



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 15 Issue 3

2021

AMAE Special Issue

Centering Translanguaging in Critical Teacher Education:
*Cultivando Nuevos Conocimientos de Translenguaje en la
Educación de Futuros Docentes*

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<http://amaejournal.utsa.edu>

ISSN: 2377-9187

**Learning and Teaching en Dos Idiomas:
Critical Autoethnography, Translenguaje, y Rechazando *English Learner***

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Abstract

Language usage in US K–12 classrooms and beyond continues to be an issue of equity (Navarro Martell, 2021; Palmer et al., 2019). Teachers expect racialized students who appear to be Latinx to know and perform as if their native language is Spanish, mientras a otros se les celebra sus intentos de usar el español; otro idioma colonizador. Some educators know language can be used as a tool to teach content y que muchos adultos translenguamos mientras navegamos espacios profesionales y personales, not because of our lack of mastery of English or Spanish, pero porque tenemos la habilidad y el poder de navegar y vivir en varios idiomas. Entonces, why are many educators determined to force students to use only one language at a time cuando el translenguaje es tan común (Martínez et al., 2015)? This essay provides reflections and lessons learned of one immigrant, formerly labeled “English learner,” who was once a fourth and eighth grade math and science dual language teacher. Inspired by critical autoethnography, this manuscript is written by a current math and science bilingual methods teacher educator and supporter of translanguaging in the P–20+ classroom.

Keywords: translanguaging, English learner, dual language, bilingual education, bilingual teacher preparation, raciolinguistics

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.15.3.443>

In this essay, I translanguage to explain and present mis experiencias como emigrante de México a los Estados Unidos and my language-developed traumas as a child and teacher. In this critical autoethnographical-inspired essay, I argue that those of us who have the gift of bilingualism and beyond translanguage in our daily lives. Nevertheless, some educators and administrators do not allow it in classrooms because those with power believe it is not “proper” (Flores & Rosa, 2015). So why are many educators determined to force students to use only one language at a time cuando el translenguaje es tan común? Here I note that as a way to transgress the Academia normativity, I chose not to italicize parts of my essay written in a language other than English.

Comienzo by stating my positionality as a learner and speaker of inglés y español growing up en la frontera entre Tijuana y San Diego, California. I follow with a short dialogue on deficit and asset-based perspectives in education (Valencia, 1997; Yosso, 2005) before highlighting selected relevant literature in translanguaging (García, 2019; García & Leiva, 2014; García & Otheguy, 2020; García & Wei, 2015) and raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017), as they connect to mi vida. Después elaboro critical ethnography como metodología, as Boylorn and Orbe (2016) presented. Continúo by describing different phases of my life when I was forced to separate two languages and use only Spanish or English in education-specific spaces. I also elaborate on how I integrated my languages in educational settings, specifically, how I translanguage as a student immigrant, dual language teacher, and bilingual teacher educator. I conclude with reflections on teaching and preparing primarily Latinx bilingual teachers at two Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in California.

Po(sitio)nality

Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate . . . and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 40)

Soy Mexicana. Entré al kínder en Tijuana a los 3 años. I completed first, second, and third year of kindergarten before entering first grade. A los 4 años, mi mamá ya me había enseñado cómo decir los colores, my ABCs, basic shapes, and animal names both in English y español. She purchased six educational placement mats to go over with me during meals and

we watched *Sesame Street* (Singer, 1980-1993). By age 4, también sabía cómo sumar, restar y multiplicar; “tú absorbías todo, y pedías más, y mientras más te enseñaba, más y más aprendías” (O. Martell Sotelo, personal communication, May 30, 2021). This example of familial capital supported my learning mientras crecía en Tijuana (Yosso, 2005). Así que después de ir a la escuela 8 años en Tijuana, y el resto en San Diego y Los Ángeles, I am comfortable using my languages as I please, yet with slight fear of the “language police,” and even multilingual people reading this essay. Pero me vale. Sin embargo, sabemos que existen personas que son rápidas de juzgar because they think if one switches or mixes languages, “seguro que no sabe bien cómo hablar,” o como dice mi colega, “o peor, piensan que no sabemos pensar” (A. Esquinca, personal communication, June 11, 2021) apoyando el concepto de Flores y Rosa (2015) de cómo las ideologías raciolingüísticas varían y dependen del fenotipo de la persona que habla. Pero en realidad, las personas multilingües comfort ourselves knowing that when we use our languages with liberty, the people we need to hear us will understand us the way we speak. And if you don’t understand me, then maybe it’s because I’m not talking to you.

It is here I acknowledge mi privilegio de ir a una escuela privada en Tijuana, que le costó mucho trabajo a mi mami. I attended a top school and was a top student—until I crossed the border and was seen differently by this American educational system. Pero de tal manera, mis estudios en Tijuana y mi Spanish Literature Bachelor of Arts degree made me realize I love my language, y me gusta expresarme como quiero. I have used my Spanish to teach fourth and eighth graders in dual language schools. And since 2014, I have been preparing maestres bilingües en clases de métodos de ciencias, matemáticas, e ingeniería para maestres de nivel de primaria.

También escribo este ensayo porque estoy cansada de leer acerca de estudiantes como yo, from people who did not share the struggles as I did as an immigrant child, bearing the degrading label of English learner. As Kibler and Valdés (2016) indicated, labels and categorizations are problematic and not neutral and curriculizing language has implications that work against language acquisition goals. Lastly, my research and methodology are informed by my positionality as a critically conscious researcher committed to social, racial, and environmental justice. As a practitioner, I prepare critically conscious dual language educators to work with all students, but specifically, to serve linguistically diverse student populations who are bilingual/multilingual/English learners, as I was and continue to be.

Translenguaje, Community Cultural Wealth, y Raciolinguistics

In this section of the essay, I frame my experiences primarily around the work of García and colleagues on translanguaging, and Flores and Rosas (2015) on raciolinguistics. I first heard the term *translanguaging* as a PhD student from two colleagues asking my thoughts on the term. I had an idea of what it meant, but I had not done my due diligence to truly understand it because I was coming from a space and language ideology that prioritized colonizing languages in all their purity (Kroskrity, 2004). After much reading, listening, and conversing with many colleagues in the last 7 years, I present this information while acknowledging the nuance of the term to me.

Fuera con el Déficit

I take a political stance (García, 2019) and choose to translanguage in this essay porque quiero y porque puedo and because it is a way to use my linguistic assets. Tired of experiencing the deficit perspectives (Flores et al., 2015; Valencia, 1997) of teachers, counselors, and administrators, I reject deficit language and ideologies and adopt asset-based perspectives such as that offered by Yosso (2005) in the community cultural wealth model. However, like Katznelson and Bernstein's (2017) analysis of California's Proposition 58, although I am not thrilled about appropriating "current neoliberal discourses" (p. 12) by using words such as "wealth" and "capital," I appreciate everything about the community cultural wealth model. After all, two of the six forms of capital Yosso (2005) discussed include linguistic and familial capital.

Colonial Language, Multilingüismo, y Translenguaje

No se puede discutir acerca de idiomas sin primero discutir el colonialismo and the implications it has on bilingual education. Since their arrival, European colonizers have exploited the minds and bodies of Indigenous and Black people. Additionally, los idiomas europeos han sido usados por personas con poder, como políticos, para oprimir a personas que no crecieron hablando estos idiomas. Rosa y Flores (2017) calificaron este momento como el momento en el que "indigenous populations were stripped of their humanity at least in part through representations of their languages in animalistic terms that suggested they were incapable of expressing ideas that European colonizers thought were integral to becoming a full human being" (p. 4). Pero esta situación no solo paró con pueblos originarios (to learn more, please

read Kovats Sánchez, 2021), ya que en la historia de los Estados Unidos después vino la esclavitud and dehumanization of people of African ancestry, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Chen, 2015), Japanese internment camps, etc.

Por esta razón, es importante también mencionar la construcción y naturalización del concepto de raza e idiomas. De tal manera, recurro a Rosa y Flores (2017) quienes mencionan “languages as bounded and separate objects associated with particular racial groups” (p. 3) y elaboro con el trabajo de García (2019) quien discutió cómo las personas que tienen poder son las que terminan tomando decisiones políticas y sociales acerca de qué cuenta como idioma, dialecto, criollo, etc. La autora después conectó sus observaciones al trabajo respecto a raciolinguistic ideologies de Flores y Rosa (2015), mentioning how language has been used as a proxy for race and oppression to continue excluding certain people and perpetuating ideologies of superiority, which remind me of labels imposed on children in school settings today.

Obviamente, el colonialismo sigue impactando el bilingüismo y multilingüismo (Dorner et al., 2021). García (2019) dijo, “minoritized black and brown speakers had to be created in order to protect the hierarchical structure of white European superiority” (p. 159) y recaló cómo el multilingüismo solo ha sido interpretado por un lente europeo que ignora las prácticas “of the many black and brown people of the world” and “excludes the fluid multilingual practices of brown and black bodies” (p. 160). En especial, esta exclusión sucede en programas de idiomas que se supone que desarrollan el multilingüismo, y más que nada con poblaciones latinxs. En los Estados Unidos, Dorner y colegas (2021) presentaron tres estudios en los cuales expusieron la gentrificación de tres programas en distintos estados y concluyeron con la idea que el español, siendo un idioma colonizador, también puede ser colonizado. Examples they provided highlight the valued differences between Black and white students and how international teachers are also seen as more (or less) elite, depending on their income level and national origin. García y Otheguy (2020) elaboraron acerca del bilingüismo élite que ante todo, ha sido compuesto por dos idiomas en el cual como mínimo, el idioma dominante es europeo, los más comunes idiomas coloniales siendo “English, French, Portuguese and Spanish” (p. 18).

García y Leiva (2014) nos recordaron de cómo la mayoría del tiempo, las decisiones que toman los estudiantes “show traces of colonization, of historical oppression, and of subjugation that has been the result of collapsed Latin American educational systems, the result of war, colonization, rural conditions, and neoliberal economies” (p. 214). Por esta razón, expongo el

concepto del translenguaje para retar la presencia del colonialismo en el sistema educativo relacionado con el multilingüismo.

García and Wei (2015) discussed translanguaging as “the flexibility of bilingual learners to take control of their own learning, to self-regulate when and how to language, depending on the context in which they are performing language” (p. 230). Son demasiados los beneficios del translingüismo. Por ejemplo, Palmer et al. (2014) contribuyeron con la problematización de la separación de lenguajes y hablan acerca del *dynamic bilingualism* y cómo dos maestros modelan este concepto para sus estudiantes, que finalmente terminan apoyando la creación de espacios bilingües donde se puede compartir momentos personales, como el tema de la inmigración. En otro ejemplo, García and Leiva (2014) argued translanguaging allows for flexibility in using linguistic resources to make sense of the world and to liberate the voices of “language minoritized students” (p. 200), y García y Otheguy (2020) discutieron cómo el translingüismo se presta a diferentes modalidades de aprendizaje. However, schools with language-additive programs do not always promote the type of languaging that supports students, or maestros, to use their full bilingualism. As a matter of fact, some school administrators reprimand students and teachers who use their language fluidities and entire linguistic repertoires (for specific examples, see García, 2019).

El uso del translenguaje permite el aprendizaje y conocimiento de diferentes maneras a muchos estudiantes multilingües, y en especial a inmigrantes (García & Leiva, 2014). Algo que sabemos es que translanguaging is important as we consider students’ identities and beyond (García & Wei, 2015). Tal vez una de las razones for the hesitation of using translanguaging in the classroom is the continued production of research for decades on developing “strong” academic language and standardizing languages, one at a time (i.e., separately). En su papel relacionado con language ideologies y específicamente la estandarización y monolingüismo de las políticas relacionadas con el inglés en espacios bilingües, Farr y Song (2011) mencionan “the abstract notion of Standard English becomes objectified as something people can possess or lack” (p. 653) and then it becomes a commodity that interferes with students and their language and identities.

Las prácticas pedagógicas también son un acto político. Estas se enfocan en expandir las habilidades de los estudiantes multilingües para que tomen decisiones acerca de su aprendizaje e interacciones con textos en vez de ejercer el poder de los lenguajes nombrados y las

jerarquías que sostienen por encima de ellos (García & Otheguy, 2020). Y como en los Estados Unidos existe un enfoque exagerado en los exámenes (Kibler & Valdés, 2016), los cuales no reconocen los repertorios lingüísticos de estudiantes multilingües y tienden a favorecer a gente monolingüe de cierta clase social (García & Otheguy, 2020), los maestros tenemos mucho que ver in the way language restrictions are enacted in the classroom. Thus, translanguaging pedagogies have the potential to transform education for many, specifically for Latinx students from multilingual backgrounds, ya que les permite participar al máximo en la sociedad “and meet the global, national, and social needs of a multilingual future” (García & Leiva, 2014).

Raciolinguistic Perspectives e Ideologías

Attempting to teach language-minoritized students to engage in the idealized linguistic practices of the white speaking subject does nothing to challenge the underlying racism and monoglossic language ideologies of the white listening subject. (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 167)

Para ilustrar otro aspecto relacionado con el antibilingüismo propongo los trabajos de Flores y Rosa (2015) and Rosa y Flores (2017), quienes presentaron perspectivas raciolingüísticas. The researchers argued that in education, the value of a students’ spoken English is determined by how they are heard by the “white listening subject,” regardless of linguistic performance and potential, because students are racialized (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 160). They later explained five main components on this perspective summarized in Rosa and Flores (2017); estas incluyen: (a) las conaturalizaciones históricas y contemporáneas de raza y lengua como parte de la formación colonial de la modernidad; (b) percepciones de diferencias raciales y lingüísticas; (c) reglamentaciones de categorías raciales y lingüísticas; (d) intersecciones y ensamblajes raciales y lingüísticos; y (e) la impugnación de las formaciones de poder raciales y lingüísticas. However, as previously quoted, they also pointed out how even additive approaches to bilingual education are viewed by language education researchers and practitioners through a monolingual framework that perpetuate and marginalize the linguistic practices of certain communities (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Specifically, mencionan a los estudiantes, as racialized beings, que cargan los términos “long-term English learners, heritage language learners, and Standard English learners” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 151) y cómo son vistos desde un punto de vista déficit cuando en realidad están siendo racializados por las

jerarquías lingüísticas y forzados a usar un lenguaje racializado y asimilativo en sitios públicos mientras tienen que usar su lenguaje de casa en lugares privados. The authors argued language minoritized students “mimic the white speaking subject while ignoring the raciolinguistic ideologies that the white listening subject uses to position them as racial Others” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 155). Esta cita también highlights what I experienced as a young learner in California.

Y en el área de ideologías raciolingüísticas, Flores y Rosa (2015) criticaron la idea de linguistic purity de la misma manera en que el purismo racial es criticado. Los autores demostraron cómo el inglés estándar ha sido usado para recalcar las deficiencias of people of color, aunque privileged white subjects usan estas mismas formas de hablar como maneras normativas, creativas, e innovadoras.

Method(ología)

While I have been primarily prepared in quantitative methods, I have opted for qualitative investigations in my career para poder elevar las voces de maestres en programs bilingües. In my work, I employ la conciencia crítica (e.g., Darder et al., 2017; Freire, 2000; Navarro Martell, 2021; Valenzuela, 2016). In this study, I follow aspects of critical autoethnography methodologies, como lo presentan Boylorn y Orbe (2016). Los autores argumentaron cómo autoetnógrafos se investigan a sí mismos en relación con others mientras exploran asuntos de cultura, poder, y comunicación en sociedad y todas las complejidades e intersecciones que los acompañan. This approach is what I intend to take. Y similar a los capítulos en su libro, I have elected to use first person.

Additionally, Boylorn y Orbe (2016) también mencionaron, “we envisioned a project that would ‘give voice’ to previously silenced and marginalized experiences, answer unexamined questions about the multiplicity of social identities, instigate discussions about and across difference, and explain the contradictory intersections of personal and cultural standpoints” (p. 15)—esta es mi intención con este ensayo. Reflexionar acerca de mis experiencias y mis privilegios “alongside marginalization and to take responsibility for [my] subjective lenses through reflexivity” (p. 15). Los autores también discutieron cómo usaron la autoetnografía crítica como un método centrado en tres características de critical theory que incluyen “to understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and

uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016, p. 20).

Growing up Mexicana/Immigrant/Latina/Hispanic/English Learner

No Me Llamo English Learner

As a fourth-grade dual language teacher, I remember reading *Me llamo María Isabel* (Ada, 1997) con los estudiantes que enseñaba. The award-winning author of this book, Alma Flor Ada, visited the school, y específicamente a los estudiantes del salón donde yo enseñaba. Recuerdo que I was feeling inspired by the story of an immigrant child at school who refused to be called “Mary” and wanted to be called by her name, María Isabel. The story emphasizes the power and importance of one’s name and identity. Pero, en mi opinión, también debemos considerar labels imposed on children such as English learner (Kibler & Valdés, 2016).

Consequently, I continue wondering why the United States is so aferrado to impose labels on people. It was not until I entered school in the United States that I realized I was supposed to call myself Latin, Latina, or Hispanic. Having studied the history of México in Tijuana, “Hispanic” was the last term I wanted to be categorized as. I was a newly arrived sixth-grade immigrant from Tijuana to an elementary school in San Diego in 1994, 2 years before language restrictions of Proposition 227 (1997) went into effect. I was placed in a combination class, meaning a mixture of fifth and sixth graders, because this was the only option to have un maestre bilingüe. I remember the teacher’s Spanish and mi español being different; sometimes we did not understand each other. She used words like “parqueadero” that I had never heard before, and she was unfamiliar with “estacionamiento.” We understood each other when we were able to use words we did know, whether in English or Spanish, interchangeably and collectively. Translanguaging con mi maestra helped us communicate with each other so I could learn, and so she could get to know me.

The Walk of Shame

I demonstrated to the maestra I was learning. I remember her “allowing” me to spell out words phonetically. What I mean is, escribía “jaus” en vez de “house.” Can this be a form of transliteracy given that I was writing the way it sounded to me? (Kalmar, 2015). She understood me pero de todos modos, during English language arts time, those of us with the

label had to do the walk of shame as we got pulled out by a special teacher to work on developing our English, in a bungalow, in the back of the school, in a space that was shared with kindergarteners. Some kids pointed and laughed; it felt demeaning. I experienced the walk of shame with my sister in fifth grade, but this experience only lasted one semester for me because I clearly remember being told I could stay in the “regular” class during English language arts time in December of my sixth-grade year. I was no longer irregular.

The following year in middle school, even though I had more teachers and a counselor to supposedly help me, no había nadie que pudiera apoyarme in Spanish. What my teachers and counselors saw as my deficits were all they focused on; how they saw me was becoming my identity. At this middle school, almost everyone in my first “team” (tracked by ability grouping) (Darder, 2012) did the walk of shame every day on that campus. We were racialized beings, like the students in Rosa and Flores’s (2015) study. The majority of us were fluent in Spanish and had parents educated outside of the United States. If only our teachers recognized us by the language and familial capital we brought to our school (Yosso, 2005). El único apoyo eran mis compañeres. Mr. K was the English teacher. He was white. He wanted us to read *The Odyssey* (Homer, 1919), but many of us did not understand the book. At times we tried explaining to each other in Spanish, but Mr. K did not like that. He thought students talked about him, and eventually they did because he kept shutting down our conversations in Spanish. In one of his berrinches about us speaking Spanish he cussed us out. I clearly remember the “Fuck you!” and his red face. I remember him leaving us in the classroom and taking a week off before he returned to teach como si nada hubiera pasado.

También recuerdo Mr. L’s math class. I could not hear the difference between the words “100” and “100ths” and my request for clarification resulted in me being walked to the back of the classroom with broken crayons and ripped coloring pages. Otra walk of shame so I would stop asking questions. But enough was enough.

I shared my middle school experiences with my mom. I told her about Mr. L and Mr. K and how a counselor gave a pep talk to remind us that kids like us end up either in jail or pregnant. He claimed to be sharing research with us, our truth, so some of us could avoid falling into the trap. It was insulting. My mom requested an interpreter and to speak to a counselor and demanded that my classes (team) be changed. We had heard about something called “honors,” and I wanted to be in it. My counselor disagreed. “Why do you want to take

honors classes? You're not going to make it!" The compromise between my mom and me and the counselor was that she would place me in a different team (track) except for English class—I was stuck with a teacher that had already cussed at my class.

I entered high school in the honors track and was fortunate that this time, I had a Latina, Spanish-speaking high school counselor who saw and acted on my potential. I did well. I took as many honors and advanced placement (AP) courses as possible and continued to have a 4.0 grade point average almost every semester. I scored a 5 as a freshman in the AP Spanish test, so I was done with my language requirement in high school and was already obtaining college credit without understanding what this meant. I also took the horrifying PSATs, SATs, and ACTs, which of course, were all in English. My counselor had fee waivers for me to apply to college. I wondered if that score of a 5 on my AP test was the “look at me, I can go to college” sign. I applied for college and had 7 choices. I opted for one of the three universities in San Diego to stay close to my family. If there was one thing I knew, and continue knowing for sure, was that policy or not, no me llamo English learner, and off to college I went.

Mexican Teacher

¡Lo Logré!—or Did I?

I became the teacher I wished I had when I was new to the country; I chose to work at a dual-immersion school with a 90-10 model that claimed justice and equity. I often wondered what it would have been like if I had immigrated earlier. No sé si hubiera tenido maestras bilingües. O si hubiera dejado de hablar español como varies compañeres y familiares. If my parents knew about dual immersion programs, I wonder if they would have placed me in a dual immersion school.

The majority of the students and families I served as a teacher were Latinxs. I taught fourth grade, which was split 50-50 between English and Spanish. The school reinforced language separation: “Put your English hat on,” y “ahora ponte tu gorro de español.” In the classroom, I had to model the double monolingualism enforced in institutional learning spaces even though all teachers and administrators hid their beautiful fluency between inglés y español and everything in between (Martínez et al., 2015). I remember kindergarten teachers being worried, sharing anecdotes of students: “One of my students heard me speaking English to someone and they were surprised, y me reclamaron!” Kindergarten grade was taught 90% in

Spanish and 10% in English and kindergarten students could not know the teacher spoke English. We all beautifully translanguaged in the teacher lunchroom, before school, after school, and in our meetings. It is how we lived.

García (2019) indicó que la expectativa “continues to be that languages could be ‘added’ as separate wholes, without taking into account the notion that true multilingual speakers never behave in this way” (p. 152). However somehow, this idea was not welcomed in the classroom, and children were reprimanded for doing what teachers were doing when children were not around. Most of us did not know better. We listened to administrators who always quoted one or two research papers that supported their specific (deficit) ideologies on language, such as the strict separation of language. Instead of sending more teachers to get professional development, administrators sent a select few and together, they decided what they would share with the rest of us. ¡Qué conveniente!

As an eight-grade dual language math and science teacher, I was asked by the administration to teach science in Spanish. I taught chemistry, physics, and astronomy and was given a set of student textbooks in English and a teacher’s guide in English. Pero tuve acceso a una versión del libro estudiantil en español. Solo uno. Despite being a math and science teacher, I did not feel prepared to teach science, yet alone to teach it in Spanish with only one book in the language of instruction. En mis estudios en Tijuana, no recuerdo haber hecho laboratorios o experimentos. But I did it. I followed the principal’s instructions of opening up the textbook and following chapters one at a time, trying to get as far as possible. I did not question the administrators—yet.

I was a Mexican teacher, teaching en inglés y en español, at a school that valued two languages, but not at the same time. I was able to connect with parents and students on a new level. I appreciated the opportunity to conduct home visits and got to know students’ familial and linguistic capitals (Yosso, 2005). I had students who reminded me of me. I remember Brian explaining his math work and saying “then you ‘rest’ it” to indicate subtraction because “restar” and “subtract” mean the same, illustrating another example of how the student took ownership of his language to show he understood math (García & Wei, 2015).

I had to transition out of this job because I was done learning a new life lesson. In sum, this school taught me la importancia de nunca dejar de aprender and challenging authority even when my so-called leaders shared a similar background to mine and claimed to do what was

best for me and the students, which was not always the case. I was ready to investigate how teachers could teach science to truly value students' cultures and languages and how they could go beyond relying on a textbook. I share my experiences as a dual language teacher who was bullied but was supported by a few coworkers, students, and the community. I was ready for my next chapter and I was admitted to a PhD program in 2014. I had the best mentor I could ask for, Dr. Cristina Alfaro, who encouraged me to teach a science methods course in Spanish while exposing me to the world of research and national grants.

Preparing Latinx Bilingual Teachers at HSIs

La Misión

I left the K–8 school environment to begin a new career chapter as a bilingual teacher educator, \$1.5-million grant coordinator, and critically conscious researcher at La Misión. La Misión is an HSI, even though at the time, no estaba segura what HSI meant because I attended two non-HSI institutions as a college student. While researching for a publication, I learned HSIs are institutions that admit 25% or more “Hispanic” students; y dale con los labels. As I developed my knowledge of statistics, I quickly realized admitting, retaining, and graduating students significaba algo completamente diferente.

I understood the students I would serve would be bilingual in English and Spanish. This student bilingualism brought me muchísima alegría. My course was inspired by a variety of colleagues' syllabi, conversations with people who had experience teaching in this area, y más que nada mis experiencias as an immigrant learner and former elementary and middle school dual language teacher of math and science. California was adopting the newly released Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS Lead States, 2013), which were not in Spanish and addressed “limited English proficient” (p. 13) students as an afterthought in Appendix D. I searched and searched for journal articles in Spanish that had to do with the content I was going to teach. Having articles in Spanish would allow the students and me to expand our academic language in Spanish, but the ones I found from Spanish-speaking countries were difficult to understand. Although journal articles in English were more accessible, especially those coming from teacher practitioner publications, I worried that only selecting readings in English would indirectly send a message to students that English was the language of learning science.

That first year I decided to have class-assigned readings in English and discussions in Spanish and English, as we saw fit. I did not know I was addressing what García (2019) referred to as *translanguaging pedagogical practices*, que tienen como meta “to liberate sign systems that have been constrained by socio-political domination, attempting to give voice to all and redress power differentials among speakers” (p. 163). I, too, wanted the classroom learning environment to be a transformative place where students and I could translanguage and use our entire linguistic repertoires to make meaning instead of just being a scaffolding practice to access language or content (García & Wei, 2015).

Translanguaging about content also expanded to translanguaging about nuestras vidas personales. Por ejemplo, some students lived in Tijuana and it was great to be able to connect with them using Tijuana-specific language: “Watcha profe, look at how my experiment came out. Ni pex, I’ll try it again.” We got stuck on words and concepts together, and we figured them out together. Every year I learned more from students and I believe it is because we adopted translanguaging pedagogies, which I hope they can enact in their future classrooms.

Victoria University

Upon completing my PhD, I was hired at Victoria University in the department of liberal studies. Victoria University is an HSI that enrolled 64% Hispanic/Latinx students. I was the first Latinx person to be hired as tenure-track faculty in the department and one of four in the college of education that year. I was gifted the task of teaching the first and last courses in the major for students who wished to be teachers. La primer clase was an introduction to teaching y la segunda clase I recreated that incorporated the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS Lead States, 2013), the engineering design process, and the California Visual and Performing Arts standards. I also participated in mentoring and teaching students in the Master of Arts Dual Language program, and I taught the science methods course in Spanish for the bilingual credential program. Although courses I taught outside of the department were encouraged to be taught in Spanish and bilingually, the ones in the liberal studies department were not. However, given that most students were of similar backgrounds to mine, some were comfortable speaking to me en español and bringing parents and siblings to office hours to meet me. Fue una experiencia hermosa. I recall a student I had in my first year who made a video out of her ideological statement that opened with her mamá speaking Zapoteco, which the student

captioned with, “I have always told my daughter how important our culture, traditions, and language is to us.” The student went on to show pictures of her younger self with teachers and narrating about her mom:

She always told me it’s okay if our Spanish didn’t sound like the others because Spanish wasn’t her first language, but she always encouraged me to properly learn Spanish because it would help me and it will help us. She also told me the importance of learning English in order for them, my parents, to have a voice in the United States of America.

I had a great 2 years serving students at Victoria University. Interactions with my students and close colleagues helped mask microaggressions and tokenization I experienced outside of my department. I learned that even with a PhD, I would never stop being seen as a racialized being (Flores & Rosa, 2015). However, a window of opportunity emerged that I could not let pass.

De Regreso a Casa

There is one thing I knew for sure by the time I accepted my second position as a tenure-track assistant professor, this time at La Misión; I must encourage students to explore their relationship with their languages, science, and math. Los animo intencionalmente al preguntarles que relexionen y exploren these relationships. I am also intentional in the framing of my course. On page one of the syllabus, I have listed a graphic que ilustra the lens for the methods course. Figure one has an example for my science methods course. This lens continues to change and morph as I read, question, dialogue, learn, and reflect. While I deliver my classes primarily en español, en mis cursos los estudiantes choose what language or languages to submit assignments. Some have chosen Spanish or English only, and some have chosen to translanguage in various ways. They also have a choice as to how to submit assignments. Moreover, when they submit them, they can tell me what they want me to focus on besides content. For instance, a student may submit a written reflection and ask me to check for acentos y ortografía. Another may submit the exact reading reflection in video form and ask me to listen to verb tenses and pronunciation and to give that particular feedback.

Figure 1

Science Methods Class Framing



Translanguaging in the math and science methods classroom affords teacher candidates opportunities to be their authentic selves (Flores et al., 2015). We discuss math and matemáticas, science y ciencias. We make connections, and we find cognados. We make up math problems about Oxxos and “cuantos tacos te comiste” just as much as we talk about how much science children do, exploring our surroundings. We value our community’s cultural wealth, and we acknowledge the deficit perspectives prior educators have had about us. Every semester a new comunidad is created and together we laugh, cry, live, and learn.

Reflections on Teaching: Punto y Aparte

He aprendido muchas lecciones en el transcurso de mi vida como life-long learner y maestra, pero también me quedo con muchas preguntas. Queda pendiente saber why it has taken years of immigrant children and their children infiltrating the educational system, after having navigated it, to publish papers on translanguaging and be able to prove language is power. Y más que nada, me quedo cuestionando temas relacionados con idiomas, ya que por más que el sistema educativo en los Estados Unidos no valore mi español Tijuanaense y Tijuanaero, mi idioma es algo que valoro y con el cual me conectaba con mis abuelos, y continuo usando con mis padres y familiares. As a reminder, “translanguaging is important as we consider students’ identities and beyond” (García & Wei, 2015); I believe this consideration applies to teachers and teacher educators as well. También aprendí que latinxs se aprovechan de otros latinxs y los pueden maltratar y traumar. Y como dijeron Rosa y Flores (2017), “whiteness functions as a

structural position that can be inhabited by whites and nonwhites alike depending on the circumstances” (p. 9). Debemos tener cuidado en como nos tratamos entre nosotros.

I have shared varios aspectos personales de mi niñez and my adulthood as I discover what it means to be a student, educator, and bilingual teacher-educator in the United States and California specifically, not fitting into the mold of the white-listening student and teacher. As a bilingual teacher educator, I believe it is essential to reflect on my language ideologies constantly. Particularly, when it comes to grading and evaluating students’ work, a nuestros docentes bilingües en práctica, to rethink what and how we are evaluating competencies and whether those reasons are centered on elitist language competencies that perpetuate the same monoglossic dual monolingualism, or if we are modeling how to problematize these norms in our classrooms, so they can, in turn, be enacted in K–12 learning spaces.

En relación con los idiomas, el translenguaje es un approach to teach linguistically minoritized students no solamente al nivel de kindergarten a preparatoria, pero también al nivel universitario y hay que aprovechar el translenguaje, en especial en programas de preparación de docentes. Creo que es mejor tener espacios de aprendizaje where translanguaging happens, que espacios de aprendizaje where our students feel silenced o prefieren no compartir. If you got this far into my essay and understood it, did it make a difference que a veces use inglés and sometimes Spanish? My hope to my readers is that you understand that translanguaging is a beautiful complex natural process that takes place habitually in bilingual and multilingual beings. So let us use translanguaging in our multilingual learning and work spaces to connect and learn from and with each other. We are past the time to decolonize languaging.

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