

Topic Brief: Translanguaging and Dual Language Bilingual Education Classrooms

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, districts across New York State – and across the United States more broadly – have begun creating and expanding what are known as Dual Language Education (DLE) programs. Contrary to transitional bilingual education programs, which temporarily use the home language of students labeled English Learners while they learn English, the goal of DLE programs is to educate students to be bilingual and biliterate. By design, DLE programs are organized by language allocation structures and policies that strictly separate English and the language other than English (the LOTE) in instruction.

While DLE programs have grown in popularity, so too have more dynamic understandings of bilingualism that challenge conceptualizations of bilingual speakers as two monolinguals in one (García, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014). This view of bilingualism posits that rather than having two separate linguistic systems that correspond to two “named languages,” such as English, Spanish or Mandarin, bi- and multilingual people have one complex, unitary linguistic system from which they use different features to communicate and make meaning (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015, 2018). Depending on the context, bi- and multilingual people may use features of their linguistic repertoire in ways that align with what we recognize as “monolingual” uses of English or Spanish or Mandarin. However, among bi- and multilingual friends and families and in bi- and multilingual neighborhoods, people may engage in *translanguaging* – using English *and* Spanish or English *and* Mandarin fluidly in ways that blur the boundaries of one named language and another.

When we take this view of bilingualism, it throws into question the strict separation of languages in DLE programs. As Sánchez, García, and Solorza¹ (2017) put it, we must ask ourselves if these programs are merely *teaching two languages* or *teaching students bilingually*? To understand this distinction, this Topic Brief aims to answer several essential questions:

1. What misconceptions exist about the use of translanguaging in bilingual classrooms?
2. How can Dual Language Education programs invite students’ use of translanguaging while also maintaining separate, named language spaces?
3. How can educators leverage students’ translanguaging in their design of classroom activities and assessments in the DLE classroom?

Overall, this Topic Brief aims to clear up misconceptions about translanguaging in DLE programs, or what we prefer to call Dual Language **Bilingual** Programs. We do so by providing a framework for how translanguaging can be invited and leveraged within “the allocation of the

¹ Some elements of this Topic Brief have been adapted from Sánchez, García, and Solorza’s (2017) article, “Reframing language allocation in dual language bilingual education”.

two named languages to separate times, spaces, subjects, or people” (Sánchez, García, and Solorza, 2017, p.6). We also provide practical examples for educators and school leaders of how to make space for translanguaging within their language allocation policy, while maintaining instructional spaces for the two named languages.

Key Terms and Concepts	
Dual language education	Programs that teach students in two languages and whose goals are bilingualism and biliteracy.
Language allocation policy	A systemic plan for language development in school that determines language of instruction, curriculum, and assessment
Named languages	A term coined by Otheguy, García and Reid (2015; 2018) that describes groups of features socially recognized and defined as “a language” (i.e.: “English”, “Spanish,” “Mandarin”)
Translanguaging	The ways that bi- and multilingual people use features of their unitary linguistic system that do not necessarily align with socially recognized and defined named languages

What misconceptions exist about the use of translanguaging in bilingual classrooms?

Many bilingual educators fear that translanguaging could destroy the instructional space that is dedicated to the minoritized language, encouraging the use of English among students. Others see translanguaging as a simple scaffold that students and teachers use as a crutch to facilitate meaning-making. Some others see translanguaging as a representation of corrupt language use, of a language spoken incorrectly, of an impoverished and stigmatized variety of language. But translanguaging requires bilingual educators to adopt a perspective on language that refers to the full linguistic system of bilingual learners and not only to named languages.

Translanguaging must be understood as an important meaning-making resource that is always present in bilingual students, whether we hear “fluid” language practices or not. When translanguaging is *strategically* leveraged in instruction and assessment, we can better understand the bilingual learner and can engage them in expanding their linguistic repertoire. Translanguaging affirms bilingual identities, enabling authentic bilingual performances that give life to minoritized languages. While it is true that minoritized languages need to be protected, they cannot be rigorously isolated from English because they operate within one unitary system in the lives of bilingual people.

How can Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) programs invite students’ translanguaging while also maintaining separate, named language spaces?

When planning each individual DLE program, districts and schools make decisions about how to separate English and the LOTE. Some opt to immerse students in one language or the other for a half or full day. Others choose to teach specific subjects in one language or another. Still others designate different teachers for the different languages, with each teacher teaching and

communicating with their students in only one or the other language. No matter how a district or school organizes its DLE program, the allocation policy is generally organized around an “English space” and a “LOTE” space.

In each of these spaces, there are strict rules about how students (and teachers) language. Some programs go so far as to forbid students and teachers from using English in the LOTE space or the LOTE in the English space. It is thought that by separating English from the LOTE, students will be immersed in one or the other and learn each language more effectively. However, according to Sánchez, García, and Solorza (2017), DLE programs that take up such allocation policies risk the following:

- In “side-by-side” arrangements, where two teachers in two classrooms teach the English and the LOTE sides of the program, the teachers rarely have the time to plan and collaborate, and thus cannot view, assess, or leverage students’ full linguistic repertoire.
- Educators cannot appropriately assess what students know how to do with language if only one language is accepted for academic tasks.
- Students are not able to demonstrate their creativity and criticality (Li Wei, 2011) through their uses of all their language practices.
- Students are expected to develop an English-speaking identity *and* a separate LOTE-speaking identity, but rarely a bilingual identity (Lee, Hill-Bonnet, & Gillespie, 2008).

A language allocation policy to support Dual Language **Bilingual** Education (DLBE) and a translanguaging perspective walks a critical line: though it supports the separate allocation of two named languages “so that bilingual students learn, at appropriate times, to select and suppress features of their linguistic repertoire as called for by particular situations” (Sánchez, García, & Solorza, 2017, p.6), it also makes space “for students to use all the features of their linguistic repertoire in strategic ways to deepen their understandings and enhance their linguistic and academic performances” (p.6). Taking up translanguaging in a language allocation policy for DLBE could have many benefits:

- It could enable educators to provide students with translanguaging affordances and scaffolds that empower *all* students to meaningfully participate in classroom instruction, regardless of the language of instruction.
- It could guarantee inclusion of all students in a community, not just those with the desired type of linguistic or learning profile.
- It could work for both two-way and one-way DLBE programs and would work regardless of how languages are allocated in instruction.
- It could work whether the program employs bilingual teachers or one teacher who is bilingual coupled with one who is monolingual (typical in side-by-side models).

Key Point

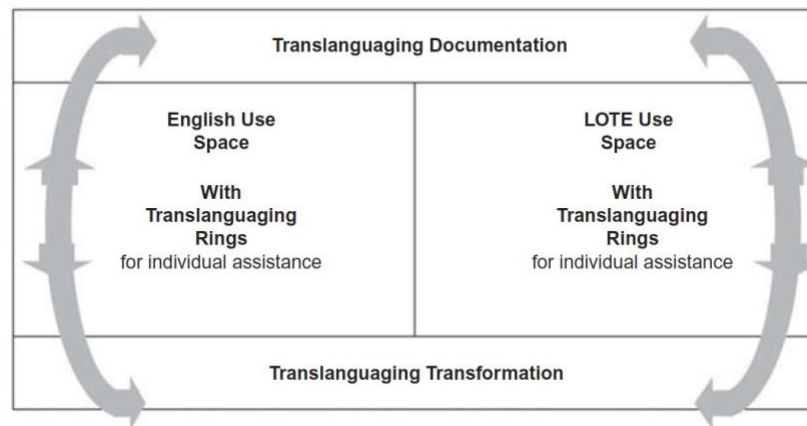
Making space for translanguaging within a dual language bilingual allocation policy enables *all* teachers across *all* program types to educate *all* students bilingually.

With a language education policy for DLBE that takes up translinguaging, the basic spaces for English and the LOTE are maintained. At the same time, these spaces are accompanied by spaces in which translinguaging is used intentionally for three purposes:

1. To have a more holistic understanding of the child as a learner (*translinguaging documentation*)
2. To scaffold instruction for individual students (*translinguaging rings*), and
3. To transform the normalizing effects of standardized language in school and the hierarchy of English (*translinguaging transformation*)

Figure 1 shows what this might look like in schools, piercing the separate spaces for one language or another with translinguaging rings, and adding two translinguaging spaces—the documentation space and the transformation space.

Figure 1. A language allocation policy for DLBE that takes up translinguaging (Sánchez, García, & Solórz, 2017).



Next, we outline each of these three components, emphasizing the ways in which they accompany the English and the LOTE allocations of DLBE programs.

Translinguaging documentation

One of the consequences of strictly separating English and the LOTE in traditional Dual Language classrooms is that students often do not have the opportunity to demonstrate what they know, and teachers cannot accurately assess their performances. With a policy that centers translinguaging, however, teachers carefully *document* students’ translinguaging to assess, as well as validate, their dynamic ways of languaging. Instead of documenting what students know and can do in only one language or another, teachers also document what students know and can do when they use all their linguistic resources together. This provides teachers with a more holistic understanding of each student’s abilities and gives them ideas for how to plan lessons and learning activities that will further develop students’ bilingualism and biliteracy.

Translinguaging rings

Once teachers have documented students' translanguaging practices and gotten a better sense of what students can do and what additional supports they need, they can then differentiate the design of instruction, learning experiences, and locate materials and strategies that support each individual student. As teachers implement these instructional designs and strategies, they are building *translanguaging rings* around their students, enabling them to engage in tasks that they cannot carry out without assistance. Translanguaging rings are ways of scaffolding instruction that allow teachers to use students' home languages as resources in learning the target language in the DLBE classroom. Depending on each student's needs, translanguaging rings might include bilingual instructional material, technology and translation assistance, multimodal provisions including videos, collaboration with peers, and small groups that can offer translanguaging support. These translanguaging rings act to expand the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), helping those students who cannot yet perform the school tasks in the language of instruction.

Translanguaging transformation

Taking up translanguaging in a DLBE program is important not only because it provides opportunities for more valid assessments and for gauging individual students' needs for instructional support, but also because it can validate the translanguaging practices of bilingual communities, develop creative linguistic uses, and disrupt the linguistic hierarchies that are the product of reigning ideologies about language in schools. Making space for translanguaging transformation is strategic and purposeful on the part of the teacher; it means encouraging students to use their full linguistic repertoire fluidly, reading and writing with all their meaning-making resources. It means building students' understandings of how language is used in their families and communities, as well as in school and in society at large. Lastly, it means helping students engage in critical metalinguistic analysis of English and the LOTE. Organizing instruction in this transformative way builds students' criticality, validates their multilingual practices and identities, and works against the linguistic hierarchy that positions English as more valuable than LOTES and school language as more important than the ways of languaging at home.

Key Points

Translanguaging documentation helps teachers assess what students know and can do when they use all their linguistic resources together, giving them a fuller picture of the learner.

Translanguaging rings are ways of scaffolding instruction that allow teachers to use students' home languages as resources in learning the target language.

Translanguaging transformation means creating opportunities for bilingual students to use all their linguistic resources to read, write, and think in ways that challenge existing linguistic hierarchies in school and society overall.

How can educators leverage students' translanguaging in their design of classroom activities and assessments in the DLBE classroom?

In this last section of the Topic Brief, we provide examples from schools and classrooms that have created translanguaging spaces within their language allocation policies. After each short vignette, we provide commentary that explains how school leaders and teachers implemented the different components of translanguaging in ways that benefited their students and the school community overall.

Classroom Practice: Translanguaging Documentation

This first classroom practice highlights an example of how one teacher in a DLBE program used translanguaging documentation when assessing a student in English reading comprehension. The teacher, Mrs. Santana, teaches in a one-way English/Spanish DLBE second-grade classroom, with specific times for Spanish Language Arts and English Language Arts every day. The following vignette illustrates the ways that she allowed one student, Anna, to use her entire linguistic repertoire in the context of a benchmark reading assessment in English.

Mrs. Santana places a leveled English-language book in front of Anna. She reads the title and briefly introduces the book. Anna then begins to read the book independently. When she finishes reading the book, Mrs. Santana asks Anna to summarize the reading. She encourages Anna to use English and Spanish to retell what has happened in the story. After her summary, Mrs. Santana asks questions about the story and again encourages Anna to answer in English and/or Spanish. After the assessment, which Mrs. Santana carefully documented, she placed Anna in a guided reading group during ELA based on her holistic reading comprehension level, not solely her English language production.

This use of translanguaging documentation allowed Mrs. Santana to accurately assess Anna’s reading comprehension instead of limiting her to one language and getting a partial performance. By allowing Anna to draw on her full linguistic repertoire even during an assessment of her reading comprehension in English, the teacher could place Anna in a guided reading group that would develop her literacy in English by leveraging her language and literacy skills in Spanish.

Classroom Practice: Translanguaging Rings

As we saw in the previous vignettes, incorporating translanguaging documentation into teachers’ practice can lead to a richer understanding of students in DLBE programs. Once we have a better idea of what our students know and can do when they are afforded the opportunity to draw on *all* their meaning-making resources, we can better plan instruction that values their knowledge and practices and *extends* them in ways that strengthen students’ bilingualism and biliteracy. The following vignette from a fourth-grade Spanish-English DLBE classroom demonstrates how one teacher incorporated *translanguaging rings* into her instruction in ways that supported students in both the English and the Spanish spaces.

Translanguaging Rings: English Space	Translanguaging Rings: Spanish Space
---	---

<p>Sidney is a student in the DLBE classroom who might be considered “English dominant.” On Spanish days, her teacher makes several translanguaging rings accessible to her. She references the bilingual Word Wall/Pared de Palabras. She has access to the English version of her math textbook to help her understand a word problem in Spanish. She has access to translation tools on a classroom iPad. She brainstorms and pre-writes in English in preparation for an essay or other written response in Spanish.</p>	<p>Angélica has a different bilingual profile than Sidney. She comes from an immigrant family and would be considered “Spanish dominant.” This means that on English days, her teacher makes sure she has translanguaging rings available to help her learn and make meaning. She is often partnered with a Spanish-speaking student who is more experienced with English. She makes use of the bilingual charts that are posted around the room. She records key words in her personal Bilingual Dictionary. Like Sidney, she brainstorms and drafts in Spanish in preparation for her writing in English.</p>
--	---

Though the teacher is always focused on the language of the day, she also plans for the specific supports that different students will need to meaningfully participate and learn in each language. As we can see from the examples of Sidney and Angélica, translanguaging rings can be utilized in both English and Spanish spaces. It is important to note that these rings are not permanent; like any good scaffold, they are temporary and removable and can be changed when the students’ linguistic needs change. What is important is that by making students’ different translanguaging rings *visible*, the teacher breaks down labels like “Spanish dominant” or “English dominant” and creates a classroom environment in which *all* students see themselves as bilingual, even as they make use of different tools to learn through English and the LOTE.

Classroom Practice: Translanguaging Transformation

Translanguaging transformation in DLBE classrooms can enable students to bring their unique bilingual, bicultural identities to the texts that they encounter. In a DLBE early childhood program in Brooklyn, one teacher set the stage for her students to use their bilingual imaginations and extend their language practices through a puppet show reenactment of the Three Little Pigs. In their play, the teacher asked questions and encouraged students to put their own spin on the story, rather than simply reenact it.

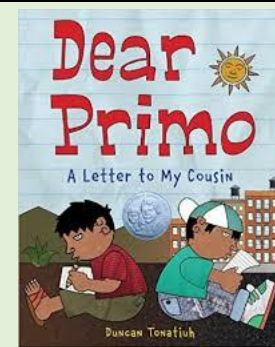
One group of students who knew that there were different languages in their own neighborhood in Brooklyn decided that each pig had recently arrived in New York from different countries and spoke different languages. The pigs became neighbors and friends, and they communicated with each other using English and their different languages. They decided that the pigs’ houses were built of seaweed, the palms of coconut trees, and wooden planks. Moreover, students ended their version of the story with the wolf climbing down the kitchen window and landing in sancocho, a traditional soup from the Dominican Republic.

As they played and imagined new possibilities for the story of the Three Little Pigs, *translanguaging transformation* was clearly at work. Students were encouraged to bring their experiences with diverse language practices and their own dynamic bilingual practices into their

play. Students’ reimagining of the story reflected their experiences in a multilingual, urban context and they applied their pride in that context to a creative transformation of a traditional story. Their play, of course, also provided the teacher with yet another opportunity to engage in *translanguaging documentation* as she observed her students demonstrating yet more knowledge and linguistic expertise as they drew on all their language practices and bilingual experiences.

Creating a translanguaging transformation space in the DLBE classroom means helping students hone their metalinguistic awareness as well as their creativity and criticality (Li Wei, 2012). This means setting up opportunities for students to learn more about their own language practices and integrate them in ways that support their bilingual identities. One DLBE teacher created a project for her fifth-grade students that attempted to do just this.

The teacher and her students read the book *Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh, in which two cousins – Charlie and Carlitos – use English and Spanish to write letters to each other about their lives in Mexico and the U.S. The teacher knew that, like Charlie, most of her students had cousins and other family members in countries outside the U.S. and designed a project that asked them to:



1. Design a bilingual interview protocol that asked a family member outside the U.S. about different parts of their life in their home country
2. Conduct the bilingual interview with the family member (via email, social media, or phone) and transcribe excerpts from the interview
3. Create their own versions of *Dear Primo* in which they use the interviews to construct a back and forth “letter” comparing their lives to the lives of family members outside the U.S.

Once students had written their letters, the teachers invited their families and communities into the classroom to watch their performances and give their feedback, which was given using both English and their home languages. She also compiled students’ letters into a book that became part of the whole-class library.

Lastly, in a two-way DLBE English/Spanish fourth-grade classroom we can see how the teacher, Juana, enacted a *translanguaging transformation*, which included activities that leveraged students’ bilingualism to develop language for academic purposes².

Regardless of the language of the day, every two days Juana conducts an activity which she calls “Language Detectives/Detectives Lingüísticos.” During this short activity, Juana focuses on a single feature or single use of English and español. She writes on the whiteboard an example in both languages and gives linguistically heterogeneous groups of students a magnifying glass to engage them as language detectives or detectives lingüísticos. Students are free to use all their language practices to discuss among themselves how the two languages differ. They then come up with other examples along similar lines.

² This vignette was taken from the article “Reframing language allocation in dual language bilingual education” by Sánchez, García, and Solorza (2017).

As they take up the role of detectives *lingüísticos*, students become better at metalinguistic reflection – What is the word or phrase in Spanish for the English or in Spanish for the English? Are the nuances of the resulting messages different or the same? Why is it said differently? How do English and Spanish express past, third person, mood? These kinds of questions also help students to think of their language practices not as two separate systems, but as an integrated whole that can lead to linguistic discoveries.

Key Points		
<p>In this section, you read about how different teachers engaged in <i>translanguaging documentation</i>, set up <i>translanguaging rings</i>, and enacted <i>translanguaging transformation</i>. These teachers’ practices included:</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Translanguaging Documentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe and keep track of the ways that students make meaning of content and engage with texts using <i>all</i> their language practices (not just the language of instruction). • When assessing students’ reading comprehension in one language, note how they retell, summarize, make connections, etc. using their full linguistic repertoire. • Create reading groups (and organize other learning structures) based on what students know and can do when they use the named language alone <i>and</i> when they use their full linguistic repertoire. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Translanguaging Rings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference bilingual Word Walls and charts it in both the English and LOTE times (in side by side models, consider having bilingual Word Walls and charts up in both the English <i>and</i> the LOTE classroom spaces) • When possible, provide both English and LOTE versions of a whole-class text (i.e.: a content-area textbook) and give students access to both, no matter what the language of instruction • Provide technological supports, such as translation tools on iPads • Give students the opportunity to plan and pre-write in any language in preparation for a written assignment in 	<p style="text-align: center;">Translanguaging Transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After reading a text, ask questions that foster students’ <i>metalinguistic awareness</i>, such as “why did the author use language in this way?” or “What do the characters’ uses of language tell us about who they are?” • Put all of students’ languages (English, the LOTE, <i>and</i> other languages they use) side by side and engage them in discussions about those languages. • Design activities that actively leverage students’ bilingualism and cultural experiences • Choose texts that not only contain English and the LOTE but that tell stories and cover topics that are

	<p>either English or the LOTE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner students with different linguistic profiles so they can help one another with assignments in English or the LOTE 	<p>relevant to students' bilingual, bicultural lives</p>
--	--	--

Conclusion

As can be seen from the classroom vignettes featured in this Topic Brief, integrating translanguaging into existing language allocations in Dual Language Bilingual programs can open myriad opportunities for powerful learning and identity development for bilingual students. Rather than simply teaching students “language,” making the English and the LOTE spaces more flexible enables teachers to teach their students in ways that support their expansive, fluid bilingualism and biliteracy. Though separate English and the LOTE spaces are necessary for many reasons, accompanying them with translanguaging documentation, rings, and transformation makes possible a more equitable and dynamic vision for educating bilingual students. In short, when translanguaging is used intentionally in Dual Language Bilingual programs, we can support bilingual learners but building on all their strengths *and* move them forward linguistically and academically in two or more named languages.

References and Further Readings

- Celic, C., & Seltzer, K. (2011). *Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB guide for educators*. The Graduate Center, The City University of New York: CUNY-NYSIEB. Retrieved from <http://www.nysieb.ws.gc.cuny.edu/files/2012/06/FINALTranslanguaging-Guide-With-Cover-1.pdf>
- Flores, N. (2014). Let's not forget that translanguaging is a political act. <https://educationallinguist.wordpress.com/2014/07/19/lets-not-forget-that-translanguaging-is-a-political-act/>
- García, O. (2009) *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective* Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley/Blackwell.
- García, O. & Kley, T. (Eds.) (2017). *Translanguaging with multilingual students: Learning from classroom moments*. New York: Routledge.
- García, O., & Li Wei. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan Pivot.
- García, O., Johnson, S. & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The Translanguaging classroom*. Philadelphia: Caslon.
- Gort, M. & Sembiente, S.F. (2015). Navigating hybridized language learning spaces through translanguaging pedagogy: Dual language preschool teachers' languaging practices in support of emergent bilingual children's performance of academic discourse. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 9(1).
- Li, Wei (2017). Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 1-23, doi:10.1093/applin/amx039

- Lindholm-Leary, K. J. (2005). *Review of research and best practices on effective features of dual language education programs*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from http://www.lindholm-leary.com/resources/review_research.pdf
- Otheguy, R., García, O. & Reid, W. (2015). Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 6(3): 281-307.
- Otheguy, R., García, O. & Reid, W. (2018). A translanguaging view of the linguistic system of bilinguals. *Applied Linguistics Review*.
- Palmer, D. K., Martínez, R. A., Mateus, S. G., & Henderson, K. (2014). Reframing the debate on language separation: Toward a vision for translanguaging pedagogies in the dual language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 98(3), 757–772.
- Poza, L. (2017). Translanguaging: Definitions, implications, and further needs in burgeoning inquiry. *Berkeley Review of Education*, 6(2), 101–128.
- Sánchez, M. T., García, O., & Solorza, C. (2017). Reframing language allocation policy in dual language bilingual education. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 1-15.
- Solorza, C. Aponte, G., Becker, T., Leverenz, T. & Frias, B. (forthcoming). *A Blueprint for Planning Units of Study: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide*. New York: CUNY-NYSIEB.
- Valdés, G. (1997) Dual-language immersion programs: A cautionary note concerning the education of language-minority students. *Harvard Educational Review* 67, 391-429.
- Vogel, S., & García, O. (2017). Translanguaging. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.181
- Vogel, S., Ascenzi-Moreno, L. & García, O. (2018). An expanded view of translanguaging: Leveraging the dynamic interactions between a young multilingual writer and machine translation software. In Choi, J. & Ollerhead, S. (eds.). *Plurilingualism in teaching and learning: Complexities across contexts* (pp. 89 to 106). New York: Routledge.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society. The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This CUNY-NYSIEB topic brief was written by Kate Seltzer and Ofelia García. The framework for this brief was adapted from the article *Reframing language allocation policy in dual language bilingual education* by Sánchez, M. T., García, O., & Solorza, C. (2017).