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## Book Review: Transformative Translanguaging Espacios: Latinx Students and their Teachers Rompiendo Fronteras sin Miedo

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BOOK REVIEW

## Transformative Translanguaging Espacios: Latinx Students and their Teachers Rompiendo Fronteras sin Miedo

*Reviewed by: Katie Ward*<sup>1</sup>

Editors: Maite T. Sánchez & Ofelia García

Place of Publication: Bristol/Jackson

Publisher: Multilingual Matters

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Price: Paperback: \$49.95, Hardback: \$149.95, Ebook (PDF): \$40.00, Ebook (EPub): \$40.00

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*Transformative Translanguaging Espacios: Latinx Students and their Teachers Rompiendo Fronteras sin Miedo*, edited by Maite T. Sánchez and Ofelia García, presents the transformative possibilities of translanguaging to challenge dominant language ideologies from the perspectives of Latinx students and their teachers. Translanguaging is a term used to describe the language practices of bilingual individuals which transcend and transgress the boundaries of named languages. Because of the rich, diverse spectrum of language practices among bilingual individuals, there are many ways that translanguaging takes place. In chapter two, for example, a student says that gentrification is, “Good for some people, bad for some people,” and another

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student responds, “Well, good para quién?” transgressing the boundary between Spanish and English (p. 61). In translanguaging, bilingual individuals employ their full linguistic repertoire without limitations of named languages. Translanguaging centers the practices of bilingual individuals as the norm rather than the exception, pushing back against policies and pedagogical practices that advocate for strict separation of languages.

This book is crucial for the current educational context in the United States. More than 11.2 million young children in the United States, 33% of all U.S. children under the age of 9, are classified as dual language learners, and 60% of these young dual language learners identify as Latinx (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). Because of this, the book’s focus on equitable education for Latinx bilingual students is particularly important, not only for bilingual education programs, but for all schools.

*Transformative Translanguaging Espacios* frames translanguaging not only as a pedagogical stance, but as a “political stance that centers the perspectives and needs of Latinxs and other racialized bi/multilingual communities” (p. xx). Authors present examples of translanguaging in the classroom across various contexts and develop theoretical approaches to translanguaging, illustrating its strength for the development of critical consciousness, family engagement, identity affirmation, and linguistic development. Through developing the lens of translanguaging and its benefits for Latinx students, the authors present a strong case for translanguaging which runs counter to dominant bilingual education approaches.

The book is organized into six thematic parts. The editors highlight in the introducción that many of the authors are young Latinx practitioners and researchers across the United States who are, “raising their voices sin miedo,” to become subjects, rather than objects, in the study of bilingualism (p. 3). Many of the chapters are co-authored by the teachers or school leaders whose classrooms and schools are featured in the text and the researchers who conduct the study. Throughout the book, the authors address their positionality in their research and engagement in the classroom, offering insights on their scholarship and perspectives. The diverse authorship of the chapters aligns with the book’s focus on centering minoritized voices for more equitable research and practice.

The perspectives offered in *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios* present translanguaging as both an academic concept *and* a political commitment to racialized bi/multilingual communities through centering the experiences of Latinx bilingual children, as stated by Nelson Flores in the forward. Editors, Sánchez and García, explain that while translanguaging has been shown to benefit all minoritized students, this book focuses on Latinx bilingual students because of their large population, their history of colonization, and the racialization process which Latinx people have undergone. In the translanguaging spaces in this book, “dual language” classrooms are transformed into “dual language *bilingual* classrooms” where Latinx students can employ all their linguistic resources (p. 32).

Translanguaging offers space for students to develop critical consciousness around realities of their own communities. In part two of *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios*, teachers and students examine gentrification through critical translanguaging pedagogy. The detailed ethnographies of the gentrification units reveal how students engage the experiences of community members, dialogue around the complexities of gentrification, and question the way that two-way bilingual education has become linked with privilege through translanguaging.

In part three, authors examine how translanguaging pedagogy transcends fronteras, including geographic borders and borders which separate languages in dual language programs. A particular strength of this part is the section on developing metalinguistic awareness in translanguaging, allowing students to distinguish between Spanish and English and have stronger agency and pride in employing their language skills across those two named languages. This addresses a common concern around translanguaging – that students will have lower levels of metalinguistic awareness.

Translanguaging does not only take place in dual language bilingual programs, and parts four and five focus on translanguaging pedagogy for Latinx students beyond dual language bilingual education. The section in part four on translanguaging in children's literature provides an excellent resource for all educators and families seeking texts that center the dynamic language practices of Latinx students. Part five focuses on translanguaging in the context of Latinx bilingual children who have been perceived as "Los Otros": Deaf Latinx bilingual children and Latinx emergent bilingual children labeled as disabled. Through translanguaging, the authors argue, students link their home and school identities, parents engage more deeply as experts in their children's development, and teachers recognize students' full linguistic identities. These two parts are particularly strong because of their relevance for all educators, not only those in dual language bilingual programs.

In the final chapter of *Transformative Translanguaging Espacios*, Sánchez reemphasizes that translanguaging is not an educational model or program; rather, it is a commitment as diverse as the communities which engage in it. Educators reading this book are encouraged to discuss the reflection questions provided at the end around their own perceptions of language use, student and family populations, and school practices which offer a concrete starting point for implementing a translanguaging lens.

In the afterword, Guadalupe Valdés presents issues in the implementation of translanguaging and suggestions for future work. She proposes further research in translanguaging that clearly defines the personal and academic outcomes for students and demonstrates how students can convey what they have learned in various assessment contexts. This research, Valdés argues, will address many of the criticisms of translanguaging pedagogy as restricting students' educational and professional achievement. She recognizes, however, that these steps alone will not dismantle criticism of translanguaging. Because of this, Valdés argues for concurrent policy change to dismantle compensatory policies, oppressive assessment systems, the labeling and exclusion of marginalized students, and conceptions of bilingualism that disregard students' full linguistic repertoire. Linking

theory and practice to effectively implement and advocate for transforming translanguaging pedagogy, Valdés states, will lead to equitable education for Latinx bilingual students.

Translanguaging is a controversial issue in a dominant system of bilingual education that advocates for strict separation of languages. Throughout the book, the authors address critiques of translanguaging, primarily from the perspective of translanguaging as a political act. The book does not, however, address the main concerns about translanguaging's impact on academic achievement in as much depth. While the examples of teachers and students speak to many benefits of translanguaging pedagogy, the book could have been strengthened with the addition of more research on the large-scale academic benefits of translanguaging for Latinx bilingual students using assessment strategies that center their language practices, as discussed by Valdés in the afterword. This would enhance the already strong argument in *Transforming Translanguaging Espacios* for translanguaging pedagogy and encourage greater adoption of translanguaging pedagogy by bilingual education practitioners and researchers.

For Catholic school teachers and leaders serving increasing numbers of Latinx students and families, *Transforming Translanguaging Espacios* can serve as a guide for reflection and action to welcome and affirm the identities of all students and families. In the United States, 18.6% of students in Catholic schools identify as Hispanic/Latino, many of whom are dual language learners, and these numbers are steadily increasing (Smith & Huber, 2022). Translanguaging offers an approach to center those students' experiences and provide them with more equitable educational opportunities. Currently, there are 46 dual language Catholic schools in the United States, 24 of which are members of the Two-Way Immersion Network for Catholic Schools, with more Catholic schools transitioning to dual language programs each year (Roche Center for Catholic Education, n.d.). For those schools, this book offers insights on incorporating translanguaging in dual language bilingual education. However, there are many more Catholic schools which serve Latinx students that do not have dual language programs. For monolingual English schools, this book is still a call to action to leverage students' linguistic repertoire by encouraging translanguaging. Given the historical role of Catholic schools as assimilative educational structures for Indigenous and immigrant communities, translanguaging offers an important path for a liberative education that promotes equity. Through translanguaging pedagogy, Catholic schools can more fully honor the dignity of every person and their cultural and linguistic identities.

*Transforming Translanguaging Espacios* challenges all teachers and leaders to reflect on their own perceptions of and policies regarding the language practices of their students and families. Whether working in a bilingual or monolingual school setting, all teachers and leaders, particularly those working with Latinx bilingual students, would benefit from engaging with the dynamic perspectives of the students, teachers, and researchers featured in this text. The examples of Latinx students and their teachers presented in this book provide strong witnesses to the transformative power of translanguaging for creating more equitable educational spaces for Latinx students and families.

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