

Book reviews

ROOTED IN STRENGTH: USING TRANSLANGUAGING TO GROW MULTILINGUAL READERS AND WRITERS

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Scholarship on the normalising of multilingualism has been increasing over recent decades, to the extent that it has been referred to as the ‘multilingual turn’ (e.g., Conteh & Meyer, 2014; May, 2014). Translanguaging has played a significant role in this turn through its active focus on leveraging the language resources students bring with them to class. Translanguaging as a pedagogy is especially popular in academic literature, and there has been a need for books that offer practical guidance for teachers. This publication is therefore a timely one. The connections between theory and practice are very clear and, importantly, useful for classroom teaching. The foreword is written by Ofelia García, a seminal scholar in the field of translanguaging, and the two authors have both had experience as bilingual (Spanish) teachers. The book is written for different kinds of teachers, ranging from those who have only a few emergent bilingual students to teachers in bilingual education programs.

Perhaps the most significant message of translanguaging, and one that comes through very clearly throughout the book, is the need to put the language background and practices of the child at the centre of their learning. The context of *Rooted in Strength* is the United States, and Spanish is dominant in the illustrations and explanations of a translanguaging approach. However, the authors clarify that emergent bilinguals are a diverse group with many different named languages (Arabic, Tagalog etc) spoken at home, and strategies discussed in the book can be applied to different linguistic contexts. They also note that the translanguaging approach works well with different varieties of English because it values what the children know and builds on this, rather than dismisses it.

Another point about the context of *Rooted in Strength* is that a lot of the examples appear to pertain to lower primary, but they can easily be expanded and adapted for middle and upper primary.

Rooted in Strength is divided into three sections – an introduction to the idea of translanguaging in the classroom, reading and writing. Each section has a focus on vignettes, or how ideas are adapted into classroom scenarios, short activities or ‘actions’ that teachers could try out, and suggestions for professional development. In Part 1, ways in which translanguaging can be included in both bilingual and monolingual classrooms (when the teacher does not understand the students’ home languages) are introduced, and actions geared towards finding out more about the language practices of students are provided.

Part 2 then focuses on reading. The section begins by discussing how reading is taken to be a unified and complex process, the importance of a multilingual reading landscape, and encouraging students to read in a home language and also any language they are learning at school. It then focuses on shared and guided reading, and read-alouds from a translanguaging perspective (where books are carefully chosen and other language practices might be drawn into the discussion). Independent reading and assessment are a further focus. For both of these, understanding the full range of students’ reading skills and knowledge is highlighted. Formative assessment is particularly prioritised in students’ reading of books.

Part 3 discusses writing in the same way as reading – as a process that is unified and complex. The authors further note the scholarship that shows how a focus on the linguistic resources of children as a whole can be a real asset to their literacy learning. One of the actions in this section is for teachers to reflect on their own relationship with writing owing to how influential this is on teaching practices. Shared writing, writing conferences, ‘publication’, dramatizing and drawing pieces of writing, freewriting, mentor texts to write more authentically, and responding to texts are all discussed from a translanguaging perspective. Similar to the reading section, the writing section finishes with assessment, including assessment conferences, self-assessment, rubrics and checklists.

Overall, this book is based in classroom practice and should be useful for both in-service and pre-service primary school teachers in Australia. There is an explanation of what translanguaging is and why it is being promoted throughout, and there are also Internet

resources to which the book provides the reader access. In Australia, plurilingual pedagogy is gaining ground, and translanguaging also works with the linguistic resources of students as a way both to affirm what they know and help them learn. Strategies and activities in *Rooted in Strength* will likely need to be adapted, but provide a very effective springboard for positioning multilingualism as an asset in Australian classrooms.

References

- Conteh, J., & G. Meier (Eds.) (2014). The multilingual turn in languages education: Opportunities and challenges. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- May, S. (Ed.) (2014). The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and bilingual education. London: Routledge.