



Education Review

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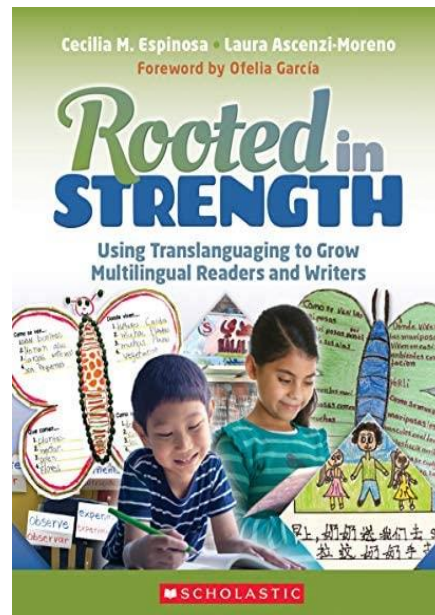
Espinosa, C. M., & Ascenzi-Moreno, L. (2021). *Rooted in strength: Using translanguaging to grow multilingual readers and writers*. Scholastic.

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In the last decade, bilingual education researchers and practitioners have increasingly embraced the concept of translanguaging: one perspective of multilingualism that focuses on the dynamic and fluid linguistic practices of multilingual people (Garcia, 2009). While teachers might attend workshops about the value of this asset-based view of students' language practices, curriculum materials usually default to deficit-based or monolingual approaches to teaching reading and writing. How, teachers might wonder, does translanguaging connect with literacy, and what can such pedagogy mean in classrooms today?



In *Rooted in Strength*, Cecilia M. Espinosa and Laura Ascenzi-Moreno create a supportive guide for practitioners that applies this linguistic theory to the day-to-day literacy routines of elementary schools. The authors keep in mind that teachers, under the many constraints of education policy and daily instruction, need resources that address not only *why* a practice is important, but also *what* it means in a classroom and *how* to enact it. The examples throughout each chapter arrive just as the reader might be asking, *But what would that really look like?*

In the foreword, Ofelia Garcia validates the barriers that may prevent teachers from applying a translanguaging ideology to their instruction: external mandates, rigid schedules, and scripted curricula that barely

acknowledge multilingualism. She praises Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno for “[throwing] teachers a lifeline to help them ensure that the [translanguaging] corriente is a vibrant resource in the classroom” (p. 6). The book’s authors, both New York-based literacy researchers and teacher educators with bilingual classroom experience, integrate linguistic and literacy theories with resources for instruction that are grounded in the words, imagination, and brilliance of children. While the authors’ primary experience is with Spanish and English languages, they honor the diversity of emergent bilingual learners by featuring speakers of many languages and language varieties, including Tagalog, Arabic, Polish, and Mandarin. The authors also resist the confinement of translanguaging to schools that are explicitly named as dual language or bilingual. Examples including English as a New Language lessons, monolingual classrooms, and early exit/transitional programs demonstrate how all models—including those with monolingual teachers—can incorporate translanguaging practices. This flexibility is essential given the widely varying contexts in which emergent bilingual children learn. The case studies will reach teachers who might otherwise think that multilingual learning and translanguaging do not apply to them.

The book is divided into three parts, each elaborating on a specific theme related to translanguaging in the literacy classroom. In the first part, Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno acknowledge the diversity of emergent bilingual students and assert that teachers can expand and support students’ language practices as “a strength that drives literacy” (p. 19). They emphasize that literacy includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as multimodal practices such as drawing or dramatizing, and they detail how teachers can plan in ways that invite translanguaging throughout lessons. This type of structural planning is portrayed as inseparable from intentional practices of self-reflection. The authors include artfully presented and clearly outlined “actions” a teacher can take, such as illustrating a portrait of one’s own use of languages and language varieties. The integration of personal self-reflection with instructional steps is less common in practitioner texts than a focus on one aspect or the other, and it sends teachers the important message that literacy learning is holistic for all participants in a classroom community.

In the second part of the book, Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno define reading as a dynamic process that begins with the reader and the rich linguistic repertoire and language environment in which an emergent bilingual child lives. Whether in daily practices such as read-alouds, or in the complicated and often deficit-focused world of assessment, the authors illustrate how a recognition of students’ multilingual strengths translates into a shift in everyday practice as well as a shift in values. Lesson descriptions, book recommendations, and charts provide connections between the theory of translanguaging and the dynamic sense-making of the reading process. These resources are flexible enough to be adapted for different program models, grade levels, and regions, yet specific enough to be immediately useful to teachers. For example, a table outlining “A Multilingual Strength-Based Framework for Formative Reading Assessments” (p. 133) provides

adaptations for a teacher assessing a child reading aloud, such as adding a column to make notes about whether errors are language-related, then planning next teaching steps to support the student's oral as well as written language. These are brief-time investments yet high-impact adjustments that a busy teacher can quickly implement, which is especially crucial as teachers and schools recover from draining years of online and hybrid instruction.

In the final part, Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno outline ways to use and build on students' full linguistic repertoires using a philosophical orientation toward writing instruction and adapted daily practices. Readers are invited to ask how pre-packaged writing curricula may convey that writing is about following a teacher's directions or using standard grammar and conventions. The authors suggest to start instead by considering the writer and the role and meaning of writing in emergent bilingual children's lives. They detail the role of translanguaging in writing assessment and show how different aspects of instruction can incorporate a translanguaging pedagogy. For example, during a writing lesson, students might be seated strategically with partners who can mutually support translanguaging, and the teacher might discuss how authors of certain genres (e.g., poetry) draw on all their linguistic resources. In this section, the authors also broaden ideas of what writing might include when teachers view children holistically, suggesting that illustrations, drama, or computer coding could be part of writing tasks.

Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno note that "Meaningful change in literacy instruction starts with the recognition that emergent bilinguals come to our classrooms whole, and with their own histories and resources" (p. 211). This argument captures the book's greatest strength: the deep embodiment of a shift in mindset that could fundamentally change how teachers view emergent bilingual students, which then becomes "*the impetus* for instructional change" (p. 210). After the book's tour through literacy practices with a consistent asset-based stance toward multilingualism, readers will understand what it means to recognize emergent bilinguals as children with unique strengths, and not as a group needing remediation. This expansive perspective and centering of translanguaging practices represents an attempt to re-envision the education of emergent bilingual students.

Although the authors briefly acknowledge different schools of thought about early reading instruction, the book could more directly support teachers in situating translanguaging ideologies among the practices promoted by the science of reading. This interdisciplinary body of research emphasizes evidence-based practices for reading instruction, including but not limited to the importance of systematic and explicit phonics instruction in English (see also Ehri, 2020; Shanahan, 2020). Teachers working to shift their instructional methods, and those who might be explicitly told *not* to use certain practices described in this volume (e.g., the three cueing systems, guided reading, writers' workshop) may need more guidance to reconcile the book's powerful messages with different instructional approaches. In an article in *The Reading Teacher*, Ascenzi-Moreno (2020) detailed how a bilingual teacher helped a student name the word-solving strategy of breaking a

multisyllabic Spanish word into chunks, then applied the same strategy in English. Supplementing *Rooted in Strength* with similar illustrations of how teachers can be responsive to emergent bilinguals while applying science of reading-endorsed practices would extend the book's usefulness. These tensions will be unavoidable for teachers in the coming years, and learning to navigate them is an essential part of bringing a translanguaging stance to literacy classrooms while also supporting foundational reading skills.

Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno's neatly organized book provides a daily resource for teachers as well as a deep reimagining of how the literacy education of emergent bilinguals could celebrate and build on their strengths. Pre-service and in-service teachers from early childhood through fifth grade will find the book applicable and helpful to their practice, as will teacher educators who prepare candidates to teach literacy in culturally and linguistically sustaining ways. *Rooted in Strength* answers important questions of how translanguaging can move from the abstract to the concrete, and from oral language to literacy. Yet the book also invites the reader to think critically about new questions: to ask why such a shift could be an essential part of equitable education, and what that shift would truly mean for literacy instruction and beyond. The book both guides teachers and allows for imagination, building open possibilities of classrooms where multilingual readers and writers grow, express, connect, and enjoy literacy as a part of who they are.

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