## Topic Brief:
## Developing Biliteracy in Dual Language Education Classrooms

## Introduction

This Topic Brief shares ideas about building bilingualism and biliteracy in Dual Language Education (DLE) classrooms. It addresses how to design curriculum and lessons that leverage flexible use of language so students can access their full linguistic repertoire when engaging in biliteracy activities within the structure of DLE programs. By biliteracy we mean what Hornberger (1990) defined as "any and all instances in which communication occurs in two or more languages in or around writing" (p. 213). The brief provides ideas for how educators can bring students' and families' bilingual practices into the classroom to transform students' learning in the development of biliteracy.

The goal of DLE programs is to make students bilingual and biliterate. DLE programs include students who are situated along all points of the language-bilingual continuum; there are those who are developing English (labeled English Language Learners or Multilingual Learners (ELLs/MLLs), as well as those who are not. Students are expected to perform academically across the content areas in both English and the LOTE. DLE programs integrate language and content so that they teach both simultaneously.

This topic brief is intended for educators who work with students in DLE programs, regardless of the program type, who are particularly interested in developing biliteracy. To this end, we have organized this brief around several essential questions:

1. How can DLE teachers effectively develop biliteracy?
2. How can educators make space for translanguaging within the structures of DLE?
3. How can educators design activities that foster students' holistic biliteracy development?

We begin by briefly exploring what a holistic biliteracy framework looks like in the context of DLE classrooms and how educators can use translanguaging to leverage literacy learning in DLE programs. Then we move into examples of promising school and classroom-based practices inspired by a biliteracy framework. We explore how listening, oracy, reading, writing, and metalanguage can be developed in a DLE classroom. These examples draw on real schools, teachers, and students, and provide models of powerful teaching practices.

| Key Terms and Concepts | |
|---|---|
| **Dual language education** | Programs that teach students in two languages and whose goals are bilingualism and biliteracy. |
| **Holistic biliteracy framework** | A "holistic biliteracy framework" (Escamilla et. al, 2014) understands the development of biliteracy in two languages as an integrated system (not two separate cognitive and linguistic systems). In this framework, literacy, as a system, includes oracy, reading, writing, and metalanguage. |
| **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 |

## How can DLE teachers effectively develop biliteracy?

Biliteracy development should be approached holistically, rather than from the idea that we are developing two separate linguistic and cognitive systems. Escamilla and her colleagues (2014) propose a biliteracy framework based on the idea that literacy instruction is a system that includes not just reading and writing, but also oracy and metalanguage, that is, reflection about language. A "holistic biliteracy framework" (Escamilla et. al, 2014) dedicates appropriate amounts of time to 1. listening, 2. speaking, 3. reading, 4. writing, and 5. metalanguage. All these actions are intrinsically connected to one another during instruction. In this framework, literacy instruction is taught in both languages (LOTE and English) *simultaneously*, rather than sequentially.

1. Teaching *active listening* is a key part of biliteracy instruction. Comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) is important in making meaning. Language is used socially with others, and successful interactions rely as much on speakers' ability to communicate, as they do on listeners' active comprehension. As students learn to listen, they begin to construct messages actively; therefore, they need to practice listening actively both to teachers and to peers.

2. Teaching *oracy* fosters the development of expressive language through structured dialogue. There are many purposes for oracy instruction. Students can brainstorm and review existing knowledge through talk; they can extend their understanding of a topic; and they can express what they have learned to others (Norman, 1992). It is important to consider having oracy objectives that focus on the oral language needed to develop literacy tasks in both languages of instruction (Escamilla et. al, 2014).

3. *Reading* and *writing* instruction in each language must emphasize the relationship between the two languages of instruction. Students need to be taught explicitly how to access their full linguistic repertoire to comprehend texts or create their own texts, as the skills and knowledge that they learn in one language help them build on what they know and can do in an additional language (Escamilla, et. al, 2014). At the same time, readers and writers need to be mindful of the specific features with which readers and writers construct texts in each language.

4. *Metalanguage* is thinking and talking about language, as well as the relationships between languages (Escamilla et. al, 2014; Freeman, Freeman, Soto & Ebe, 2016). It is essential to foster metalinguistic awareness so students can develop an understanding of and ability to talk about language, both within and across languages. This metalinguistic awareness improves the students' ability to develop their conceptual knowledge and abilities to use language to express their knowledge (Reyes & Klein, 2010).

To foster bilingualism and biliteracy, it is important to preserve the spaces for each language and design literacy activities for each target language. However, to serve the social and academic needs of students, it is *also* necessary that students have access to their full linguistic repertoire when engaging in literacy activities.

> ### Key Points
> Biliteracy development should be approached holistically, rather than from the idea that we are developing two separate literacies, one in English and one in the LOTE.
>
> To develop biliteracy, it is important to engage students in active listening, speaking, reading, writing and reflection about language (metalanguage).

## How can we make space for translanguaging within the structures of DLE?
Translanguaging refers to the dynamic process by which bilinguals "make sense" of the communicative situation by performing bilingually and drawing on their entire linguistic repertoire. Translanguaging is the fluid communicative norm of multilingual communities and families (García & Li Wei, 2014). To understand the idea of translanguaging and to educate students to be bilingual, we need to review the distinction between "language", from the internal communicative perspective, and "a language", from the external or named language perspective. A translanguaging perspective acknowledges the social, external reality and importance of named languages. However, translanguaging privileges an *internal* view of the bilinguals' own unitary linguistic system that is constructed through meaningful social interactions (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015, 2018). A translanguaging pedagogy in DL programs encourages instruction that starts with students' language practices while maintaining the integrity of the two named languages for biliteracy and bilingualism.

Sánchez, García, and Solorza (2018) propose three ways to integrate translanguaging into DLE: (1) Translanguaging documentation, (2) Translanguaging rings, and (3) Translanguaging transformation. These components are useful in thinking about biliteracy in the context of the DL classroom.

***Translanguaging documentation*** can help educators learn what students can do using their *full linguistic repertoire* and to assess their understandings in order to plan classroom biliteracy instruction. Documenting how multilingual learners use their full linguistic repertoire for communicative and academic purposes provides a more holistic understanding of the child as learner. Teachers can leverage these understandings to help expand students' literacies in both English and the LOTE.

*Translanguaging rings* act as scaffolds for individual students to ensure that they are making meaning of the instruction in one language or another. Translanguaging rings can help students when they are immersed in literacy activities that require them to use linguistic features of one named language that they are in the process of developing. Translanguaging rings can take the form of bilingual dictionaries, translation software, language partners, and other supports that help students with a literacy task that they cannot perform without assistance.

*Translanguaging transformation* happens in the DLE classroom when students' fluid language practices are leveraged. A translanguaging transformative space encourages students to use their language practices creatively. For example, a teacher might encourage students to write a short story that features bilingual characters who speak in the two languages. The importance of this space is that it makes students see their bilingual and biliterate performances not only as interconnected, but also as critical for the inclusion of all people and the transformation of the ways in which others perceive them and they perceive themselves.

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### Key Points

To support a holistic biliteracy framework, teacher must create spaces for students to build literacy in each of the named languages of instruction AND give students access to their full linguistic repertoire.

*Translanguaging documentation* helps teachers learn what students can do using their *full linguistic repertoire* to plan classroom biliteracy instruction.

*Translanguaging rings* are ways of scaffolding instruction to provide the supports that students need to accomplish a particular literacy task that they still cannot perform without assistance.

*Translanguaging transformation* means making space for bilingual students to creatively and critically use all their linguistic resources in biliteracy activities.

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## How can educators design activities that foster students' holistic biliteracy development?

In this section, we expand upon the different elements of Escamilla's holistic biliteracy framework and provide teachers with concrete ideas for approaching each element in the context of DLE classrooms.

### *Developing oracy through student interviews to enrich bilingual writing*

Interviews can be a wonderful tool to involve families and communities in the classroom biliteracy work. They can help students develop oracy and provide the foundation for writing projects. There are many ways in which classroom interviews can support a biliteracy curriculum. In this section, we discuss first how to scaffold the interview process and later, we provide examples of how to incorporate interviews as part of biliteracy activities.

> *Scaffolding the interview process:* Students must pre-plan the interview questions and think about what kinds of information they want to gather. During the brainstorming process, students should use their full linguistic repertoire, even if the final set of questions is in only

one language. This provides an opportunity for metalinguistic discussions about wording and structure of questions in both languages. As they do the interviews, students must learn skill of note-taking. Because students might be interviewing other bilingual individuals, teachers should model how to take notes in one language or another or bilingually, and to use other modalities, such as drawings or diagrams (Rogovin, 2001).

*Doing research through bilingual interviews:* Families and community members are a primary source of information. It is important to create a school-wide policy that supports teachers in learning about the families' bilingual and biliteracy practices, so they can bring those funds of knowledge to the classrooms (Moll, Amanti, Neff&, Gonzalez, 2005). When starting to learn about a new topic in the class, teachers can begin by asking their students to brainstorm: Who can we invite to the class for an interview? If this is a regular practice in the classroom, students can begin to see the members of their families and communities as experts.

*Peer Interviews to develop a topic or an idea:* Having students interview one another develops their oral language and provides a platform for writing. For example, if students are writing an "All about…" piece, a very common type of informational writing in early grades, they can interview each other about a topic that they know a lot about, such as "All about pets", "All about baseball", or "All about El Salvador". While the interview and the note-taking might use many languages, the final writing product can be in one of the languages of instruction.

## *Fostering bilingual reading identities*

To foster students' bilingual reading identities, it essential that students encounter culturally, linguistically and personally relevant texts. These texts are those that were originally written in the target language, books that contain both English and the LOTE, and books that use translanguaging. In this section, we discuss how teachers can help students build bilingual reading identities by using bilingual books during shared reading experiences, engaging students in literature circles and using interactive read-alouds.

*Lifting text using bilingual books:* Teachers can "lift texts" to provide a shared reading experience in which children examine a segment of a text closely (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Using a document camera or copying a portion of a text in large print, teachers and students can examine bilingual books closely to take apart how texts are constructed in two languages. When choosing a section of a book, it is important to use a text that the students are already familiar with so they are not reading a segment out of context. As they read the texts side-by-side, teachers can ask questions about style, word choice, word order, punctuation, and other language conventions. In addition, in lifting text from bilingual books, teachers can model how to use English *and* the LOTE to make sense of texts.

*Using literature circles as a collaborative approach to teaching biliteracy:* It is important to emphasize the sociocultural nature of learning by designing classroom structures that foster collaborative work (Capellini, 2005). Literature circles can leverage collaborative learning to teach biliteracy, but their structure needs careful consideration in DL classrooms. For example, it is important to include culturally relevant books, as well as

different types of bilingual books—those which are published in separate editions in two languages, those which present the same story in two languages alongside each other, as well as those which use two languages within the same story and text.
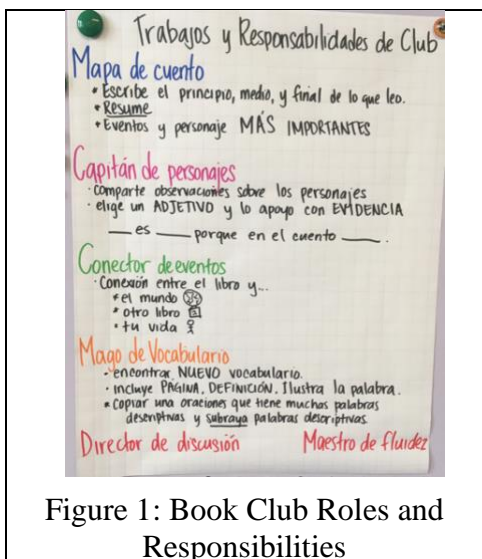


Figure 1: Book Club Roles and Responsibilities

Students must take turns in literature circle roles that leverage their bilingualism (for an example of roles, see Figure 2 to the left). For example, in each group some students might be assigned to be the "word wizard." The word wizard's role would be to find new words or important words in the text, or to point out how words are being used in the two languages of instruction.

During discussion, while it is important to provide supports for interactions in the language of instruction, it is also essential that students use their full linguistic repertoire, moving fluidly between the LOTE and English to make sense of the text so they can have rich verbal interactions.

*Using interactive read-aloud to model how authors use translanguaging as a literary device:* Read-alouds can be used to teach specific literacy strategies and model the kinds of questions that students might ask as readers (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Many bilingual authors move between languages flexibly as a narrative technique. One way to foster students' bilingual reading identities is to read books in which the authors engage in this kind of translanguaging. Teachers should begin by activating students' prior knowledge, asking them to make connections to their own language practices: How do they use language at home? How do others in their homes or communities use language?

During reading, it is essential to model the kinds of questions that a reader might ask in books that are written primarily in one language, but include words or phrases in other languages. For example, in the book *A Days' Work*, written primarily in English, the teacher might ask: 'Why is the author using Spanish in this dialogue?' Students must also have opportunities to turn and talk to each other and to discuss how and why an author is using language in particular ways. During this process, it is important to co-construct an anchor chart that records children's thinking about how authors use translanguaging as a literary device that students can add to (See Figure 2 to the right).
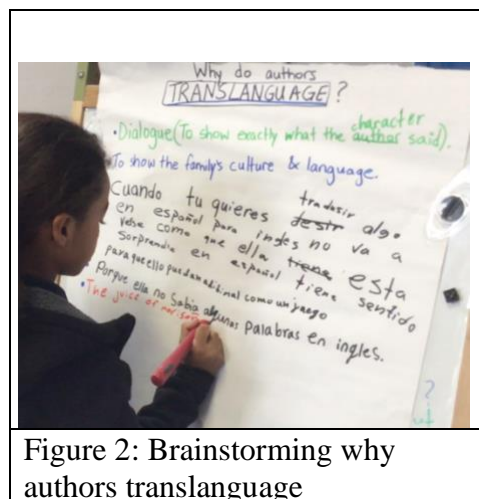


Figure 2: Brainstorming why authors translanguage

> **Box 1: Books that Support the Development of Holistic Biliteracy**
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> In order to encourage students to use language in creative ways, it may be helpful to introduce them to books that support the development of holistic biliteracy. Here is a list of recommended books that are written primarily in English but have words in other languages (listed in the parentheses):
> - *The Name Jar* by Yansook Choi (Korean): Unhei just moved from Korea. Instead of introducing herself on the first day of school, she tells the class that she will choose a name by the following week.
> - *Coolies* by Laurence Yep (Chinese): The story of two Chinese immigrants coming to the United States and working to build the railroad.
> - *Drita, My Home Girl* by Jenny Lombard (Albanian): The story of a ten-year-old from Kosovo who starts in a new school.
> - *How Tía Lola Came to* Visit by Julia Alvarez (Spanish): Miguel moves to Vermont after his parents' divorce, and then Tía Lola arrives from the Dominican Republic to help his mother.
> - *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan (Spanish): Esperanza was a wealthy girl in Mexico, but tragedy forces her and her Mama to flee to California during the Great Depression.
> - *Listen, Slowly* by Thanhha Lai (Vietnamese):  A girl born in California, travels to Vietnam with her grandmother to find out what happened to her missing grandfather.
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> A list of books that integrate multiple languages can be also found at: https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/culturally-relevant-books-and-resources/

## *Developing Bilingual Writers*

The writing process of bilingual students is enriched when students can use their full linguistic repertoire to navigate it and when they use multiple modes of language (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) throughout the process (Espinosa, Ascenzi-Moreno & Vogel, 2016). In this section, we explore how students can use their full linguistic repertoire in the writing process, as well as how they utilize their bilingualism in their writing as a literary device.

*Using students' full linguistic repertoire to support the writing process:* Biliteracy instruction should provide opportunities for students to experience writing and publishing in a variety of genres in both English and the LOTE. Therefore, students need to learn the writing conventions of a genre in each particular language. However, the process of writing should engage students in using their full linguistic repertoire and connect to other modes (reading, speaking, listening). For example, before writing, students might discuss their ideas with a partner or role play a story using all their meaning-making resources (Espinosa, Ascenzi-Moreno & Vogel, 2016). They could also brainstorm their ideas using a concept map using both languages. Regardless of the language of the final product, they can revise and edit their work using any language with a language partner.

*Bilingual writing as a literary device*: Students also need to learn how to use their bilingualism to enrich their writing. As noted in the section about fostering students'

bilingual reading identities, bilingual authors can be students' mentors. If students learn how bilingual authors use their bilingualism as a literary device, they can learn to do the same in their own writing. A DLE classroom must make the space for bilingual writing, both using the two languages separately and in interrelationship. Using mentor texts, teachers can explore how different genres lend themselves to bilingual writing. For example, bilingual poems often play with the use of multiple languages, and personal narratives sometimes have the characters speak in one language, while the narration might be in another language.

## Promising Practices

In this section, we step into DLE classrooms that use multiple strategies to develop students' biliteracy. In each vignette, you will see teachers take up several of the ideas put forth in the previous sections. After we describe each classroom practice, we provide insights into the ways in which the teachers developed holistic biliteracy within the structures of their DL classrooms.

### *Classroom Practice: Developing Bilingual Readers Through Social Issues Literature Circles*

The following vignette illustrates how two teachers in a fourth-grade side by side English/ Spanish DLE program (that is, in which two teachers each teach one language to the same students) used multiple modes to support students' development as bilingual readers in a literature circles unit. At the beginning of the unit, students discussed and created a list of the social issues that they were aware of, based on their personal knowledge or texts that they had read previously. Later on, in each classroom, the students were grouped according to their reading levels in Spanish and English and read books featuring a variety of social issues. The books were primarily written in the language of instruction in the classroom. However, in both settings, there were some books in which the authors used more than one language as a literary device.

The teachers provided structures for oral discussions to brainstorm ideas and to make sense of the stories that the students were reading. They also provided opportunities for students to reflect on their reading through their writing. While the children read books in the target language of each of the classrooms, the teachers purposely designed opportunities in which Spanish and English were used flexibly to support students' meaning-making process.

The teachers and students discussed and agreed that books focusing on social issues feature problems and injustices that don't just affect one character in a book, but instead, affect entire groups of people. Before the students read the books in each class, the teachers taught a mini-lesson in which the children learned to focus their lenses on a particular skill, such as noticing connections between issues, comparing and contrasting different view points, or thinking about power differences. For each teaching point, the students took notes individually and shared them during the discussions. One of the lessons addressed how and why authors use language strategically as a literary device in different texts. The students read and analyzed a few poems that used Spanish and English strategically in groups and created a list of reasons for why authors used language flexibly. Figure 3 shows how after reading a poem from *My Name is Jorge: On Both Sides of the River*, a student wrote about why he thinks that the author uses translanguaging in the poem. Figure 4 shows how a student noted that the author in her book, *The Keeping Quilt,* used the Hebrew word "challah" because "it is not a word in Spanish or English".

During the literature circle discussions, the children had different tasks to focus the discussion. The teachers provided the prompts and some sentence stems to start the discussions in the target language, but as the children participated in the discussion, they moved fluidly, as needed, between Spanish and English to make sense of the text. Through working in literary circles, students came to reconsider their own ideas through collaborative discussions and to draw new conclusions about the texts that they read.
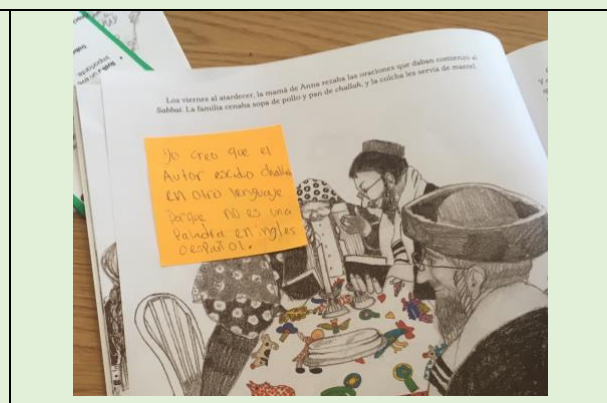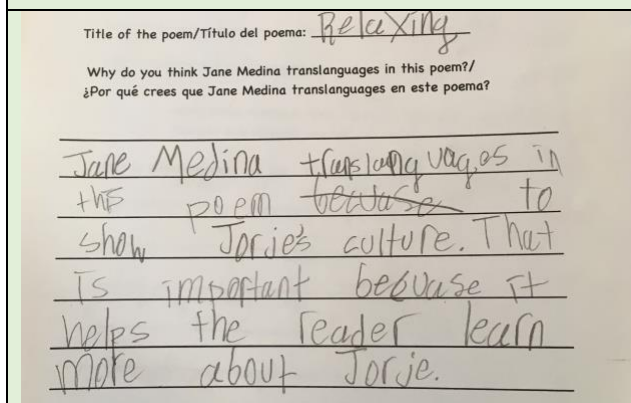


*Figure 3: Student's reflection on the use of more than one language in a poem by author Jane Medina.*



*Figure 4: One student's sticky note on her book The Keeping Quilt that shows her analysis of the Hebrew word, "challah."*

Through the social issues literature circles, the teachers created a *transformational space* in which the students used their full linguistic repertoire to dive deeper into their books. While the students read books in the target language, the teachers equipped them, as needed, with *translanguaging rings* to provide a scaffold, for example, providing a book to a student in her home language to help her read the same book in English. Having the story in both languages allowed her to make meaningful connections and to participate in group discussions. To foster bilingual reading identities, the teachers modeled strategies that explicitly showed students how to use English and Spanish as they were reading and to reflect on the use of language. This unit

provided a platform for metalinguistic discussions that helped foster students' identities as bilingual readers.

## *Classroom Practice: Writing "How-to" Books and Learning to Cook with Ms. Sánchez*

The following vignette illustrates how a kindergarten teacher in a self-contained English/Spanish DLE program in Brooklyn used parents' cultural and linguistic resources to teach students how to write in a non-fiction genre: "how-to" books. "How-to" writing weaves together drawing and writing, and has a hands-on, action-oriented style. This vignette provides an example of how bilingual oracy is embedded in the writing process. It also demonstrates how students' and their families' expertise— sometimes considered outside of the academic realm— can be brought to the classroom to enrich biliteracy projects.

The teacher invited parents to share with the children their knowledge about how to do different things. Some parents felt more comfortable teaching the children in English, others used Spanish, while many others used both languages. One of the parents - Ms. Sánchez, an immigrant from Guatemala - came to the class to teach the students how to make tortillas. Before she came, the children in the class brainstormed questions to interview Ms. Sánchez in English and Spanish. But since Ms. Sánchez only spoke Spanish, the students, as a class, created a second draft of the list in Spanish and then, with help from the teacher, took turns asking the questions.



*Figure 5: Students making tortillas*

After the interview, Ms. Sánchez taught the children how to make tortillas and they took turns helping. The teacher stopped at different points to write the steps, highlighting sequencing words (primero, después, al final). When the tortillas were finished, they ate them and read the "how-to book" they created as a class. The following day, each student brainstormed ideas for their own "how to" books, using both Spanish and English. They first shared their ideas with a partner (how to walk a dog, cómo jugar al fútbol [how to play soccer], etc.). After they had talk through their ideas with a partner in the language in which they felt most comfortable, they wrote their first draft, using the sentence frames in Spanish.

Ms. Sánchez engaged the parents in her class in sharing family practices with the children as a foundation for non-fiction writing. Throughout the process, the students used oral language as a tool for research (during the interviews and while Ms. Sánchez was explaining the steps in making tortillas), and as a tool for thinking and brainstorming their ideas for their projects. The teacher also designed opportunities for students to move fluidly between languages during some steps of the writing process, but the final product was in the language of instruction (Spanish).

### *Classroom Practice: Engaging Parents in Analyzing Bilingual Poems*

This last vignette provides an example of how a fourth-grade teacher in a Spanish/English DLE classroom engaged parents and students in thinking about their dynamic language practices at home through the collaborative analysis of bilingual poems.

The teacher invited parents into the classroom to participate in a poetry bilingual poetry analysis activity. When the parents arrived, the teacher distributed poems from the book, *My Name is Jorge from Both Sides of the River* by Jane Medina. The book is a collection of bilingual poems written the perspective of Jorge, a young boy who recently arrived in the United States from Mexico. In the book, the author uses language flexibly in some of the poems for a range of purposes.

Parents were grouped with the children. They read two poems from the book together and discussed how the author used English and Spanish. After, they shared their ideas with the whole class, the teacher explained what the word "translanguaging" means and asked parents and students to think about when they use translanguaging in their daily lives.

The teacher then asked each child to draw a scene of one of those situations with the help of his/her parents. After this activity, the teacher continued to use *My Name is Jorge* as a mentor text to inspire students to write bilingually.



*Figure 6: Student's drawing of how he uses language flexibly in his daily life.*

In this vignette, you saw students and parents engaged in metalinguistic analysis of a poem. In the analysis, they found multiple ways in which the author used translanguaging as a literary device. While home and school language practices are often seen as isolated from each other, this activity validated the language practices that families use at home as a rich resource that can be leveraged in biliteracy instruction in the classroom. Children and family members reflected on their own language practices and brainstormed ways of sharing through a multimodal medium that includes text and drawings. In doing this activity, the teacher used families' funds of knowledge to develop students' biliteracy skills.

> **Key Points**
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> In this section, you read about how different teachers use multiple strategies to develop students' biliteracy holistically. Here is a summary of some of the teachers' practices:
> - Use students' full linguistic repertoire to make sense of texts and develop students' bilingual reading identities.
> - Engage students with texts that model how to use bilingual writing as a literary device.
> - Use interviewing to support the writing process by making students' families and communities a primary source of information for non-fiction writing.
> - Engage families in shared literacy activities with the children and provide a platform for them to reflect together on how they use multiple languages in their everyday life.

## Conclusion

In Dual Language classrooms, teachers should approach biliteracy development holistically, using a framework that includes listening, oracy, reading, writing, and metalanguage. In addition, teachers whose goal is to develop biliteracy must pay attention to two different aspects of bilingualism: the external perspective and the internal perspective. On the one hand, teachers should have their bilingual students read monolingual texts, written in one language or another and produce oral and written texts in one language or another. But in so doing, bilingual students must be encouraged to interact with a text written in one language using *all* their linguistic and meaning-making resources. To develop students' biliteracy, it is important to uphold the different spaces for English and the LOTE, while enabling bilingual students to make use of their full language/literacy-making capacity.

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