling attention to language differences for discussion and analysis. The translingual view may remain contrary to English or Spanish purists, but among immigrant families, it legitimates emergent bilingualism.

In terms of encouraging and inviting parent involvement with homework, the largest obstacle teachers face is finding time to engage parents. Accommodating schedules that may differ from the school calendar/schedule is a barrier. The easiest way to overcome this is to research and reach out to local community centers that offer bilingual assistance, thus fostering relationships with them. This is, of course, easier said than done, but strong links between community organizations, schools, and families are necessary for informing all parties about educational opportunities and community building projects. I advocate for further community-based research that examines the translanguaging practices of families in different educational contexts outside schools.

There is much that happens at the community level that educators may overlook. For example, MANOS mentees learned about the social relations between Spanish and English as they worked in a New York City basement in the barrio. Future teachers would gain great experience by partaking in service-learning courses where they engage with the translanguaging practices of communities outside school settings. In terms of intersections of life and study, ethnographic projects exploring student communities, languages, accents, and literacies encapsulate methods with which future teachers can discover data from students’ communities that is ideal for analysis and enriches pedagogical reflection.

University preservice courses that implement ethnographic methods with volunteer service-learning in communities like MANOS can connect future teachers to local communities. This also solves the problem of offering quality personnel for the community program—personnel who could potentially assist in the training and retention
of current and future volunteers. What this does not solve, however, is sustained engagement with community programs after the semester ends or the turnover of students at the term’s end. Ultimately, the goal would be to extend the relations between preservice college students and their potential students’ families and communities. Future teachers will learn about and analyze students’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), and/or the bodies of their everyday knowledge learned through participation in home and community practices. One of Paulo Freire’s first tenets was for critical educators to prepare themselves for critical teaching in a community by first researching the languages and conditions of students in order to generate lessons and themes of syllabi. Broadening this, I propose a personal connection with the communities one teaches, a two-way sense of confianza, or trust.

There is an urgent need to have confianza between schools and community programs. Community programs such as MANOS deserve institutional support, while at the same time maintaining operational distance from those institutions providing support. Off-site organizations should promote tutor training with teacher training while also engaging with community needs in a safe space distinct from educational institutions. I recommend that future teachers serve as tutors/mentors while also conducting ethnographic case studies of families learning to navigate school systems in an attempt to inform the instructors of tomorrow about the everyday realities language minority families face in monolingual-oriented schools today. I also urge immigrant community organizations to reach out to teachers and schools to advocate and collaborate in establishing productive programming for their youth.

References


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