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Rooted in Strength: Grounded in Research Communities and Building on Pedagogical Leadership

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Rooted in Strength: Grounded in Research Communities and Building on Pedagogical Leadership

Cover Page Footnote

Author:

Lorraine T. Falchi, EdD, is an early childhood educator based in New York City. She supports educators in collaborative coaching partnerships in developing practices as critical practitioners and change agents in learning communities. Her research examines early language, play, and multimodal literacies with a focus on emergent bilingual children's identities. Recent work includes "Learning from Emergent Bilinguals: Mobilizing Translanguaging and Multimodality to Reimagine School Literacy Curricular Spaces," co-authored with Ysaaca Axelrod and Marjorie Siegel in *Multimodal Literacies in Young Emergent Bilinguals*.

Book Review

Rooted in Strength: Grounded in Research Communities and Building on Pedagogical Leadership

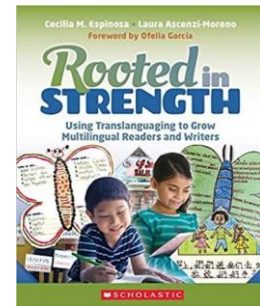
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Book Reviewed:

Espinosa, C., & Ascenzi-Moreno, L. (2021). *Rooted in Strength: Using Translanguaging to Grow Multilingual Readers and Writers*. New York: Scholastic Incorporated. 224 pages. ISBN-13 978-1338753875 Paperback \$36.99.

A global pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing inequities in how we do schooling. Yet few educational programs are designed to address critical issues for emergent bilinguals, and teachers need the resources and support to develop and deepen promising practices for educating emergent bilinguals. *Rooted in Strength: Using Translanguaging to Grow Multilingual Readers and Writers* shares research-based resources and maps opportunities for teachers to grow in their practice. Readers are challenged to examine their knowledge and stretch the application of their understandings. Starting with the recognition of emergent bilinguals' potential to become bilingual and biliterate, the book makes a case for ways of honoring and using children's entire linguistic and sociocultural repertoires toward their fullest participation in language and literacy learning. As such, this volume encourages positive responses to the multifaceted challenges faced by educators and teacher educators that are critical to school change.



Cecilia Espinosa and Laura Ascenzi-Moreno are educational leaders with a vision for educating emergent bilingual learners in schools, and they communicate ideas for how teachers might use expansive asset-based pedagogical practices to make a difference in the lives of emergent bilingual children. In doing so, they build on decades of experience as learners, teachers, and researchers of early bilingualism and biliteracy. By rooting their educational practices in children's strengths and taking a view of the child as a whole person, educators may harness their own knowledge and build on learners' experience, knowledge, and resources.

A foreword by Ofelia García opens with a poetic image of a current of translanguaging practices to activate the reader's imagination to make these visible in

classrooms. The authors invite educators to support emergent bilinguals as agents in their own learning using the pedagogical practices of translanguaging. The dynamic process of *doing* literacy and becoming literate shows how emergent bilinguals acquire language in their daily lives using social, creative reserves. Translanguaging, then, is described as the creative process of multi/bilinguals who weave their linguistic, sociohistorical resources together with new communicative practices.

The authors address an audience of early childhood and elementary teachers who work with emergent bilinguals, yet content offers secondary school teachers, leaders, and teacher educators both in-depth theoretical principles and guidance to integrate pedagogical practices of translanguaging and literacy learning. Educators who voice concerns about equitable social conditions with varied professional experience will find constructive ways to question and think collaboratively through disciplined description of observations and reflective practices that improve reading and writing pedagogies.

The book chapters are organized with features and suggestions on such practices with appendices providing self-assessment tools and collaborative inquiry structures. Classroom scenarios are woven throughout to visualize and awaken background knowledge of agentive learners. Action sections provide support strategies to organize and engage emergent bilinguals in active literacy learning. Suggestions for Professional Development outline ways for colleagues to invigorate and investigate instructional practices as peers in professional learning communities. New Teacher Spotlights detail tools and templates to operationalize core concepts within activity structures. This presents a plethora of options for participation in hands-on, minds-on exercises to apply and extend knowledge with practitioner inquiry.

Part 1: *Translanguaging Into Literacy* proposes thinking about emergent bilinguals' languages, literacies, and resources to maximize use of oral language practices. Chapter one introduces literacy principles and conceptual connections between literacy and a translanguaging stance. It offers a vision of practice that fosters children's social identities by owning their languages in portraits that grow learners' self-awareness and belonging as speakers, thinkers, readers, and writers in a classroom community. Chapter two enhances understanding of observational practices by listening and responding to children by cultivating multilingual ecologies that represent learners and provide environmental support for those emergent bilinguals. Teachers demonstrate how emergent bilinguals thrive and learn as they learn about children's and families' translanguaging practices to build on them across funds of knowledge.

Part 2: *Reading Into Meaning* applies a translanguaging framework to emergent reading processes unfolding as early biliteracy. Chapter three explores the teacher's role in promoting emergent bilingual readers' construction of new knowledge as they develop and negotiate reading identities. Reading practices attend to children's readings of their worlds as linguistic landscapes of icons, environmental print, and libraries. In chapter four, emergent bilinguals are shown as active constructors of meaning during components of literacy instruction that include shared, guided, and independent reading practices, with an eye toward the teacher's role in scaffolding

children's talk about texts and connecting with readers to shape their bilingual reading identities so they acquire the types of language, language awareness, and critical literacies privileged in schools. Chapter five describes emergent bilingual reading practices during read-aloud and teaching practices for supporting developing reading identities and interests in children's literature, including core comprehension practices of questioning, modeling metaknowledge of texts, and mentoring participation in grand conversations. Chapter six features research on assessment practices with emergent bilinguals that include disciplined observational and descriptive writing practices enabling teachers to reflect and respond with adaptations of reading assessment by translanguaging, rephrasing questions, and teaching practices encouraging deep investigation of emergent bilinguals' knowledge about language and reading to respond to readers and plan instruction.

Part 3: *Writing Into Understanding* synthesizes research on writing instruction for bilinguals and introduces translanguaging writing tools that encourage interactions with mentor texts and multimodal resources. Chapter seven explores teachers' practices of listening to children's thinking and assuming competence as writers to encourage composing practices. This emphasis on strengths encourages students to develop writing identities along with technical aspects and conventions of writing while using their multimodal repertoires. Chapter eight challenges the narrative of a static, standard form of writing by arguing that teachers of emergent bilinguals notice and draw on oral language practices to spark composers' thinking and dialogue through dynamic tactile, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic experiences of joint retellings and interactive or shared writing. Chapter nine grants teachers permission to experiment with multimodal approaches to writing to support emergent bilinguals with responsive instruction. Teachers and learners organically improvise as language users, meaning-makers who imagine and compose with symbolic and graphic languages to discuss observations and plan provocations to multiply representational meanings understood and made by children. Chapter ten shares how a descriptive review of the child might be used as a starting point for writing assessment. Teachers pose central questions, collect evidence, reflect together, and share descriptive information before interpreting writing and responding to questions. In this way, an understanding of who the child is, as well as the child's purposes and strengths, becomes the basis of conversations in writing conferences. Using strengths that emerge, teachers design instruction that taps linguistic and cultural repertoires so that children become increasingly confident and sophisticated readers and writers.

In closing, the authors reflect about their work as teachers on their unique learning trajectories. They recognize how teachers continue to theorize about learning and literacy as they structure environments and access to resources. They remind readers of the importance of noticing emergent bilinguals' strengths and of families' and communities' linguistic funds of knowledge that are brought to bear on students' learning as they become confident thinkers, readers, and writers with hopes and dreams for their participation in their world. The authors' research with bilingual teachers is a driving force at the center of learning communities, with multilingualism as the norm.

Their vision grows out of a research legacy with teachers who see the whole child. The central theme that emerges is translanguaging as a dynamic process, and pedagogical practices stand out as authors' expertise are rooted in creating space lines of inquiry in social collectives. Authors address teachers of emergent bilinguals while challenging them to stretch their capacity for reflection as self-directed inquirers. A translanguaging stance requires teacher inquiry alongside or with the child who is also a thinker, a curious inquirer, and composer. A teacher is capable of sparking curiosity in a parallel process as researchers who investigate alongside one another. This has been fruitful for researchers' constructing and promoting new understandings and knowledge of human development.

A second thematic highlight that undergirds the book is the idea that learning is dialogic. The authors characterize learner exchanges as bi-directional flows, ongoing conversations between teachers and learners with texts. Dialogue can incite and sustain cycles of inquiry in social worlds. Teachers are listening, watching, noticing, and cultivating the voices of multilingual learners with attention to child agency. The child is a protagonist in their own learning and in relationships with others. The child simultaneously brings the most valuable resources, linguistic and social repertoires, to talk about texts across named languages, modalities, and ways of engaging in dialogue. This orientation flips traditional language hierarchies in classroom communities; it is a disposition to practice learner-up, rather than teacher-down, pedagogies. Teacher dispositions develop as they make room for learners to leverage strengths in classroom literacy.

A final theme is an expansive notion of literacy development rooted in generations of research on literacies as social practices. In interactions interpreting graphic signs, children learn how to give meaning to them. These meanings are used to compose texts produced from words, the orality of breath and tongue, carrying cultural histories. Their translanguaging stance recognizes that literacy is not neutral. Pedagogies open possibilities for emergent bilingual children to generate, communicate, investigate, and represent their worlds or shut them down. They reject the boundedness of categorizing multilingual children by arbitrarily assigning labels and deficits. This expansive view resists the use of one set of knowledge and literacy resources while excluding families' language histories of participating in literate lives. The authors affirm and imagine teacher networks of practice and spaces to develop translanguaging stances. This shifts teachers' focus away from singular methods and encourages them to embrace strategic ways to rethink the environment and support structures and connect with families to maximize the children's choice and agency. Expansive notions of literacy development take root in the freedom to do, revise, and respond anew.

The authors stated that emergent bilinguals present a wide range of characteristics and identities, yet there were few explicit examples of emergent bilingual learners in inclusive education or with those who receive special education services in a range of educational settings. They reference the work of authors María Cioè-Peña and Patricia Martínez-Álvarez, whose research examines emergent bilinguals with dis/abilities, and say that their vision of equitable education, in which

bi/multilingual practice is the norm, applies to children identified as having dis/abilities. The authors are skilled in the description and discussion of concepts and practices of bilingual educators. Through visible and understandable models and examples, they contribute to areas of knowledge in bilingual curriculum and pedagogy that have often been neglected. Their clear definitions and visualized models are shared with stories of their family language practices and expertise as bilingual educators and researchers of equitable reading assessment practices. They have investigated bilingual teachers' writing identities, exploring promising areas of practice and teacher inquiry. They show how teachers aspire, investigate, and act to support multilingual learners in becoming bilingual and biliterate.

Espinosa and Ascenzi-Moreno envision culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogical practices with a contribution to the professional literature in literacy education for emergent bilinguals. They combine theory and practice with questions of whose history, culture, and identity matter in teaching and learning (Muhammad, 2020). Authors themselves identify as supporters of bilingual teachers of emergent bilingual children and teachers of multilingual learners, and as such they recognize the importance of building on learners' strength and envisioning how things might be otherwise to create change.

For future consideration, I suggest use of examples of Emergent Bilinguals Labeled as Disabled (EBLADs) who represent a range of developmental variations. Though their situations might be quite distinct, they are frequently denied the least restrictive setting where multilingualism is the norm and translanguaging is celebrated. Emergent bilinguals are seen as protagonists in literacy learning, and teachers are shown as collaborators who create learning environments and instruction to mentor strong critical thinkers with confident voices. *Rooted in Strength* is theoretically rich and research-based, offering extensive practical applications that are accessible to readers with vignettes of practices, awareness, and reflection on identities-in-action. The book also offers pictures of practice that support teachers exploring translanguaging as strategic pedagogical practices honoring and building on resources that children bring to their social and academic reading and writing lives.

Reference

Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic.