

# Sanctioning a Space for Translanguaging in the Secondary English Classroom: A Case of a Transnational Youth

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*A growing number of adolescents in the United States are transnationals who regularly engage in translanguaging practices by drawing on their full linguistic repertoires in their everyday lives. Many of these students are also emergent bilinguals, learning language and content simultaneously. Yet, as the number of these diverse students significantly rises, so does curricular standardization in the secondary English language arts classroom. Even so, some research documents promising translanguaging pedagogies, but these studies focus primarily on the elementary level or provide general overviews of these practices in secondary classrooms. Consequently, this qualitative study was divided into two phases: Phase 1 deeply investigated the nature of one high school emergent bilingual's transnationalism through a case study approach. The findings indicated that the participant's transnational lived experiences and literacies were closely tied to translanguaging practices. Then, grounded in that data, for Phase 2 of the study, the researchers used a formative design to create a literacy unit in the participant's high school English classroom that purposefully engaged her transnational literacies through translanguaging. Her reaction to the unit, specifically her writing in English and Spanish, was analyzed to understand her response to the curriculum and instruction. A systematic use of translanguaging—through reading, through oral language, and primarily through writing poetry—provided the participant with the means to express creativity and criticality as she took ownership of her literacy learning. The study suggests the possibilities of student learning when a space for translanguaging is sanctioned in the secondary English language arts classroom.*

Within the field of bilingual education, there is a growing movement to view students' multiple languages as resources (García & Sylvan, 2011; García & Wei, 2014; Ruiz, 1984). This paradigmatic change supplants decades of schooling in which bilingual youth were discouraged, shamed, and punished, sometimes even physically, for speaking their home languages in school (Arreguín-Anderson & Ruiz-Escalante, 2014; Guerra, 2012). In place of the traditional deficit perspective (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and past negative views of bilingualism in the United States (Baker, 2011), a new paradigm has emerged in which full biliteracy is

valued and desired for students, particularly those who are in the dynamic process of acquiring English as a second language (Collier & Thomas, 2009).

Many bilingual education researchers are now considering how emergent bilinguals' (EBs')<sup>1</sup> multiple languages interact with one another in the academic setting. Terms such as *code-meshing* (Canagarajah, 2006), *code-switching* (Guerra, 2012; Weinrich, 1953), *code-mixing* (Muysken, 2000), and more recently, *translanguaging* (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015) are being discussed in relation to pedagogy, particularly in the elementary classroom (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Palmer, Martínez, Mateus, & Henderson, 2014; Sayer, 2013) or in extracurricular settings at the secondary level (Martin-Beltrán, 2014). Translanguaging, or drawing from all one's languages in order to make meaning, is considered a transformative practice teachers should understand and utilize with emergent bilinguals in an official manner within the classroom (García & Menken, 2015).

Although there is much progress in teaching the language arts to young bilingual children (e.g., Escamilla, 2013), EBs in secondary English language arts classes rarely have biliteracy development opportunities. Indeed, the majority of dual-language programs exist at the elementary level (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007). Additionally, increased standardization from No Child Left Behind and now the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) has marginalized bilingual students' multiple abilities in all grades (Luke, 2012), but especially at the secondary level (Enright, Torres-Torretti, & Carreón, 2012). High-stakes accountability is responsible for pushing many adolescent EBs out of high school (Menken, 2008) as curricular standardization increases (Diamond, 2007), causing greater restrictions in secondary classrooms (Enright & Gilliland, 2011; Gilbert, 2014). Various studies illustrate the negative effects of ignoring emergent bilingual adolescents' language, culture, and identity, and criticize such practices as detrimental to the students' success in school (Menken & Kleyn, 2009; Olsen, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). In contrast, promising studies in the secondary English class give evidence that EB students experience academic success when their languages, cultures, and identities are valued and leveraged within the academic environment (e.g., Giouroukakis & Honigsfeld, 2010; Jacobs, 2008; Newman, 2012; Stewart, 2015).

Although the discussion of emergent bilinguals is often relegated to the fields of English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education, we must include these students in all areas of education, that is, the mainstream. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2015), 25% of children in the U.S. under 18 had at least one foreign-born (immigrant) parent, and one in three children are predicted to have at least one immigrant parent by 2020 (Mather, 2009). As EBs become more commonplace in the mainstream classroom, the field of ELA must be prepared to leverage students' multiple literacies and lived experiences for academic success.

Consequently, García (2008) calls for a "multilingual awareness pedagogy" (MLAP) for all teachers, not just those with the official title of ESL or bilingual



education: “In the twenty-first century, it is MLAP that all teachers need” (p. 398). She maintains that although schooling in the United States and Europe has traditionally ignored students’ multiple languages at the secondary level, a school with even one bilingual student becomes a multilingual school. Therefore, the ELA classroom teacher should possess not just a deep knowledge of the English language, but also an understanding of pedagogy that incorporates students’ bilingualism in the classroom. García (2008) claims that MLAP can transform teachers’ practice and students’ lives through its empowering nature. A result of MLAP is understanding translanguaging practices (García & Wei, 2014) among bilingual students. Accordingly, Canagarajah (2011) calls for more studies to examine the phenomenon of translanguaging as a sanctioned academic practice, specifically in classroom writing. Addressing how theory systematically guides practices in this area is what he calls “a matter of affirmative action” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 2).

Guided by translanguaging as a component of MLAP, this study explores the transnational life and literacies of a Latina high school student in her first year in the United States. Then, this article reports on the participant’s response to a formative design that entailed a curricular intervention to invite translanguaging into her ELA classroom. We present this study to illustrate the need for the secondary ELA community to consider sanctioning a space for multilingual awareness pedagogies such as translanguaging in the classroom.

## Transnationalism

*Transnational* can be used as a noun, referring to people who have moved across borders and yet maintain ties to their home countries (Hornberger, 2007), as well as an adjective to denote the social practices stemming from this phenomenon (Warriner, 2007). Discussing transnationals, Márquez and Romo (2008) indicate that the boundaries for traditional communities, cultures, and social units have been eradicated, and in fact these unbounded spaces open up many benefits to those who travel freely throughout them. Moreover, Sánchez and Kasun (2012) maintain that one such benefit is a flexible and “enhanced identity toolkit” (p. 86) that students can draw on in multiple contexts, including the classroom setting. From this perspective, transnational students are engaging in transnational literacies on a daily basis, whether or not they are sanctioned by the school. Yet, it would be advantageous for the school to capitalize on these practices.

Using a transnational lens, some studies have investigated immigrant youths’ transnational literacies (Sánchez, 2007; Skerrett, 2012; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013), or the full range of abilities they have to send and receive meaning. These include their clothing (Bruna, 2007), music (Poveda, 2012), online social networks (McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, & Salianni, 2007), and language choices (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007) resulting from the transnational spaces (Moje, 2004) they inhabit. In these spaces, individuals construct their identities, demonstrate cultural pride, and stay connected to multiple places. Researchers have called our attention to these transnational spaces as crucial sites for further investigation (Hornberger, 2007; Jiménez, 2003; Warriner, 2007) because many youth “are constructing hybrid ethnic

identities that draw increasingly from multiple texts of multiple spaces” (Moje, 2004, p. 37). Consequently, teachers should seek ways to incorporate students’ transnational lives into the curriculum (e.g., Jiménez, Smith, & Teague, 2011).

Examples of this pedagogy are detailed in case studies by Skerrett (2012) and Skerrett and Bomer (2013) that highlight the transnational lifeworlds of English/Spanish bilinguals and how an ELA teacher incorporated a transnational curriculum into the students’ high school ELA class. This research provides a rich description of how the Latina students’ transnational lived experiences, including their language practices, are leveraged, and it illustrates the need for a transnational curriculum. However, these studies entail little use of Spanish in the curriculum or the data collection since the bilingual participants communicate competently in English, unlike some EBs. Therefore, the present study expands this crucial work with transnational youth (Skerrett, 2012; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013) by featuring a case study of a newcomer primarily using Spanish in the data collection and for about half of the sanctioned classroom curriculum. As such, the present study links the research on transnational curriculum to translanguaging pedagogies.

## Translanguaging

Transnational bilingual students engage in the practice of translanguaging on a daily basis as it is “the discursive norm in bilingual families and communities” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 23). Viewing these students as two monolinguals who use one language for home purposes and another for academic purposes is misrepresentative and, moreover, incorrect. Translanguaging finds its roots in the term *code-switching*, which describes a bilingual switching between two distinct languages. That is, translanguaging includes code-switching, but encompasses all the multiple, broad, complex discursive practices bilinguals utilize in their lives (García & Sylvan, 2011). García (2009) posits that a translanguaging lens views bilinguals as having not two disparate systems, but rather one fluid and complex linguistic repertoire from which they draw and make meaning of their transnational worlds.

Research suggests that the first language, or L1, is a useful tool at the secondary level for scaffolding (Cook, 2001; Faltis, Arias, & Ramírez-Marín, 2010); however, the concept of translanguaging moves beyond using students’ L1 as a support. Martínez (2010) explains how the use of English and Spanish together in conversation can support academic standards in the secondary ELA classroom, referencing the educational possibilities of translanguaging. Further academic potential can be found in two key features of translanguaging: creativity and criticality (Wei, 2011). Creativity is employed when students can play with words and language in ways that draw on their bilingualism. They have choices in language that they can creatively use to most effectively express themselves. Criticality enables students to talk back to the norm of a monolithic, autonomous form of education. Through translanguaging, they must evaluate the available evidence to make political decisions on their use of language. Therefore, “translanguaging . . . enables students to construct and constantly modify their sociocultural identities and values, as



they respond to their historical and present conditions critically and creatively” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 62).

Even though most secondary English classes are not bilingual in name, bilingual students will still engage in translanguaging, employing their full linguistic repertoires in the classroom whether this is sanctioned or not. Ofelia García and Li Wei (2014) discuss ways in which high school teachers of varying degrees of bilingualism have purposefully created a translanguaging space in their classrooms. Specifically, in one high school ELA classroom, the teacher used translanguaging to help newcomer students participate and elaborate on their ideas. All of the bilingual students in the high school classroom were able to evaluate critical questions regarding immigration in the United States through the use of both English and Spanish as they analyzed and translated song lyrics about this theme. The authors concluded that translanguaging “open(ed) up possibilities of participation” for students who might otherwise have been excluded (García & Wei, 2014, p. 105). Other examples of translanguaging in the high school ELA classroom include students engaging in small group discussion in the L1, translating for other students, learning course content through bilingual materials, and completing projects using more than one language (García, Flores, & Chu, 2011; García & Sylvan, 2011).

The translanguaging practices described in the high school ELA classes show great promise in using translanguaging to carry out a variety of academic tasks, yet these practices are at the classroom level, not the individual student level. Moreover, much of this work occurs in special high schools with specially trained bilingual or ESL teachers, still leaving the larger ELA field with questions regarding how to sanction a space for translanguaging in a traditional school and how an individual student might connect her lived experiences and literacies to these practices.

In response to the progressive work in both transnational pedagogies (Skerrett, 2012; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013) and translanguaging pedagogies (García, Flores, & Chu, 2011; García & Sylvan, 2011; García & Wei, 2014) in the secondary ELA classroom, the present study explores an emergent bilingual student’s transnationalism and how that can be leveraged through a specific translanguaging curriculum. The study also expands the body of work on translanguaging pedagogies in the ELA classroom, providing a more descriptive example of translanguaging at the individual student level that can occur in a sanctioned capacity within the ELA classroom in a nonspecialized school.

## **Method**

### ***Research Questions***

This study was conducted in two phases, the first employing a case study approach, and the second using a formative design to develop an instructional approach that responded to the information learned in the case study. The research question for the first phase was the following:

1. What transnational experiences are evident in the participant’s life and literacies?<sup>2</sup>

The research question for the second phase was:

2. How does the participant respond to instructional practices that leverage her transnational life and literacies through translanguaging?

The purpose of dividing the research into two phases was based on literature which illustrates that students, particularly bilingual students, may be best supported through curriculum and instruction that connect to their lived experiences, their culturally embedded ways of knowing, and their cultural and linguistic identities (e.g., González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Thus, Phase 1 was dedicated to deeply exploring the transnational manifestations in one student's life and literacies. Once these data were collected and initially analyzed, we used a formative design to create an instructional approach to leverage the student's transnationalism in the classroom. Because language use was particularly evident in the data collected in Phase 1, translanguaging through sanctioned in-school literacy was chosen as a focus for the curricular unit.

### **Context**

The study took place in a suburban U.S. city with a population of approximately 127,000. The entire area receives many immigrants from Mexico, which shares a border with this state, although the city is approximately 10 hours from the border by car.

### **School and Class**

This large high school used state-adopted curriculum, yet still allowed teachers a degree of professional autonomy in curricular and instructional decisions. This autonomy was particularly palpable in the spring, when most high-stakes testing was complete. The school had received commendations from the state for its passing rates on high-stakes tests, and many resources were available to support instruction. Of the nearly 2,000 students in grades 9 through 12, about 150 were considered emergent bilinguals, denoting that they were still acquiring the English language. In the class where the intervention took place, the students were all in their first year in a U.S. school and at the beginning stages of English language development. The teacher was a certified ELA and ESL teacher, and the students in this class were receiving credit for ninth-grade English language arts.

### **Participant**

Paula<sup>3</sup> was a 16-year-old ninth grader in the second semester of her first year in a U.S. school. Although she had citizenship in both Mexico and the United States, and had traveled to the United States multiple times previously to visit family, Paula was living in this country for the first time. At the beginning of the school year she was classified as a beginner in her English language acquisition, yet by the end of the school year and the study, she was reclassified as intermediate (the second of four levels in the state's language assessment rating scale).

As the firstborn of well-educated Mexican parents with professional jobs,



Paula was expected to learn English and provide a good example for her two younger siblings. Therefore, after completing three weeks in the 10th grade in a private school in Mexico, she was sent to live in the United States with her aunt and uncle. Paula attended the same high school as her three American cousins, who spoke English fluently.

### Researchers

The first author, Mandy,<sup>4</sup> had previously conducted case study research in this school and had established a good relationship with the teacher. Mandy is bilingual in English and Spanish and has experience teaching adolescent emergent bilinguals. However, unlike the participant, she is not an immigrant and speaks English as a first language. Upon acquiring IRB approval, she began assisting in the class in which the participant was a student and soon after sought permission to interview her. After five weeks of assisting in the class and interviewing Paula, the researcher became the main teacher in the class for a one-week unit, yet worked with the ELA/ESL teacher to develop the curriculum and deliver instruction specifically designed to connect to Paula's transnational experiences. The second author, Holly, is an English/Spanish bilingual as well, and provided further insight when analyzing the participant's interviews (primarily in Spanish) and writing (about half Spanish).

### Research Design

#### Phase 1

In the first phase, we used ethnographic techniques to construct a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the participant's transnational life and literacies. Specifically, we sought to understand the ways transnationalism manifested itself naturally within the student's past and present life, as well as her plans for the future—without making any interventions. This was accomplished through a single case study in order to acquire context-dependent knowledge about manifestations of transnationalism in EBs' lives. Paula was strategically selected because she represented an extreme case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) where the phenomenon, transnationalism, was most notable. Therefore, particularity was purposefully selected over generalizability, with the understanding that although most EBs have transnational lived experiences, those of Paula would likely be more informative. Our decision was grounded in the belief that "atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229). This was an information-driven selection, as we expected to gain more knowledge of how transnationalism might manifest itself in EBs' lives through what we perceived to be an extreme case.

**PHASE 1 DATA COLLECTION.** The primary data collection strategy for Phase 1 was interviewing. Brenner (2006) states that interviews are appropriate when the researcher is a cultural outsider who wants to understand the culturally situated meanings of participants in their own words. Following the constructivist approach to a grounded theory interview (Charmaz, 2006), questions were developed to give the interview a shape, but not a predetermined path. Each of the five interviews was conducted primarily in Spanish in the teacher's empty classroom during a 35-minute lunch

block. An open-ended structure was used to explore the participant's transnational lived experiences through her literacies. Each interview started with a "grand tour" question that allowed for a broad description of the interview's focus. In order to build each interview, Mandy then used "mini-tour" questions that more deeply explored the topic under investigation (Brenner, 2006, p. 358). (See Appendix A for examples of questions.)

The questions provided context about the participant's life history, her literacies past and present, and her schooling experiences in Mexico and the United States. The categorization of the questions was grounded in Seidman's (1991) three-part phenomenological interview protocol: (1) establish the context of the experiences, (2) reconstruct details of the experience, and (3) reflect on the meaning of the experience. In this instance, the context of Paula's transnational experiences needed to be understood through her history. Then, particular details of that history were revisited for further information, specifically regarding transnationalism. Finally, through a recursive pattern, the meanings behind specific elements of transnationalism in Paula's life were explored. These questions were developed in two previous studies that investigated adolescent EBs' out-of-school literacies throughout their lives (Stewart, 2014a, 2014b) based on previous research with immigrant youth (Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007). These studies, as well as similar research (e.g., Skerrett, 2012), suggest that transnationalism is very present in students' literacies, leading to this particular lens for the present study.

In addition to the interviews, artifacts were collected from the participant's writing journal for her ELA class. Mandy was also a participant-observer in the student's class prior to the intervention and observed Paula regularly using both English and Spanish to complete assigned coursework or communicate with other students. These data sources were used to support the information learned in the interviews.

**PHASE 1 DATA ANALYSIS.** Data analysis for Phase 1 was completed prior to Phase 2, although recursive data analysis continued for months thereafter. Each interview was transcribed shortly after it was completed in the exact language of the researcher and participant, which was mainly Spanish. All data were uploaded using NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software for coding. As suggested by Charmaz (2006) for constructivist grounded theory analysis, we first coded the data with a specific term that denoted how it represented the phenomenon of investigation, which in this case was transnationalism. We then recursively compared each incident or artifact against others to identify similarities and differences, determine its code, and redefine the properties of each individual code (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Initially, the coding took the forms of transnational life events and literacies such as birth, music, reading, and speaking with friends. However, for the purposes of sharing a narrative that we believed would most effectively capture the essence of Paula's transnational life and literacies, we recoded the data into three chronological categories: childhood, current life, and future. The data from the initial coding from life events and literacies appear in all three of the chronological codes. Additionally, during this phase of data collection, we noted that transnationalism regularly



manifested itself through various translanguaging practices in the participant's life, which greatly informed Phase 2 of the study.

## Phase 2

Mandy used the information gathered through Phase 1 to develop an instructional unit for the participant's classroom that would comprise five 45-minute class periods. The prime goal of the unit was to leverage Paula's transnational experiences and translanguaging practices, as well as those of the other students, through literacy activities that supported the goals of the ELA classroom. Phase 2 employed a formative design (Bradley & Reinking, 2011) in order to allow the researcher to continually modify the instructional approach, considering the complexity of classrooms and learning (Brown, 1992), as well as the theoretical foci of transnationalism and translanguaging. Based on distinguishing features of design research (Bradley & Reinking, 2011), the intervention was designed (1) using theory regarding literacy pedagogy for adolescent EBs; (2) with the goal of contributing to a pedagogy that leverages EBs' transnational lived experiences through translanguaging; 3) to occur in natural contexts; and 4) to include cycles of iterative data analysis.

This approach was used in an ELA class that had five beginning students: four from Mexico, including Paula, and one student from Vietnam. The data collected from this unit—observations and student writing—served to answer Research Question 2: *How does the participant respond to instructional practices that leverage her transnational life and literacies through translanguaging?* Paula's writing and reaction in class will be the focus of this paper, rather than the other students. This aligns with our reasons for selecting an extreme case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) to illustrate the possibilities of literacy instruction that purposefully sanctions a space for translanguaging to connect to EBs' transnational lived experiences.

The instructional intervention consisted of whole-class reading, independent reading, journal writing, class discussions, and finally, the culminating poetry writing project. Each element was chosen purposefully to connect to students' transnational lives and allowed multiple opportunities for translanguaging. The class read biographical poetry about the (transnational) life of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (Bernier-Grand & Gonzalez, 2010). The English version was used for whole-class reading, journal writing, and discussion, but the same book in Spanish was used by Paula and the other Spanish-speaking students for individual or partner work. The English version contains many examples of translanguaging, as words in Spanish are systematically inserted into the English poems, as Sotomayor is a child of Puerto Rican immigrants and an English/Spanish bilingual. Students discussed Sotomayor's life using English as a whole class and Spanish with other Spanish speakers, and responded in their writing journals in English and their L1s. Then, the Spanish-speaking students independently read selections from *Red Hot Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Being Young and Latino in the United States* (Carlson, 2005). The poetry in this anthology is in both English and Spanish. (The student from Vietnam used a poetry book in English and Vietnamese for this work.) Mandy chose to use excerpts from *Red Hot Salsa* because during

the interviews in Phase 1, Paula mentioned that she had read some poems from this book for independent reading and enjoyed them. This is an example of how information gained from Phase 1 guided Phase 2 of the study.

As a culminating project for this area of study, we applied Christensen's (1994) instructional idea of using Lyon's (1999) "Where I'm From" poem as a mentor text for writing. Using sentence frames, the students and Mandy wrote their own "Where I'm From" poems in English—although students' poems contained purposeful interjections of other languages. Then, students translated their poems to their first languages—Spanish or Vietnamese. Because Paula finished early, she asked if she could write a third poem in the style of one poem she had read in the bilingual poetry book entitled *Bilingual Love Poem* (Burciaga, 2005), which intertwined words in English and Spanish.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from Phase 2 included the researcher's field notes as a participant-observer (recorded each day after the instructional unit) and the focal participant's writing. Data were analyzed by coding elements of translanguaging, such as Paula consulting an electronic translator, reading a book with both languages, or talking to a class member in Spanish about a poem written in English. Then, we engaged in more detailed coding of the elements of creativity and criticality (García & Wei, 2014) in her poetry writing. After coding for Paula's general uses of translanguaging in the unit, we decided to more specifically focus on the details in her writing because of the attention Canagarajah (2011) gives to this issue. He explains that teachers are more likely to allow translanguaging in a sanctioned manner within the ELA classroom through oral language than through writing, perhaps because writing is a high-stakes area in many educational contexts. He further explains the specific need for translanguaging studies that focus on writing, noting that there are "strong opinions among some scholars that translanguaging is not permitted in writing" (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 6). As such, we wanted to focus our investigation in that area. We did this to challenge these beliefs on writing and translanguaging and to illustrate the possibilities of sanctioning a space for this practice within writing instruction in a high-stakes environment.

## **Results**

### **Research Question 1**

The research question for Phase 1 asks: *What transnational experiences are evident in the participant's life and literacies?* The results of this inquiry are presented in sections related to the transnationalism in Paula's life during her childhood, current life, and future.

### **Transnational Childhood**

Desde que yo iba a nacer mis papás planearon que yo naciera acá. (Since [before] I was going to be born, my parents planned that I would be born here.)



Paula's existence as a transnational global citizen began even before her birth. Although her mother and father lived and worked in a town in Mexico about two hours from the U.S. border, they crossed into the United States when they anticipated Paula's birth. It was their plan for all three of their children to be born on the U.S. side of the border in order to obtain citizenship in both countries. Her parents were not U.S. citizens, but they were able to cross the border with papers due to their professional careers, which sometimes required travel out of the country. Paula's two younger siblings' arrivals were similar, and she said most of her friends' parents did the same: "De hecho muchas de mis amigas también viven allí en [city in Mexico] pero fueron nacidas acá. . . . Es muy común que muchos crezcan allá pero hayan nacido acá." (In fact, many of my friends who also live in [city in Mexico] but were born here. . . . It's very common for many of them over there to have been born here.)

Paula said there was always an international influence in her city beyond her friends' citizenship in two countries: "Donde vivo yo muchas se han ido de intercambio . . . de Alemania, Brasil, y de Portugal" (Where I live many people have done an international exchange . . . from Germany, Brazil, and from Portugal). At the age of 2, Paula was enrolled in a private bilingual school, learning both English and Spanish. She continued in private bilingual schools through her ninth-grade graduation. Although she explained that she basically just learned oral communication in English during this time, she sometimes was required to write letters in English. Her favorite subjects, though, were history and Spanish, where she enjoyed learning more about the Spanish language. She read classical literature in Spanish, making posters and creating plays to help her understand the plot and analyze the major themes. For two years before coming to the United States, her mother wanted her to improve her English, thinking that Paula needed more instruction than was provided in the school. Thus, she attended after-school English classes two days a week.

Yet, Paula attributed much of her English acquisition to areas beyond formal study. Every year, Paula's family would travel to the United States and spend time with family, allowing her to practice English with her American cousins, who preferred to speak in English. In Mexico, she and her friends listened and sang along to popular English music, such as Justin Bieber, Britney Spears, the Backstreet Boys, and One Direction. She explained the influence of English-language music in her life:

Pero desde chiquita . . . todas mis amigas y yo, siempre hemos escuchado canciones en inglés. Así que yo pienso que me ha ayudado escuchar canciones en inglés como para hablarlo más bien. Y me gusta el idioma el inglés. Así que por eso me gusta cantar canciones en inglés. (But from the time I was little . . . all of my friends and I have always listened to songs in English. I think that it has helped me speak it better. And I like the English language. That is why I like songs in English.)

Nevertheless, despite her love of pop music in English, she also grew up listening to popular music in Spanish, such as Mexican artists Maná and Thalía. She

also learned about many of the traditional Mexican artists from her mom: “Me gustan más las canciones de antes . . . porque mi mamá siempre que veníamos en el carro siempre tiene CD de los de ante.” (I like older music more . . . because my mom and I always listened to CDs of old music in the car.)

Her reading activity while she lived in Mexico also reflects transnationalism. For school, she read *Don Quijote* and *Lazarillo de Tormes*—both pieces of classic literature written by authors from Spain—as well as texts about Mexico’s rich history. For pleasure, she read books in Spanish written by authors from a variety of countries. Those she mentioned specifically include the *Twilight* series, *Anne Frank*, and books by Paulo Coelho, a Brazilian writer.

### Transnational Current Life

A day, B day. OMG ¿Cómo le voy a hacer? (How am I going to do it?)

Once Paula completed *secundaria* (grades 7–9) in Mexico, her mother decided she needed to go live in the United States with her aunt, uncle, and three adolescent male cousins. She did not want to come, but agreed when her mother said she would put her in English class every Saturday and Sunday if she did not. Paula was very nervous about beginning school in the United States, but was relieved when she realized there were other students in her large high school in a similar situation: “Cuando llegué aquí vi que muchos también estaban en la misma situación que yo que no hablaban inglés. . . . Me sentí más de que no la única.” (When I arrived I saw many others who were in the same situation and didn’t speak English. I felt better not being the only one.)

Adjusting to a large U.S. high school was challenging, especially the A/B block scheduling. In Mexico, the *teachers* changed classes, not the *students*. Here, she had to remember where her classes were in the large two-story high school; whether it was an A or B day; which days she had A, B, C, or D lunch; and if there was an alternative schedule for pep rallies or testing.

In her English class, she was often the translator for the three other students from Mexico, who did not understand as much English as she did. However, Paula was not always in classes with students who spoke Spanish; in fact, most students at this high school did not speak Spanish: “En biology no tengo a nadie. . . . Son puros americanos.” (In biology, I don’t have anyone. . . . They are all Americans.) She had to transition from speaking in Spanish to her Latino friends to speaking in English to non-Spanish speakers throughout the school day.

She constantly drew on knowledge she gained in Spanish in Mexico to help her with language and content in her new school. This especially helped her understand her algebra teacher’s English-language instruction. She explained that she already understood the math: “Ya sabía cómo hacerlo. Ya lo había visto in México.” (I already knew how to do it. I had already seen it in Mexico.) This allowed her to concentrate more fully on the teacher’s English. She was very proud that after seven months, she could now talk to the teacher about math concepts in English.

Paula also attended a Spanish for Spanish speakers class, in which she flourished; indeed, she claimed she even *taught* the teacher. In geography, she was learn-



ing new information she had never learned in Mexico, and knew some countries' names in English that she did not know in Spanish: "Como los países de África. . . Como estoy aprendiendo en inglés y no sé cómo se dicen en español." (Like the countries of Africa, I am learning them in English and I don't know what they are in Spanish.)

Her social life at school was also transnational, as she learned to switch between English and Spanish like her U.S.-born Latina friends did. Although these young women spoke Spanish, they were fluent in English and often used both languages at the lunch table. Paula explained that when her friends were speaking English, she also tried to switch languages if she could. She spoke English very well for someone in her first year in the country, but like many language learners, was concerned that her pronunciation was not that of native speakers. She said in English, "I think that my pronunciation is not like American pronunciation." In order to improve her pronunciation, she listened to pop music in English, often putting karaoke on her computer so she could see the words to sing along: "Me gusta mucho cantar cuando estoy aburrida. Entonces pongo karaoke." (I like to sing when I am bored. So I put on karaoke.)

Since coming to the United States seven months before the study, Paula had been able to maintain her transnational ties. She spoke to her parents in Mexico on the phone every day and regularly texted or sent Facebook messages to her friends from school in Mexico. Because of her braces, she had to return to Mexico to see the orthodontist. Her parents had made the 10-hour drive (one way) to get her four times. Even her four-year-old brother understood her transnational life. When she returned, he always asked if she would live in Mexico now, and her mother replied that she was learning English and so had to live in the United States. In response, when the little brother saw Paula in Mexico, he said, "Ya no estudias en inglés, ahora estudias en español." (You don't study in English anymore, now you study in Spanish.)

She also lived in a very transnational situation, with an aunt and uncle born in Mexico who preferred Spanish, and cousins born in the United States who preferred English. Conversation at home was in both English and Spanish, weekly church services were purely in Spanish, and TV was primarily in English for movies yet in Spanish for the news.

### **Transnational Future**

Los dos. (Both.)

Paula made it clear that she had no idea where she would finish high school, attend university, begin her career, or make her life. Mandy asked her if she planned to continue living in the United States or return to Mexico, and her response was both:

Mandy: ¿Qué piensas? ¿Quieres regresar o te prefieres quedar aquí?

(What do you think? Do you want to return [to Mexico] or do you prefer to stay here [the United States]?)

Paula: Pues, los dos.

(Well, both.)

She did not think there were necessarily more jobs for her in the United States and realized that she might end up living in Mexico, but needed English either way. First, she explained that English was needed to study at the university level in Mexico and also maintained that there were many jobs in Mexico that required one to speak in English. At times, though, she showed no preference for one country over the other.

In the last interview, she wanted to read a paragraph she had written in English to accompany a poster she had made about her future. She explained how she wanted to be a nutritionist; visit a place in New York that was of religious importance to her as a Jehovah's Witness; graduate from college; visit Spain; and learn more English. When Mandy asked her what country she planned to live in the following year or anytime after that, she smiled, looked pensive, and said, "Pues ahorita la verdad no sabría." (Well, right now the truth is, I wouldn't know.) She just wasn't sure yet. In her more immediate future, though, she wanted to return to Mexico for the summer and practice English with a teacher she knew there. She also planned to watch many American movies on Netflix in Spanish with subtitles in English. In between, she'd check in with her Facebook friends in the United States, Mexico, and Canada and post in both English and Spanish, all while singing along to Justin Bieber and traditional Mexican music.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asks: *How does the participant respond to instructional practices that leverage her transnational life and literacies through translanguaging?* To answer this question, Mandy engaged in a formative research design within Paula's ELA classroom. The instructional unit was designed to connect to Paula's transnational life and literacies, specifically through translanguaging. After reading examples of English and Spanish poetry that was written about or by transnational people and also included translanguaging, Paula wrote three poems: one primarily in English with a few purposeful Spanish words, a second in Spanish, and one that frequently and decisively changed between the two languages every few words.

Paula spent most of her time working on her poem in English, using the sentence frames provided by Mandy. She consulted her phone for translation of words in the poem from English to Spanish and then for words in Spanish that she wanted to write in English. She consulted other bilinguals in the class about the best translation for certain words. During this time, she also acted as a language broker, or mediator of communication (Tse, 1996) for the three other Spanish-speaking students in the class, who relied on her for assistance. The beginning of her English poem shows how she chose to emphasize words she wanted to include in Spanish by highlighting them in yellow. She was not instructed to include Spanish words, nor to highlight them, but made that artistic choice as she typed her final English version. (See Figure 1.)

Paula then quickly translated her poem into Spanish, an activity she was able to do in much less time than writing it in English. She spent more time translating the last line of the first section ("whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own"), which is a line from the original poem by Lyon (1999) that was



I am from the kitchen  
 From the coach and the chorizo.  
 I am from the center, the trailers, the mole,  
 the square, the most delicious cheese, and the family love.  
 I am from the corn and the horses.  
 The rose and the oak trees  
 whose long gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.

FIGURE 1. *Excerpt from English poem. This is Paula's original work as she typed it. "Coach" should be "couch." Paula chose to highlight in yellow the words "chorizo" and "mole." Chorizo is a spicy sausage eaten in Mexico. Mole is a traditional Mexican sauce made with chocolate and chile peppers.*

included in the sentence frames. In order to translate it, she consulted her dictionary and Mandy to discuss the literal and figurative meanings. Figure 2 shows the first section of her poem in Spanish.

Lastly, although it was not part of the assignment, Paula asked if she could write a third poem that entwined the languages. This was an organic creation influenced by her independent reading of a poem from the book the researcher placed in the classroom library. Although selections from this book were used for the whole class, Paula was the only student who read this particular poem. In this poem, entitled "Bilingual Love Poem" (Burciaga, 2005), approximately three quarters of the words are in English and the others in Spanish. On the following page, the poem is entitled "Poema de Amor Bilingüe," and the words in English in the previous version appear in Spanish and vice versa. The poem is full of wordplay, especially words that sound similar in English and Spanish—some that have the same meaning and others that do not. For example, *sí* (yes in Spanish) and *sea* (English) sound the same but have different meanings.

Soy de la cocina  
 del sofá y el chorizo.  
 Soy del centro, de los camiones,  
 de la plaza, del queso más delicioso  
 y el amor familiar.  
 Soy del maíz y los caballos  
 de las rosas y de los grandes y bellos robles  
 cuyas extremidades mucho recuerdo como si fueran las mías.

FIGURE 2. *Excerpt from Spanish poem.*

Asking the researcher if she could write a poem like this, Paula then wrote her “Where I’m From” poem in the same manner. Figure 3 shows an excerpt from this poem.

We emphasize that writing this third poem was not part of the researcher’s instructional plan. As a bilingual, Mandy engages in translanguaging practices, but not as often as Paula; nor does she express her lived experiences with the same degree of transnationalism as Paula. Through the sanctioned space for independent and whole-class reading of translanguaged texts, and various translanguaging practices to make sense of the material, Paula felt secure enough to ask Mandy if she could write this third poem using her own mixture of languages. She chose to go beyond writing two separate, primarily monolingual, poems by writing a third poem in class that was not part of the original lesson plan.

## Discussion

Paula cannot be defined as a citizen of just one country, a speaker of one language, or a member of one cultural group. Nor is she the sum of two separate citizenships, languages, or cultures. As her life, literacies, and poetry demonstrate, translanguaging represents her complete transnational being.

Translanguaging allowed Paula to express her identity as a transnational bilingual. Her childhood, current situation, and future plans were characterized by transnationalism and directly connected to her translanguaging practices. The academic tasks she engaged in during the instructional unit provided a sanctioned space for her to tap into those experiences, ideas, and ways of being and knowing within the official ELA curriculum. The way the researcher created that sanctioned space was not just through oral translanguaging, but also through the literature students were encouraged to read independently and as a class. Finally, the space for translanguaging most clearly opened up for Paula through the assignment of

I am from the felicidad y meetings,  
From Ana and Gerardo, de el pescado  
Y la empresa Kujimoto and the learning.  
I’m from el “pita tren” y “mami y papi”  
And the “Te quiero you y tu a mi” from Barney.  
Soy de every month of Abril and la mitad de July.  
(I am from happiness and meetings [or get-togethers], from Ana and Gerardo,  
from the fish and the company Kujimoto and the learning. I’m from the “agave  
train” and “mama and papa” and the “I love you, you love me” from Barney. I am  
from every month of April and half of July.)

FIGURE 3. Excerpt from Spanish/English poem. “Ana” and “Gerardo” are pseudonyms.



writing a poem in English and translating it to the L1. Within this space, Paula's third poem, closely reflecting her transnational identity, organically emerged. This gave her ownership and agency of her own learning in a generative and authentic literacy learning environment. Through this learning, creativity and criticality were highly evident.

Li Wei (2011) maintains that multilinguals such as Paula have greater degrees of creativity and criticality available for their use through the act of translanguaging. For example, Paula's choice to highlight Spanish words in her English poem demonstrated creativity, as did her decision to use the words "*chorizo*" and "*mole*" in her language. Creativity was further demonstrated as she broke away from monolingual norms with her choice to write a third, unassigned poem that assumed a bilingual reader. In this poem, she weaved English and Spanish together, much like the poems she had independently read.

She made linguistic choices that were uniquely available to her as a bilingual. In this way, she exercised criticality as defined by García and Wei (2014):

*Criticality* refers to the ability to use available evidence appropriately, systematically and insightfully to inform considered views of cultural, social, political, and linguistic phenomena, to question and problematize received wisdom, and to express views adequately through reasoned responses to situations. (p. 67, italics in original)

The criticality she used was illustrated by her decisions about which words were best expressed in Spanish in her English poem, as well as how to best translate her English poem to Spanish. Since she was highly literate in Spanish, she had a wide range of vocabulary to choose from to express herself. Lastly, her criticality was most evident in the third poem, as every word—whether an article, verb, noun, etc.—provided her with multiple decisions within and between her languages.

We acknowledge that Paula's background with regard to education, family support, and even financial situation was privileged and likely quite different from that of other transnational EBs in U.S. schools. It is probable that she had transnational experiences stemming from her unique situation that other EBs do not. Therefore, we do not attempt to generalize her response to this unit to all transnational or emergent bilingual populations; rather, we use this example to discuss unimagined research and practical possibilities for the high school language arts classroom—possibilities that can flourish even in restrictive environments. We maintain that the benefits—namely, creativity, criticality, and choice—experienced by Paula through the creation of a sanctioned space for translanguaging can be enjoyed by transnational youth across the diverse spectrum of socioeconomic statuses, nationalities, dialects, cultures, and so on. Therefore, there is a need for further research on translanguaging pedagogies at the individual level, with more transnational students representing diverse experiences in ELA classrooms, as we collectively, as a research community, imagine curricula that sanction students' unique identities even in the midst of standards-based reforms.

## Implications and Conclusion

This study, in linking transnational and translanguaging pedagogies, suggests the great possibilities of sanctioning a space for translanguaging. It is a “sin fronteras” (no borders) pedagogy (García & Wei, 2014, p. 43) for students whose lived experiences reflect a “sin fronteras” worldview. It is a pedagogy that leverages students’ transnational lived experiences, their culturally embedded knowledge and skills, and their full linguistic repertoires. Especially now, as secondary schools confront the demands of accountability and standardization and many states grapple with the implications of the Common Core State Standards within the ELA classroom, educators must take necessary risks that may deviate from standardized curriculum (Gilbert, 2014). This is crucial because students like Paula “suffer the most from contexts in which curricula grow impoverished, basic skills get foregrounded, and higher academic goals recede” (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2014, p. 292).

Sanctioning a space for translanguaging as part of a “multilingual awareness pedagogy” (García, 2008) enables emergent bilingual transnational students to engage in greater creativity and criticality as they engage their full linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging facilitates students’ use of higher-order thinking to make decisions and evaluate all linguistic options available to them in their writing. When all choices are available to them for in-class writing, they can begin to understand the results and consequences of using certain words or languages in specific situations.

This study illustrates the possibilities in the ELA classroom when curriculum and instruction purposefully respond to students’ transnational lives and literacies through sanctioning a space for translanguaging. Yet, we must heed Canagarajah’s (2011) warning to determine if translanguaging, specifically through writing, will help or hinder a bilingual student in a particular context. Surely we must provide models and learning opportunities for bilingual students to systematically and pragmatically use their multiple languages. As a research community, we must understand the transnational literacies, such as translanguaging, that are already present in students’ lives and further understand how they respond when those literacies are invited into the classroom. Only then can we make more informed decisions about how, when, and why to use these practices in an official manner. Hence, we offer this descriptive study to illustrate the possibilities of sanctioning a space for translanguaging in the ELA classroom to leverage students’ full linguistic repertoires and connect to their transnational lived experiences.

## APPENDIX

### Semistructured Interview Questions

Each category of grand tour questions was accompanied by 10 to 20 mini-tour (follow-up) questions. All of the grand tour questions are included, yet only a few examples of mini-tour questions are provided.



### History and Context

Grand tour questions: Describe the reading, writing, art, music, extracurricular activities, household chores, or technology you used as a child when you were not doing school work. Describe your family. Describe the languages you used growing up.

Mini-tour questions: What reading did you enjoy as a child? (Comics, books, religious material) What were your extracurricular activities? (Sports, family activities, dance, teams) Do/did you ever see your parents read? Write? Watch TV? Listen to music? Use technology? What languages were used in each activity?

### Forms of Literacies

Grand tour questions: What do you do when you are not doing schoolwork? What languages are present in each activity?

Mini-tour questions: What do you read that is not for school? (Comics, magazines, books, religious material, Internet sites, manuals, texts, letters) What do you write that is not for school? (Letters, emails, stories, diaries, journaling, lyrics, poetry, texts, Facebook posts or messages)

### Meanings and Significance of Literacies

Grand tour questions: Can you explain all of the reasons that you [activity stated in previous interview]? What language(s) do you use and why?

Mini-tour questions: Tell me about how you got involved in \_\_\_\_\_. How often do you engage in it? Where? When? Why? What language(s) do you use? How do you determine the language? What language do you prefer for this activity? Why?

### U.S. School Experiences

Grand tour questions: Describe your interest in and ability to complete your school assignments. How do you feel about the reading and writing assignments you've had recently? Can you relate to them?

Mini-tour questions: What kind of reading do you do in school? Writing? Do you enjoy any of it? Why or why not?

### NOTES

1. In this article, we will refer to these students as emergent bilinguals (EBs) to emphasize their bilingualism, rather than any perceived linguistic deficits (García, 2009).
2. We use the construct *literacies* to denote the multiple forms one uses to send and receive meaning, such as embodied, written, audio, and oral discourses (Gee, 2008). This definition embraces the New Literacy Studies as explained by Gee (2008) and researchers interested in the culturally and socially bound ways one uses literacy (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1995).
3. All names of people and places are pseudonyms. The names included in the participant's writing have also been replaced by pseudonyms.

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