

# Kindergartners' Writing in a Dual-Language Classroom

Using a translanguaging lens, this article examines the development of specific writing skills among kindergarten dual language students working in buddy pairs.

**Patricia is a kindergarten teacher** who recently secured a position in a dual-language school. During this academic year, she wants to focus on how to best support her students' writing development across both of their languages. Because she has both Spanish and English speakers in her classroom, she wondered whether she could pair her L1 Spanish and L1 English speakers together to support each other's writing. Although putting students together may be a good idea, she worried that the act of pairing the students may not be sufficient. She wondered, what do good student pairing practices look like? How might she create an environment that would push both students to access and reflect on their languages?

This article focuses on a teacher's use of buddy pairs to support her students' writing by drawing on all their linguistic resources from all of their languages, as is called for by the translanguaging paradigm. Drawing examples from a research project, I use the actions of a dual-language kindergarten teacher, Janet, to answer Patricia's questions in the above vignette. I examine how Janet structured her classroom to maximize the benefits of activities, such as participating in the morning message, playing language detectives, engaging in regular writing, using books to learn about writing, following Janet's model, and preparing graphic organizers to promote talk.

## Literature Review

### Writing and Student Talk

Dyson (2000) has shown that students use self-talk and discussions with other classmates to maintain their writing voice during the writing process. The talk that students engage in supports them in regulating key processes tied to writing (Dahl, 1993; Parr, Jesson, & McNaughton, 2009), helps them to plan what will unfold in their writing and rehearse their ideas before committing them to print (Clay, 1975), and allows them time to reflect on what they have written (Dyson, 2006). Student talk is central to helping them navigate the complexity of writing (Parr, Jesson, & McNaughton, 2009) within the construct of peer social relationships (Dyson, 2000). Student talk during writing sets the foundation for students to understand the relationship between oral speech and written language.

Bauer and Gort (2012) have argued that emergent bilinguals—students who are in the process of learning two languages at once, often presenting as stronger in one language than the other—are distinct from monolinguals in that they approach literacy bilingually. That is, they use both of their languages in informed ways at different points in the writing process (Pérez, 2004; Velasco & García, 2014). Moll, Sáez, and Dworin (2001) state, “[B]ilingual children, unlike their monolingual

counterparts, may become literate in a language they do not speak fluently, [and] their literate ability may exceed their oral fluency in one language but not the other” (p. 447). Within this context, teachers have the daunting task of supporting students’ writing development in each of their languages while being mindful that students’ languages are not separate entities and that each informs the other.

### Translanguaging

One concept that can help educators think about how to approach students’ languages in the classroom is translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging is the dynamic and systematic use of two or more languages or dialects to construct meaning and build literacy skills as multilingual identities emerge (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009; García, Flores, & Chu, 2011; García & Wei, 2014; Orellana, Martínez, & Martínez, 2014). It can include actions such as repetition, translation, code-switching, and nonverbal communication, and usually requires the development of metalinguistic awareness and multilingual meaning making on the part of those engaged in translanguaging practices (Alvarez, 2014). Each language and dialect reinforces and improves the other as literacy practices develop.

Translanguaging as a theoretical lens allows for an examination of how students are using their languages to make meaning as emergent bilinguals while they navigate participation in classroom activities. This paradigm pushes us away from simply talking about students’ L1 and L2 and instead places the focus on how students are “doing” language. Research studies have begun to point the way on the benefits of bilingualism (Bialystok, 2009; Bialystok & Werker, 2016; Kroll & Dussias, 2017). For example, emergent bilinguals—students who are developing as bilinguals—use their languages strategically for “explanation/clarification, discussing the language structures of English and Spanish, [and] attending to written language patterns of each language in systematic and purposeful ways” (Gort, 2012, p. 92). Alvarez (2014) elaborates and states, “[E]mergent bilinguals expand their translanguaging repertoires as they develop stocks of practical experiences from which to strategically respond

to schoolwork and academic uses of language” (p. 327).

Could the way we structure instruction enhance the likelihood of this expansion? Research suggests that a natural response to being an emergent bilingual is to strategize bilingually even when students are required to respond in a given language during instruction. Providing students with opportunities to access all their linguistic resources improves how they go in and out of the languages (García, as cited in Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012). Given the synergy between languages, writing in one language will shape writing in another (Dworin, 2003). One question worth asking is: How can classroom environments support students to build on and pull from their linguistic resources as they engage in writing?

### A Closer Look at One Context

This article draws on a larger research study examining African American and Latina/o students in a K–5 dual-language program in the Midwest. I will focus on year 2 of the larger study and highlight through classroom insights how the students engaged in writing with their buddy-pairs in one dual-language kindergarten classroom. The goal is to highlight the classroom structures Janet had in place to support students so they could capitalize on the buddy-pairs partnership.

The school is considered low-income, and nearly 90% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch based on family income. The students in the school are racially and linguistically diverse. During the second year of the study, 58% of the students were African American, 21% White, 10.5% Hispanic/Latina/o, 8.5% multiracial, and 2% American Indian (self-identified as indigenous peoples of North, Central, and/or South America).

The Spanish-English dual-language program exists within the larger elementary program. There were two strands of dual-language classrooms at each grade level (e.g., two kindergarten classrooms, two first grade classrooms, etc.). Language allocation at the kindergarten level was based on a 90/10 model (90% of the day students were exposed to instruction in Spanish and 10% of the time in English), with language allocation for first grade at

80/20 (80% of the day students were taught in Spanish and 20% of the time in English). Instruction in Spanish decreased 10% each subsequent grade until instruction reached 50/50. Although the early focus was on establishing a strong language base in Spanish, Janet allowed students to use both of their languages to communicate.

Janet had nine years of experience working with emergent bilinguals when she started in the dual-language program. She had a master's degree and was endorsed as a bilingual teacher. Janet is Mexican American and grew up in Chicago in a working-class neighborhood that was predominantly African American, but with a growing number of Latinx residents.

## Lessons from the Classroom

To answer the initial question posed by Patricia regarding how to support pairing students in the classroom, I will use classroom insights from one kindergarten classroom in the dual-language program. Specifically, I will address how Janet set the stage for talking about language by positioning students as language detectives, creating opportunities for them to write regularly, using books to teach about writing, positioning herself as a model, and using graphic organizers to plan and promote talk.

In order for Janet to accomplish her goals, she established buddy pairs in the classroom. Buddy pairs were partnered with each other for pair work over several months unless a problem dictated otherwise. Each student's buddy pair was selected by Janet, who first considered each child's linguistic strengths, then paired students based on proficiency, first matching English-dominant students with Spanish-dominant students, then the remaining Spanish-dominant students together. The pairs sat next to each other during pair work.

### Setting the Stage Early for Being a Language Detective

At the start of kindergarten, students are learning about literacy. In the case of writing, most of these students are still developing their understanding of how their ideas can be captured in print. For emergent bilingual students, it is helpful if they can talk

about the role their two languages play in the process of capturing their ideas in writing. The morning message is one classroom routine that can be used to bring young kindergartners' attention to their languages and how the languages work in a context-rich environment.

In the classroom I observed, the morning message was a whole-group interactive space where students were explicitly told their job was to learn about how the languages they were learning were alike and different and to use that information to enhance their learning. They were to work on being the best language detective they could be. To create a context in which all students could take part in the process, Janet showed them how they could represent their ideas in different ways (e.g., pictures, using letters, and a combination of the two), ensuring that writing as a tool could be accessed by everyone. This process allowed students coming to school with different abilities to think about and participate in the act of writing.

The structure of the morning message created a scaffold for these emergent readers. The message used formulaic phrases to which students would add content, such as, "Buenos días. Hoy es \_\_\_\_" (Good morning. Today is \_\_\_\_). Students were asked to identify words and letters, and eventually they started helping each other add to the morning message, with students seeking opportunities where their two languages gave them insight or understanding. To accomplish this, Janet gave students a specific job. Each day during whole-group work, one student "pointer" was chosen to point to the words as the other students read the message aloud. At the end of the teacher-led discussion about the content, during which the students located words and letters, the pointer for the day added to the message, and the other students as a group helped the writer.

As the student wrote this message, he or she had access to the language and literacy knowledge of all the other students. That is, his or her fellow classmates were in charge of stretching syllables and talking with the writer about his or her letter choices and so on. This context kept everyone in detective mode. For example, while a student was writing the word *juguetes* (toys) on the board as part of adding

to the morning message, the rest of the class was poised to discuss why she wrote *j* as the first letter when the pronunciation of the word using English sounds would suggest that the letter should be an *h*. This prompted a metalinguistic discussion on the way in which letters are represented in Spanish versus English. During this discussion, another student pointed out that *h* in Spanish is always silent. These interactions focused on translanguaging as necessary if students are to develop a deeper understanding of how their languages operate in an academic setting.

When done as just described, morning message is a meaning-centered activity that can provide many literacy-teachable moments that build on students' rich linguistic knowledge. Researchers have shown that students can develop literacy skills in a language they are just beginning to speak (Geva & Zadeh, 2006; Moll, Sáez, & Dworin, 2001). And if students are given the opportunity to engage in rich discussions around these emergent skills in a group setting, perhaps they can better use these skills when they are working individually (Vygotsky, 1986).

### Creating Opportunities to Write Regularly

Key to quality instruction is building on what is of interest to the students while being aware of their developmental level. In this context, one of Janet's goals was to ensure that students felt they had an audience for their writing. Having students start journals early in the school year meant that every child could share his or her thoughts with Janet. Sometimes students wrote in their journals about a topic that was introduced to them by Janet, whereas other times they wrote about a topic of their choice. The journal served many functions. Initially, students used it as a place to plan out their writing. Janet taught students that their writing can answer the questions who, where, and what. For example, in advance of their writing, one set of buddy pairs, Lela (Latina) and JJ (African American), wrote,

**Lela:** *donde: donde esta moises en la casa*  
(where: where is Moses in the house)

*quien: mi mama, mi tio, yo, mi prima, mi tia*  
(who: my mom, my uncle, me, my cousin,  
my aunt)

*que: antes de venir a los estados unidos* (what:  
before we came to the United States)

**JJ:** *donde: yo “?”* (where: me “?”)

*quien: mi mama, nene y mi primos* (who: my  
mom, the baby and my cousins)

*que: esas cosas veo* (what: the things I saw)

These structures helped the students organize their thoughts broadly as they learned about putting their ideas on paper. Sometimes they would follow up and write about these ideas in their writing folder.

The journal was also a space for the students to share their ideas with each other, not just with Janet. For example, in the previous section, I described a student helper who added to the morning message that she liked writing about *juguetes* (toys). Her writing for the group served as an extension to a journal writing activity that Janet had students participate in, which suggests the topic was of high interest to the students. Students were asked to bring their favorite toy to school. Given the fact that these students were kindergartners, it would have been acceptable to simply have students bring their favorite toy in and have them write about it. However, Janet used this opportunity to teach students a specific element of writing. She encouraged students to experiment with describing something in their writing so that the reader could see it in his or her head. As is usually the case, there was a group lesson on this topic, and then students were asked to work in buddy pairs. The following is an example of how two students with different home languages shared their thoughts. Lela wrote:

*Mi Juguete Favorite*

*Mi juguete favorite es un perrito suave El color es como pi e, y morado rosa Mi Juguete es me diano y bonito (intended meaning—Mi juguete favorito, mi juguete favorito es un perrito suave, el color es como pie, y morado rosa, mi juguete es mediano y bonito.)*

(My Favorite Toy, My favorite toy is a soft dog, the color is like pie and purple and pink, my toy is medium [size] and pretty.)

To work with a partner, both students must share what they want to write and must read what they have written to each other, thereby creating opportunities for conversations around language. Lela's partner, JJ, who had not interacted with Spanish

before joining the class, wrote, “*Café, mi juguete para rojo mediano* (intended meaning: “Cafe, mi juguete es de un tamaño mediano y color rojo”) (brown, my toy for medium red [intended meaning]—brown, my toy is medium [size] and red).” The similarities in the descriptive details—focusing on color and size—suggest that Lela and JJ held each other accountable for the content they were contemplating writing.

During the second half of the school year, as students became more dependent on writers’ workshops for their story writing, their entries resembled more typical journaling, where students shared their life events and Janet responded to them. In the following example, Katy, an African American student, wrote about an event that took place in her home:

*Un dia yo estaba en mi casa con mi mama es mi Hermana y mi bebe y mi mama y yo y mi bebe estaba llorando porce yo no estaba jugando con mi bebe yo no se porce yo no estaba jugando con mi bebes porce yo esta bien el cocina.*

*(un dia yo estaba en mi casa con mi mama es mi hermana y mi bebe y mi mama y yo y mi bebe estaba llorando porque yo no estaba jugando con mi bebe yo no se porque yo no estaba jugando con mi bebe porque yo estaba en la cocina. (One day I was in my house with my mom and my sister and my baby [reference to her baby brother] and my mom and I and my baby was crying because I was not playing with my baby I don’t know why I was not playing with my baby because I was in the kitchen.)*

Students who started the year with little to no ability to write in any language used translanguaging to write journal entries that resemble those that could be written by anyone of their age. In this classroom, that ability on the part of kindergartners was attributable to factors such as whole-group “detective” activities, translanguaging in buddy pairs, and ample opportunities to practice.

### Using Books to Learn about Writing

Although books by children’s authors serve as important examples for students’ writing, for kindergartners in a DL classroom, Janet remains central. The way Janet connects the books with important elements of students’ lives is critical. In this case, Janet got the students involved in writing longer texts by teaching them to study what published authors do

when they write. As Janet engaged in author studies, she asked the students to reflect on all elements of the text. For example, during a unit on alphabet books, she examined with the students how the themes affected the author’s choice in the word used for each letter, the illustrations, and the use of humor. They also discussed differences between English and Spanish alphabet books. By reading different picture alphabet books together, they could discuss these different themes. At the end of the unit, students worked on their own alphabet book.

Two specific activity structures helped students learn during the lesson on alphabet books: “turn and talk” and buddy pairs. Sharing during turn and talk typically took place during whole-class lessons. Janet asked students to turn and talk, and typically the sharing took place with whoever was near them that day. Buddy pairs, on the other hand, were selected by Janet; the pairs were assigned seats next to each other, and each person had different linguistic strengths from the other (Spanish/English).

---

### Students who started the year with little to no ability to write in any language used translanguaging to write entries . . .

---

When working in pairs, the focus was getting students to build on each other’s strengths. For example, as cited in Bauer, Presiado, and Colomer (2017), students working as pairs were expected to talk and share with each other and support each other’s writing. Which student took on the role of the learner or teacher during an interaction was bidirectional (Dworin, 2003) and was dependent on the language being used and the topic.

Janet stressed to students the importance of writing with an eye toward details. Any teacher who has worked with young students learning to write knows how hard it is to teach students to add details to their writing. To reinforce writing with details, Janet asked students to practice the skills using items they cared about. As with every major lesson she taught, Janet modeled for the students what she wanted from them. In the following example,

she addressed with these six-year-olds how to be descriptive about a favorite topic: themselves. Janet started by connecting a book that students had read together to the pictures they brought to class of themselves when they were younger.

**Janet:** *En este libro nosotros dijimos que . . . las ilustraciones nos recuerdan a fotos reales, verdad, como si alguien tomo la foto, y eran muy buenas para que nosotros pensáramos como el autor o la autora . . . pudo usar las fotos para hacer una historia, verdad.* (In this book we said that the pictures, the illustrations, the illustrations reminded us of real pictures, right, like as if someone took the picture and they were very good for us to think about what the author [male or female] could use the pictures for in their story, right.)

### Serving as a Model

The above discussion led to Janet modeling for the students how real pictures can be used to stimulate writing. She started with a picture of herself when she was the students' age and showed the class her picture by walking in a circle to ensure that everyone who was seated saw the picture well. A student was chosen to model the sharing process with Janet, and she was asked to stand in front of Janet and ask questions about Janet's picture. The student modeling with Janet, Susie, is White and comes from a home where only English is spoken:

**Susie** *¿dónde están?*

[Where are you?]

**Janet:** *Nosotros estamos en la iglesia.*

[We are at church.]

**Jason:** [an observer]: Church?

**Janet:** *Si, nosotros estamos en la iglesia. Hazme otra pregunta.*

[Yes, we are at church. Ask me another question.]

**Susie:** *¿que están haciendo?*

[What are you doing?]

**Janet:** *Bien, nosotros estábamos celebrando el día de la virgen de Guadalupe. Hazme otra*

*pregunta. Mira la foto.* [Janet speaking to the class] *Mira como ella está viendo la foto y está pensando; qué tipo de cosas me puede ayudar para pensar en mi foto.* (Good, we are celebrating the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Ask me another question. Look at the picture. [Janet speaking to the class] Look how she is looking at the picture and thinking; what kinds of things can you help me think about in my picture?)

**Susie:** *¿cuándo vayan a su casa?*

[When did you go to your house?]

**Janet:** *Nosotros estuvimos allí casi todo el día; que era mucha fiesta, fuimos a mi casa en la noche. ¿Hay algo más que puedes preguntar?* (We were there almost all day; it was a big party, we went to the house at night. Is there anything else you can ask?)

**Susie:** *Ummm, no sé.*

[Um, I do not know.]

**Janet:** *Mira mi ropa.*

[Look at my clothes.]

**Susie:** *¿Qué color es tus zapatos?*

[What color are your shoes?]

**Janet:** *Mi ropa es de muchos colores y tiene flores. ¿Y sabes por que me pusieron trenzas y todo eso? Y yo puedo explicarles por que. Es que tengo maquillaje, me pusieron maquillaje y me pusieron trenzas y yo puedo explicar. Verdad. Muchas gracias.* (My clothes have lots of colores—colors—and flowers. And do you know why they put braids and all of this? And I can explain that. I have makeup on, they made me up and put braids and I can explain. Right? Thank you very much.)

**Susie:** *Yo tengo una mas pregunta.*

[I have one more question.]

**Janet:** *Ok sí.*

[Ok, yes.]

**Susie:** *¿Por que tiene, um, those in your hair?*

[Why do you have, um, those in your hair?]

**Janet:** *¿Por que tengo monos en mi pelo?*

[Why do I have bows in my hair?]

**Susie:** *Si.*

[Yes.]

**Janet:** *Es porque me pusieron un vestido típico de México y en México ponían monos en el pelo. Las muchachas cuando se vestían, en su ropa típica, usaban unos monos bien grandes. Mis monos casi están tan grandes como mi cabeza, verdad?* (It is because they put me in typical Mexican attire and in Mexico they put bows in the hair. The girls when they dress, in their typical clothes, they use bows that are so big. My bows were so big they were almost as big as my head, right?)

**Susie:** *Te ves muy bonita.*

[You look so pretty.]

**Janet:** *Oh gracias, Susie.*

[Oh thank you, Susie.]

Several things were taking place in this example. Given the emphasis placed on students asking each other questions, Janet modeled with a student what this would look like (face the person you are talking to) and what it would sound like (answers must extend beyond one-word answers and provide details). Janet also played the role of commentator, evaluating the process as it unfolded. She brought the students' attention to what was taking place by making rhetorical comments as she modeled for the students ("Look how she is looking at the picture and thinking . . ." reference to the student who is modeling with her). She also modeled describing using detail by framing the question about clothing for Susie, who then independently expanded on the details by asking about hair bows.

Once at their desks, students sat in clusters of four, representing two buddy pairs, and each of the buddy pairs presented to each other. After the sharing, students narrated what they knew about their partners. Janet had also modeled this in the large group. As students worked in buddy pairs, she walked around the room observing what students were doing and listening for whether students were being detailed about what they previously heard from their partner. This process ensured that each

member of the buddy pair knew what the other could write about before starting the act of writing.

This process invariably created an ideal situation for students to use translanguaging to talk about their languages because the students had to talk about how they were going to capture their thoughts in Spanish. For example, during the following writing process, two buddy pairs sitting next to each other engaged in using all their language resources. In the following dialogue, an African American student who spoke only English at home at the start of this project was interacting with her partner, a Latina student, at the table:

**Valentina (Latina):** *Que está pasando en tu foto?*

[What is happening in your picture?]

**Michelle (African American):** *Estaba feliz, es feliz.*

[He was happy, it's happy.]

**Valentina:** *Está muy feliz y por qué está feliz?*

[He is very happy and why is he happy?]

**Michelle:** *Porque yo estaba how you say tickling in Spanish.*

[Because I was, how do you say tickling in Spanish?]

In this situation, students learned vocabulary as well as how to communicate what they know about their lives in a given language to a new audience. Sometimes students struggled to recall a word that a classmate requested in a given language, and they had to use translanguaging to negotiate the meaning and discuss the topic long enough for the word to come or to make the decision to ask another student. Language in this classroom was something to ponder, and pondering language out loud and in writing was something Janet consistently modeled for students.

### Using Graphic Organizers to Promote Talk

Having a graphic organizer helps students keep track of what they wanted to communicate in their writing. During the second half of the school year,

Janet used graphic organizers with the students on a regular basis. In preparation for writing a story about a character who had qualities similar to themselves, the buddy pairs were asked to discuss and fill out their graphic organizer. By having students write about someone who was like them, Janet hoped the students would have more to say about the character. The following dialogue (Bauer, Presiado, & Colomer, 2017) depicts a buddy pair working together during a writer's workshop to complete their graphic organizer prior to writing their story. As was the theme in this classroom, detailed talk was at the center of the activity. Manuel started.

**Manuel:** *A mí me gusta jugar videojuegos.* (I like to play video games.) As Manuel is writing his sentence, Elizabeth continues to write. Each student was entranced with his or her writing as Janet approached their desks.

**Janet:** *Amigos, me encanta que están tan motivados a escribir pero el propósito de la actividad es pensar por qué les gustan estas cosas. Por ejemplo, ¿Manuel, por qué te gustan los juegos?* (Friends, I love that you are motivated in your writing, but the purpose of this activity is to think about why you like these things. For example, Manuel, why do you like games?) [Reading his graphic organizer].

**Manuel:** *Son videojuegos. Ves.* (They are video games. See.) [Pointing to his picture]

**Janet:** *Ok, ¿pero por qué te gustan?* (Ok, but why do you like them?)

**Manuel:** *A mí me gusta Mario porque tiene carritos y yo soy Mario y mi hermano es Luigi.* (I like Mario because it has little cars and I am Mario and my brother is Luigi.) [Colors in his drawing]

**Janet:** *Bien. Y Elizabeth, ¿por qué te gusta la princesa?* (Good. And Elizabeth, why do you like princesses?) [Reading Elizabeth's writing]

**Elizabeth:** *Me gusta princesas porque bonitas.* (I like princesses because pretty.)

[Elizabeth colors]

**Janet:** *Excelente. Ahora, escríbanlo. Para la última caja, hagan lo mismo. Primero lo*

*dicen y luego lo escriben.* (Excellent. Now, write it. For the last box [square on the graphic organizer], do the same. First say it, then write it.) Janet left them so they could continue working, yet she eavesdropped when they were about to commence talking again about their writing.

**Elizabeth:** [Looks at Manuel, who is starting to fill in his last box] *¡No, Manuel! We gotta talk.* [Spots Janet looking at them. Manuel follows her gaze] *Habla.* (Talk.)

**Manuel:** *Oh, me gusta renos.* (I like reindeer.) [Starts to draw]

**Elizabeth:** *¿Por qué?* (Why?) [Proudly looks in Janet's direction]

**Manuel:** *Porque ayudan a Santa.* (Because they help Santa.) [All this time working on his writing]

**Elizabeth:** *Bien. Me gusta Tinkerbell.* (Good. I like Tinkerbell.) She can . . . how do you say fly?

**Manuel:** *Volar.* (To fly.) [Stretches out arms like wings] *¿Es un pájaro?* (Is it a bird?)

**Elizabeth:** She is a fairy, not a bird! [Looks in Janet's direction] *¡No pájaro!* But she can *volar* (fly).

[They continue working]

In this example, both students were helping each other to complete the activity, but they were doing much more than that. When she felt it was necessary to complete the task as Janet described, Elizabeth, someone new to learning Spanish, felt comfortable enough in her interaction with her buddy to take on the teacher role. Manuel was able to support Elizabeth's vocabulary as he translated the English word (fly) to Spanish (*volar*). Elizabeth exposed Manuel to the concept of Tinkerbell, which extended his notions of what can fly. As noted in Bauer, Presiado, and Colomer (2017), "Through their interactions, Manuel and Elizabeth engaged in translanguaging when they both drew from each other's knowledge and language to create a broader repertoire" (p. 26). Use of graphic organizers allowed students to explain and describe

in detail both with their buddy pairs and in their final written products.

## Summary

As we look back on how Janet organized and shaped her classroom, it is quite clear that she was intentional about the amount and type of talk she wanted from students, and she used buddy pairs as a vehicle for ensuring that this talk occurred in a safe space. In order to get students to share their thoughts, teachers must first ask, what is the nature of the talk I want to hear, and how will I shape my classroom to ensure it will happen? To ensure that buddy pairs work, the teacher must set the stage for the type of talk that she wants from her students. Although the examples were drawn from a dual-language classroom, teachers working with linguistically diverse students in other contexts can also be intentional about putting talk at the center of their instruction. Even though it is important to describe a language goal to students, describing alone is not enough. The structure of the classroom must provide students with the opportunity to practice talking about language as a means to reflect on their growing awareness of how their two languages function.

Students in this kindergarten classroom were intent on communicating with their teacher and each other and were willing to use all their linguistic skills to accomplish this. Janet embraced and reinforced students' efforts to communicate through deliberate and highly structured whole-class and buddy-pair activities, which made talking about language a habit that students wanted to maintain.

Moll, Sáez & Dworin (2001) have shown that students can become literate in a language they are not yet proficient in. The way Janet positioned students to be language detectives placed the students in a position where they were thinking about and analyzing their languages in an ongoing fashion. The students' own awareness of this knowledge could then be used to further their learning. In particular, we saw how students were beginning to develop a sense of what was possible and what was not (e.g., *juguéste*/toys in Spanish does not start with an H even though the same initial sound in the word maps on to the letter H in English).

The examples in this article provided an opportunity to see how students were specifically engaging with their languages in an informed fashion (Pérez, 2004; Velasco & García, 2014).

## Implications for Educators

In order for these suggestions to work, educators must be intentional about how they pair students and how they model what they want from the students. Students should be paired so they can stretch each other. Educators should take into consideration students' language proficiencies, literacy skills, and willingness to take risks. Educators should also be intentional about how they support students' efforts. Modeling is something that happens throughout the year. As students become proficient with a certain skill, a new skill will need to be taught. In the classroom, Janet was willing to put her life experiences (the discussion of the photo of her when she was a child) on display; modeling in this fashion helped students to understand what she wanted from them. She was also willing to let students play a key role in the modeling process. There was less telling and more doing and showing on Janet's part, and students were allowed to truly converse. Educators need to engage in all of these activities—and have a vision for where they want to take these activities—in order for buddy pairs to work well.

---

**The classroom must provide students with the opportunity to practice talking about language as a means to reflect on how their two languages function.**

---

Teachers wishing to use buddy pairs in their classrooms to increase dialogue and provide support for writing must take certain steps into consideration. First, it is important to identify the nature of the talk the teacher wishes to have in the classroom. In this project, Janet wanted students to highlight the details in their conversations and to transfer this to their writing. Second, one must consider what activities educators can tap into that will support the desired communication among the students. One good place to

start might be to establish a morning message activity of some kind that fits the age group in question. The main point of this activity is to provide a catalyst for exploring “linguaging” in a natural context. Third, it is important to trust that students have the ability to translanguange and become proficient writers. Educators must structure the classroom space and the pedagogical activities so that students can talk about and use what comes naturally to them—their languages—within appropriate frameworks such as being detectives, engaging in abundant opportunities to write, using books as models of writing, and employing graphic organizers.

## References

- Alvarez, S. (2014). Translanguaging tareas: Emergent bilingual youth as language brokers for homework in immigrant families. *Language Arts, 91*, 326–339.
- Bauer, E. B., & Gort, M. (2012). *Early biliteracy development: Images of how young bilinguals make use of their linguistic resources*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bauer, E. B., Presiado, V., & Colomer, S. (2017). Writing through partnership: Fostering translanguaging in children who are emergent bilinguals. *Journal of Literacy Research, 49*, 10–37.
- Bialystok, E. (2009). Bilingualism: The good, the bad and the indifferent. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 12*, 3–11.
- Bialystok, E., & Werker, J. (2017). The systematic effects of bilingualism on children’s development. *Developmental Science, 20*, 1–3.
- Clay, M. M. (1975). *What did I write?* Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann.
- Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching? *The Modern Language Journal, 94*, 103–115.
- Dahl, K. L. (1993). Children’s spontaneous utterances during early reading and writing instruction in whole-language classrooms. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 25*, 279–294.
- Dworin, J. E. (2003). Insights into biliteracy development: Toward a bidirectional theory of bilingual pedagogy. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 2*, 171–186.
- Dyson, A. H. (2000). Writing and the sea of voices: Oral language in, around, and about writing. In R. Indrisano & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Perspectives on writing research, theory, and practice* (pp. 45–65). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Dyson, A. H. (2006). On saying it right (write): “Fix-its” in the foundations of learning to write. *Research in the Teaching of English, 41*, 8–42.
- García, O. (2009). Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas, R. Phillipson, A. K. Mohanty, & M. Panda (Eds.), *Social justice through multilingual education* (pp. 140–158). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- García, O., Flores, N., & Chu, H. (2011). Extending bilingualism in US secondary education: New variations. *International Multilingual Research Journal, 5*, 1–18.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Geva, E., & Zadeh, Z. Y. (2006). Reading efficiency in native English-speaking and English-as-a-second-language children: The role of oral proficiency and underlying cognitive-linguistic processes. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 10*, 31–57.
- Gort, M. (2012). Evaluation and revision processes of young bilinguals in a dual language program. In E. B. Bauer & M. Gort (Eds.), *Early biliteracy development: Exploring young learners’ use of their linguistic resources* (pp. 90–110). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kroll, J. F., & Dussias, P. E. (2017). The benefits of multilingualism to the personal and professional development of residents of the US. *Foreign Language Annals, 50*, 248–259. [An earlier version of this paper appeared online as part of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Commission on Language Learning; it can be retrieved at <https://www.amacad.org/content/Research/researchproject.aspx?d=21896>]
- Lewis, G., Jones, B., & Baker, C. (2012). Translanguaging: Developing its conceptualization and contextualisation. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 18*, 655–670.
- Moll, L. C., Sáez, R., & Dworin, J. (2001). Exploring biliteracy: Two student case examples of writing as a social practice. *The Elementary School Journal, 101*, 435–449.
- Orellana, M. F., Martínez, D. C., & Martínez, R. A. (2014). Language brokering and translanguaging: Lessons on leveraging students’ linguistic competencies. *Language Arts, 91*, 311–312.
- Parr, J., Jesson, R., & McNaughton, S. (2009). Agency and platform: The relationships between talk and writing. In R. Beard, D. Myhill, J. Riley, & M. Nystrand (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of writing development* (pp. 246–259). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Pérez, B. (Ed.). (2004). Literacy, diversity, and programmatic responses. In B. Perez (Ed.),

*Sociocultural contexts of language and literacy* (2nd ed., pp. 3–24). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Velasco, P., & García, O. (2014). Translanguaging and the writing of bilingual learners. *Bilingual Research*

*Journal: The Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education*, 37, 6–23.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

**Eurydice Bouchereau Bauer** is the John E. Swearingen Chair of Education and a professor in Instruction and Teacher Education at the University of South Carolina. Her research focuses on understanding the language and literacy development of young bilinguals. She can be contacted at [bauereb@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:bauereb@mailbox.sc.edu).

## INTO THE CLASSROOM

readwritethink

Lisa Storm Fink

 NCTE

### ***Kindergartners' Writing in a Dual-Language Classroom***

*In this strategy, students read aloud to each other, pairing more fluent readers with less fluent readers. Likewise, this strategy can be used to pair older students with younger students to create “reading buddies.” Additionally, children who read at the same level can be paired to reread a text that they have already read, for continued understanding and fluency work. This research-based strategy can be used with any book or text in a variety of content areas, and can be implemented in a variety of ways.*

<http://bit.ly/2zw6lf3>

*Pairs of students respond to literature alternately in shared journals, responding to group read-alouds, independent reading, literature circles, or any instance when pairs of students are exposed to the same texts. After introducing the concept of literature response journals, the teacher models a basic exchange. Students*

*brainstorm possible generic prompts for their journals, then practice an exchange with their partners. As students begin using the journals, mini-lessons are presented on responding to prompts, creating dialogue, adding drawings, and asking and answering questions. Students can choose their own partners, or partners can be teacher-assigned so that less proficient and more proficient writers can be paired.*

<http://bit.ly/1Mia0cq>

*In this strategy guide, you'll learn about Partner Talk—a way to provide students with another learning opportunity to make learning their own through collaboration and discussion. Partner Talk can be used for assessing classwork, making connections to prior knowledge, discussing vocabulary, or simplifying concepts.*

<http://bit.ly/20aS1zf>