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"La biblioteca es importante": A Case Study of an Emergent Bilingual Public Library in the Nuevo U.S. South

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

Research examining ethnolinguistic community schools (García, Zakharia, & Otcu, 2013) proposes that local spaces not directly affiliated with schools sustain bilingualism and identity. Though researchers often theorize about how community schools sustain home language literacies, less research examines how local public spaces sustain bilingualism among immigrant communities and, more broadly, what this would resemble. With a conceptual framework modeled after García’s (2009, 2011) theorization of translanguaging as a dynamic bilingual practice, we offer a counter to monolingual assumptions permeating current language education policy and ideologies. This case study of a public library examines a translanguaging space that offers a window into an emerging Latin American immigrant community in the U.S. South and the complexities of bilingual contact in the United States as a whole. We found that this nurturing public library fostered bilingualism, intentionally refuting language-minoritized stigmas for students learning English. With targeted programming and mentorship, the library challenged misinterpreted “deficit” views of emergent bilingual communities with reoriented views of English language learning to a translingual orientation (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011) that extends the innovative and critical practices of shuttling across diverse language repertoires. The public space of the library honored and cultivated the literacy practices of its local communities, and the importance of this is, without overstating, that public spaces for bilingual learning further the missions of all schools.

The sign in Figure 1 announces the afterschool and evening agenda for April 30, 2014 at the Valle del Bluegrass Library (VBL)\textsuperscript{1} of Kentucky. Written in both Spanish and English (notably Spanish first, with English subtitles), the sign notes the annual Día de los Libros celebration, as well as the regular nightly homework help session, and a weekly aikido course offering a healthy dose of Japanese vocabulary. The celebrants’ full linguistic repertoires were part of the Día de los Libros special event featuring bilingual songs, readings, and free school supplies. For nearly a decade, VBL had offered free afterschool K-12 homework tutoring services to emergent bilingual youths in a small city of Kentucky. It was the only public library in the state to offer a wide selection of books and media in Spanish and regularly scheduled bilingual programming for children and adults. VBL was also the only library in the state to offer bilingual afterschool homework assistance thanks in part to volunteer tutors and assistance from library staff. VBL’s programing objectives stressed community inclusion, and events like the Día de los Libros intentionally met local demand, as they were rhetorically attuned (Lorimer Leonard, 2014) to the resiliency of bilingualism amid language-minoritizing school policies. It was no surprise that VBL thrived as a bilingual educational space when...
no other local bilingual programs were available, and where members of the community could freely communicate beyond and across languages.

In addition to programming, the sign at VBL also communicated how bilingual communities translanguaged strategically in their daily practices in ways that were energetic, negotiable, and affiliative. Translanguaging is the moving back and forth between and across languages, a dynamic literacy activity among bilingual communities (García & Wei, 2013). In very practical terms, translanguaging describes students’ fluid movement across multiple languages, speaking and composing, for example, in Spanish and English within the same oral or written text, demonstrating comfort with both languages. Translanguaging practices happen during the everyday multilingual situated contexts of emergent bilingual students as the conditions for learning. As a pluralist language ideology, translanguaging enacts a heteroglossic disposition that defies monolingualized assumptions about languages and literacies (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2013). Monolingualized English is an ideology that views the English language as singular and monolithic. This language ideology privileges a single orientation for the qualified standard of instruction, and as such it can potentially discount the home languages of students and their shuttling practices (Canagarajah, 2013; Horner & Lu, 2007; Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011). English literacy then has a form of symbolic power in language-minoritized families that can disrupt and reshape social relations between family members, and further complicate building trust between schools and communities.

How communities negotiate English literacy and nurture bilingualism can be a different story. Indeed, most of the families who attended VBL were emergent bilinguals—Spanish was the home language for the majority of attendees. But it was English language support that brought the community together in the public space of the library. The Día de los Libros then was an event that cultivated these bilingual language practices and needs. However, observing the sign (Figure 1), we—as teacher-scholars—could not avoid asking ourselves about how the families and the library cooperated to make events like the Día de los Libros possible in a state where approximately 95% of the total population reports speaking English only (United States Census Bureau, 2014). For this article, we delved further into this juxtaposition and asked ourselves the following questions to orient our study: How do immigrant communities

Figure 1. “Ayuda con tareas.”
in the U.S. South maintain bilingual resiliency amid pressures for home language loss? How do emergent bilingual communities create and work to sustain bilingual spaces? How can public libraries cultivate bilingual spaces? What alternative avenues for bilingual learning are available for students and their families outside of school settings? Related to these questions for educators, we must also consider asking if teachers unwittingly encourage children to misunderstand their emergent bilingual practices in English-only terms.

In this article, we argue that VBL was a bilingual educational provider distinct from local public schools that operated as a community learning space for publically promoting and reclaiming home languages. Whereas public and private schools are typically formal educational units organized around a standardized curriculum established and regulated by larger bureaucratic agencies, locally based operations like VBL are sites of ethnolinguistic community schooling (García, Zakharia, & Otcu, 2013). This community model stresses that education is built from the immediate needs of a local constituency, which is not required to use the service, unlike formal schooling which is legally required for grades K-12. Because of VBL’s status as a public library, bilingual communication acquired symbolic legitimacy in the city in a manner not occurring in local schools. Welcoming community learning sites like VBL enable bilingualism and cultivate translanguaging practices that are creative and critical resources for students. In the United States—despite the wide variety of languages spoken—we subscribe to a monolingual ideology (Horner & Lu, 2007). Thus, our schools stress that speaking and learning in one monolithically imagined language is the norm, and that any language seen as a variation from such a “norm” is considered non-standard. But that doesn’t have to be the only way of thinking about language and languaging. What if we instead saw language through a pluralist ideology, a counter ideology in which understanding multiple languages was the norm? That is the essence of the translingual orientation (Horner, NeCamp, & Donahue, 2011), which argues that multilingual practices of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are creatively and critically complex, rather than English language learning obstacles.

**Study background**

Scholars describe the boom of Latin American migration throughout the U.S. South beginning in the 1990s as the formation of the “Nuevo New South” (Mohl, 2003). According to U.S. Census data (2012), the Latin American-origin population of Kentucky nearly tripled between 1990 and 2010, with nearly 90% of these migrants coming from Mexico. Rich and Miranda (2005) explicate that the rapid growth of Latinos in Kentucky occurred when a predominantly male Mexican population engaged in more permanent low-wage agricultural jobs—as opposed to seasonal work. After 9/11, increased border militarization led to less seasonal migration, and a formerly transnational group of men traveling back and forth between nations for work during different times of the year became a growing population establishing families with children in the United States. The heightened levels of border security compelled migrants to settle in Kentucky rather than risk the inability to leave and never return. During interviews, we also met several families who moved to Kentucky when anti-immigrant sentiment toward Latin American immigrants—mostly farmworkers—in Georgia and North Carolina increased.

Over the course of a generation, more social programs appeared in Kentucky to help immigrants adjust to life in the United States, as well as to locate English language support. The bilingual VBL was a safe community space offering not only English support, but also civic engagement, advocacy, mentorship, and networking for the local Latin American immigrant community. As with many cities throughout the nation, the Nuevo New Southern cities are experiencing a rapidly emerging multietnic community spurred by transnational migration reshaping the local practices of communities—sometimes unwillingly—to multilingual needs. Educators delving into engaged community participation must respond to local sites for mutual learning that builds trust on the way to social justice, especially as in cases like Kentucky where minoritized immigrant families experience social isolation and exclusion.
Kentucky's history of responding to immigration to the commonwealth demonstrated a willingness among leaders of influence to move forward in a proactive position as opposed to a reactive state. Multiple Latino-focused local organizations addressed the growing needs of the community. Though these programs made progress to empower the Latin American immigrant community, the majority of them were unsustainable. The lack of plans for sustainability and growth resulted in great work starting but never reaching full fruition on accounts of leaders burning out, and, inevitably, action ending due to lack of resources, human capital, and organization. VBL, however, has sustained for nearly a decade and has proven itself as a leading-provider serving the interests and needs of the growing Latino population, principally because of local government support.

The modern, well-designed VBL space is lit well, equipped with computers, an abundance of resources in Spanish and English, and several rooms to accommodate events and patrons. Of the six community branches of the public library system in the city, the 10,000 square-foot VBL is the newest. It was opened in 2004, and later expanded in 2008. VBL found its home in a local shopping center on the west side of the city. The space in the shopping center was a cooperative venture among the public library, a large corporate bank, and multiple community partners. Over a period of ten years, VBL had accumulated a vast collection of Spanish materials, and had expanded to two-thirds of the west wing of the shopping center. The space had increasingly lent legitimacy to the growing immigrant community living in the ethnic enclave. The professionalism of the institution was legitimated by its space, but most importantly, the openness to bilingualism of the people who managed it. VBL was a broker between the immigrant community and the larger city-school complex. VBL's space was alive with activity and hardly a quiet place to do silent reading during certain hours. Nevertheless, this branch of the public library was open seven days a week.

The neighborhood in which VBL was located has been a hub for Latin American immigrants for roughly 25 years. Students identified as Latino composed 70% of the student body of 700 at the nearest local elementary school—white students composed 15% and African American students 13%. Ninety-seven percent of all students at the same school qualified for free-and-reduced lunch. Although nearly 50% of the entire student body was classified as English language learners (ELL) or assessed as Limited English Proficient (LEP) since the early 2000s, the local primary school did not make efforts to organize bilingual learning options for students until 2014, and even these were geared towards English monolingualism.

VBL mediated between the newly growing Latin American immigrant community in the area and local institutions, primarily local schools. The VBL afterschool program itself purported to promote educational advancement for the Latino populations of all its region, but VBL was limited to expanding shopping center space funded by city government and donations, and a homework program that operated late afternoons and evenings four days a week for four hours each session. Those homework sessions reached thousands of students of all levels, but mostly at the elementary and middle school ages. VBL operated as a safe space for immigrant families to discourse openly with one another about school policies and experiences in their home languages. VBL homework tutors aided students with homework in English and Spanish.

**Translanguaging as literacy practice**

Translanguaging is a bilingual theory for social justice that challenges monolingual assumptions permeating current language education policy and monolingual ideologies. Bilinguals have a repertoire of linguistic features and translanguaging is what it looks like to enact and creatively organize those features in ways that respond to diverse social contexts. Translanguaging treats the hybrid sense-making practices of emergent bilinguals as additive for language development, and strongly counters subtractive English-only pedagogies (Bartlett & García, 2011; García & Kleifgen, 2010; García & Wei, 2013). One of the central premises of translanguaging is that bilingual competency is not measured as two separate monolingual systems, but rather as a single repertoire of practices that strategically, creatively, and critically make meaning. A significant line of literacy research among language-minoritized communities argues that the entrance of minoritized languages into mainstream institutional literacy instruction has increasingly been promoted as encouraging healthy schooling outlooks and cultivating a sense of
inclusion of minoritized students’ community lives at school (García, 2009; Orellana, 2009; Orellana & García, 2014).

Likewise, educators, administrators, and schools must figure out ways to reduce narrowly defining, in English-only terms, students’ linguistic repertoires, especially among those students who belong to language-minoritized communities. When encountering homework in English, emergent bilingual students strategize from their full linguistic repertoires to make meaning critically and creatively as they negotiate language differences. Communicative practice is not restricted to predefined meanings of individual languages, but the ability to translanguage across diverse language resources in situated interactions which reevaluate uncertainty and openness is essential to any examination of communication and difference.

Emergent bilingual youths, college students, and adults with expansive linguistic repertoires actively and dynamically challenge monolingual assumptions that permeate language education policies (Alvarez, Canagarajah, Lee, Lee, & Rabbi, 2016). Educators who embrace multilingualism as a resource rather than ignore it or perceive it as a learning obstacle make translanguaging explicit in their teaching and learning. Translanguaging recognizes that emergent bilinguals mobilize or tap into their linguistic repertoires as they strategically respond to daily activities, including schoolwork and academic uses of language (García, 2011; García & Kleifgen, 2010; García & Wei, 2013; Zentella, 2009).

The study

Methods and participants

The participants in this article participated in a larger three-year ethnographic research project at VBL conducted from August 2012 to November 2015. The study was based on fieldwork including observations and action research conducted during homework help and interviews of 45 youths, 8 parents, 7 educators, and 3 librarians. Over the course of research at VBL, we collected over 800 pages of field notes and interview transcripts from 80 hours of audio recordings, 50 photographs of the space and programming, and 100 photocopies of student writing, including the students in this article. With certain pieces of writing homework, we conducted group interviews with individuals and groups involved in compositions about their recollections of the events surrounding the makings of specific texts.

For this article, we focus on VBL’s branch manager, three youths, and one parent from VBL (n = 5) and their spoken and written reflections about the library. Both authors had helped each of the four students in this article on numerous occasions with homework during the afterschool tutoring program, where they also conversed with parents of these same youths, including the mother profiled in this article.

Data analysis

We coded data according to what we identified as translanguaging events or bilingual situations in context. Translanguaging events are narratives that represent emergent bilinguals practicing their linguistic repertoires in the production of texts (Alvarez, 2014). Such moments of translanguaging occur as dynamic bilingual enactments of translanguaging in shared-situated contexts for literacy in communities (García & Kleifgen, 2010). We found translanguaging events as illustrative of the potential to read situations as narratives for theorizing literacies and their real world relevance.

From located translanguaging events, we subcoded data according to bilingual practices, stories, and attitudes during homework sessions among youth and adult participants at VBL. Moments of translanguaging in response to English homework reframed the literacy activities as translanguaging events—situated contexts to study the full linguistic repertoires and literacies of emergent bilingual families through writing. From the data, themes of bilingual resilience, community care, mentorship, and community safety emerged as significant among participants.
“They help my parent to learn a little more or a lot of English”: VBL as a safe space for translanguaging

Social context and an understanding of the difficulties that the predominantly immigrant community of this local enclave faced on a daily basis—because of language, cultural, or immigration status barriers—demonstrated VBL’s support of bilingualism and biculturalism. This open orientation to bilingualism amid pressures for home language suppression demonstrated how VBL encouraged translanguaging as a resilient practice for maintaining and building community. By offering bilingual texts and hiring bilingual staff, VBL attempted to not only meet the neighborhood’s sociocultural and bilingual needs, but also nurture their emerging biculturalism. The bureaucracies and impositions of the standardized ideologies of public schools often make it difficult for people in administrative positions to immediately respond to families’ bicultural needs, such as emerging bilingualism.

Ms. Clara had been the manager at VBL since it opened its doors in 2004. Ms. Clara was born in Havana, Cuba, grew up in Florida, and had lived in Kentucky for over 20 years. Her position as a multilingual immigrant provided her the bilingual and bifocal perspective that many library members longed to encounter in their children’s schools, and which children could look up to as a model of the value for translanguaging. The VBL manager was involved with local politics and also with finding spaces for local Latinos to locate educational, medical, and legal support. Ms. Clara was largely responsible for researching and applying for VBL’s bilingual educational program funding. The bilingual programming at VBL was largely subsidized through federal grant initiatives aimed at preventing violence in communities by supporting public programs that keep young folks occupied after school. “The idea was to use education as one means of reaching the community,” Ms. Clara said. She continued,

We expanded over the years as more immigrants found us and discovered us as a safe place to speak Spanish. We wouldn't deny them, and I think they felt that from other organizations. I know what these kids experience. I remember growing up, and how I started school and I didn't know English. I used to translate for my parents, and it was hard. Hard because some of the words were difficult, I didn't know what I was saying. Like with taxes! How is a kid supposed to translate that into Spanish? And my parents would be so upset with me, and I would be upset with them. There is so much stress with English for immigrants, and we do our best to help take away some of that stress for these families, because they have so much already.

Largely from her experience growing up bilingual, Ms. Clara was rhetorically attuned (Lorimer Leonard, 2014) to what she perceived as the strengths and challenges the local Latino community faced. Ms. Clara also had direct contact with local families, and her bilingual abilities made her a point of contact for schools and community organizations. Ms. Clara pointed to the challenges of being bilingual and helping families. Language brokering (Orellana, 2009), simultaneous translation, interpretation, and guidance for families becomes an important function for the children of immigrants, and is one of the many practices of translanguaging. Ms. Clara became a mentor for many of the VBL patrons because she understood such aspects of bilingualism in immigrant life. This genuine sense of care from the library staff was not unique to Ms. Clara, however, but her disposition certainly set the tone for how VBL would approach the local Spanish-speaking community—with dignity and respect for their lived experiences. With those patrons who she had established trust, Ms. Clara shared hugs and laughs, and for those who were new to the library she always greeted them literally with her arms open, and in both Spanish and English.

For 11-year-old Fernando, Ms. Clara was an educational role model and the library was a space in which he felt comfortable. Fernando’s parents and he migrated to Kentucky from Michoacán, Mexico nearly a decade previously. Fernando had participated in VBL programs since he was in kindergarten. He wrote the following essay about the impact of VBL on him:

VBL is important for me. I like the library because I can checkout books, use the computers, and get help with my homework. This place is good for kids so they can learn more things and it also helps padres to learn a little more English.

The book are my favorit thing on the library. I read every day I read a book for one hour. So I cood get better at reading. The book I like best are funny like Diary of a Wompe Kid and Harabler Harry. The best part about book is learning.
I also check computer at the library. I use the internet to do homework. And sometime I play game with my frands.

One time I look at the map on the computer it was call googel earth were my family is from in Mexico. The homework teacher knew Michoacan and speak Spanish.

The homework help a lot of kids to learn somethings in English. They also dont do tests. They help me with my math and reading. They help my parent to learn a little more or a lot of English so when I cant go to library they cood help me with homeworks.

Indeed, Fernando was an avid reader at VBL. He also used the computers often to play games and watch YouTube videos, in addition to doing searches on Google maps for where his family lived abroad. Fernando also helped younger students with homework, which also allowed him share his literacy. Fernando’s line about testing (“They also dont do tests,”) speaks to the importance of VBL as a safe academic space distinct from the high-stakes assessment models imposed on and by schools. Unlike schools that assess students, the library assessed itself and how the community utilized its resources. Assessment at the library looked to quantify public usage, access, and use to the community rather than standardized test scores and evaluations based on testing “effectiveness.” Through largely composed in English, Fernando does use “padres” to refer to his parents and indicates his pleasure for speaking Spanish with his homework tutor while using technology to learn more about Mexican geography. Notably, Fernando includes his parents in his essay and how VBL had helped them to learn English to help their son with his schooling.

Like Fernando, nine-year-old Rosa migrated when very young. In Rosa’s case, her family migrated from Veracruz, Mexico seven years previously. Also like Fernando, she had been coming to VBL for nearly the entirety of the time she lived in Kentucky. Rosa’s essay about the impact of VBL on her reads:

La biblioteca significa un lugar importante because I can do my homework. At the library there are nice people that help with homework. The library means a safe place. For example, at the library they have a nice security gaured and cameras, or no one could hert them. The library also means a fun place because they have lots of computers and video games. The library is also like my house because I can speak english and spanish and no one can get mad. In addition, I could read with the kids younger than me. Sometimes they are annoying and some could be exaggerating and nice. I rilly like the library and I am thankful for it. Gracias biblioteca!

VBL for Rosa was both a safe space because of what she pointed out with regards to physical safety and the safety of speaking Spanish as she would at home, though in public. For many families in the area, interactions with police and security agencies were stressful and nerve wracking, either because of irregular immigration status or distrust of the police force in general. At the library, security guards were seen as good and trustworthy enforcers of guidelines—who at many points found themselves translanguaging and eating Mexican sweets that families brought for them. Spaces like VBL connect to schools indirectly, but with as much emphasis in Rosa’s life. In fact, at VBL she came into contact with teachers from local schools employed by the library’s grant funding to participate in the homework programs offered. It is worth noting that her writing speaks volumes about the potential for spaces that welcome translanguaging as a resource for bilingualism. Rosa’s translanguaging demonstrates her comfort utilizing her full linguistic repertoire for her audience. We should also note that Rosa describes VBL as a safe space with “no fighting.” For Rosa, this obviously was important, but equally important was making friends and having trusting teachers available to mentor students learning English and where she could speak Spanish “and no one can get mad.” Lastly, her waiving off of the essay in Spanish seems to signal her affect-based connection to the biblioteca as fostering a bilingual space welcoming her home practices.

Not only was VBL a safe space for translanguaging, it was also a rich space for bilingual collaborations between VBL youth and adults. From the perspective of a parent, 35-year-old Berta, originally from Guerrero, Mexico, was the mother of 16-year-old Celia, who was born in Kentucky. Berta found her daughter’s participation in programs at VBL to be important for Celia’s academic support and for learning more about her identity. For a high school English writing assignment, Celia interviewed her mother as a reporter learning more about how Berta saw herself raising her children. Celia conducted the interview, transcribed it in Spanish, and translated the transcription into English before writing the following version she submitted for class:
I have witnessed that my child has developed in her maturity. She is proud to be Mexican American and celebrates both parts of her culture. She is starting to know who she is as a woman and what she is capable of doing as a person and in this world. She is outspoken, personable, smart, and determined to succeed.

She grew up in a single parent home with a brother and a sister that went to programs at VBL to help her with school because I could not, because I don’t know enough English. VBL also helped me to learn from people who speak Spanish. Now my daughter’s looking to follow the footsteps of my two other kids and focus on her future. I want my family to be on the right track to get a great education and make something out of themselves. As a single mother and someone who did not get to go to college, I am so happy for my children to be in this position to make their dreams come true, and also for the help we found at VBL.

For Berta, her daughter’s participation in VBL programs helped her to learn more about educational opportunities that may have not been as present to her because of what she deemed her English limitations. Despite these self-identified English limitations, Berta found a bilingual community at the library to address the educational concerns she had for her children, which she was not able to do through the schools. Berta also notes that Celia not only found homework help at VBL, but that the library also helped her to think about her identity and find a group of students sharing ambitions and constraints, thereby expanding her network with mentors and participants to help guide her toward college. As teacher-researchers we feel it is important to note that Celia did graduate from high school like her siblings a few years later, and became the first in her family to attend college. Celia has also become involved in a Latina mentoring program at her college that arranged female mentorship for elementary and middle schools students. Several of these college mentors attended VBL growing up and returned to the library to serve as volunteers and, for some, as part-time employees.

Public spaces as bilingual mentorship and learning spaces

Ms. Clara, Fernando, Rosa, Celia, and Berta each expressed in their words and writing the importance of bilingualism among immigrant communities and more broadly what this would resemble in community spaces outside of schools. For the youth, feeling safe and using Spanish with adults proved to be an important aspect that created a caring atmosphere at VBL. For youth and adults, VBL nurtured and promoted bilingual learning and translanguage practices, intentionally refuting language-minoritized stigmas for students learning English.

We arrived at two findings from this study, which we detail below. First, we believe that with targeted programming, VBL challenged misinterpreted “deficit” views of emergent bilingual communities with reoriented views of English language learning to a translingual orientation (Horner, Lu, Royster, & Trimbur, 2011) that applauds the innovative and creative abilities to shuttle across individuals’ linguistic repertoires. Our second finding concludes that writing projects that honor local literacy practices can collaborate with community bilingual educational spaces to engage students’ full linguistic repertoires. We cannot overstate the importance for engaging public spaces for bilingual learning to further the missions of all schools, whether schools are equipped or not with bilingual resources.

Finding 1: Mentors negate deficit thinking

Mentors can, like Ms. Clara, create a sense of validation and support for bilingual families. In many ways, they support the socially-just project of education (Paris, 2012). Public libraries can be connection points for mentorship at multiple levels, from programing to homework support. VBL adult volunteer homework tutors who regularly attended the program also became mentors for VBL youths. At VBL, the impact of adult mentors provided mentees with support and friendship outside the constraints of school contact zones (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). This networking of mentored support was a primary function of VBL in the community. This mentorship aspect of VBL offers an example for educators who wish to engage local communities: Building partnerships of trust must be core to tapping into networks of individual stakeholders meeting between institutions and communities, and forming partnerships to study emergent bilingual families while building rapport. Making connections in spaces like public libraries
acknowledges that such spaces have the affirmation of schools that learning happens beyond classrooms and in the civic lives of students across generations.

**Finding 2: Literacy projects that honor community practices**

As we see in the writings from Fernando, Rosa, and Celia, writing projects can explore the resiliencies of emergent bilingual students, their families, and their communities. The example of Celia's profile of Berta is particularly relevant to consider. Celia interviewed Berta in Spanish, transcribed the interview in Spanish and English, and composed her profile in English. The additional step of translation was not a nuisance according to Celia in an interview: "It was not that bad, my Spanish was not so okay on transcription, but I liked writing my mom's words in Spanish, it made it easier to listen and practice. I kept all the writing because I want to have it for later to share with people." The translanguaging behind Celia's text was not apparent in the final English composition. Indeed, the English text did capture Berta's story, but Celia never produced a corresponding Spanish composition. Nevertheless, the value of the assignment gestured to producing an assignment that honored family narratives. Further, writing projects that explore family history can turn to expressive projects that reflect local struggles and histories, as well as emerging presents and futures, but should also return to honoring local languages.

VBL offered that nurtured bilingual learning and programming that honored the literacy practices of the local immigrant community. The availability of texts and media in Spanish and the volume of spoken Spanish attested to the status of Spanish in the public library. It is significant that VBL, a public library, takes on this orientation that honors and works to sustain the literacy practices and linguistic repertoires of students, as this demonstrates that asset-based pedagogies that extend classrooms into communities and vice versa are operating. This also suggests there are further opportunities for collaboration between schools and community educational spaces like libraries.

**Suggestions**

As daunting as all this community outreach sounds, busy educators can network and mentor communities like VBL in a number of relevant ways to incorporate community literacy engagement into writing assignments that reposition language minoritizing English-only discourses into emergent bilingual orientations. Educators can organize assignments and units that seek to encourage translanguaging events by inviting students to language broker, translate, paraphrase, and interpret, reflexively calling attention to language differences for discussion and analysis. The translingual view may remain contrary to English or Spanish purists, but the translingual orientation also acknowledges the hybridity of everyday practices emergent bilingual individuals and communities develop in response to their contexts and histories. Similarly, assignments that exhibit translations encourage bilingual participation from students. Foreign language videos or news clips that include English subtitles, for example, are excellent texts for analyzing and critiquing translations as well as visualizing international locations, stories, and events. For emergent bilingual students, this could invite students' expertise, while also exposing the students to the translanguaging practices of their classmates. Assignments, like Celia's parent interview, that ask students to gather field notes of language uses in their homes and communities can invite diverse participants, including individuals who speak, read, and write different languages. Of course, a Spanish version of the final text would also be equally as important for the project portfolio, as would be the transcripts in both languages.

Literacy projects that send students into the field to collect data invite students' inquiries into their own communities. From the practices of where they belong, students learn to uncover the strands of meaning from which they are privy and discover spaces for learning that happen outside of schools. Teams of students taking on ethnographic projects in which they explore the narratives and languages of their classmates have much to offer when sharing language differences among the classroom community's literacies and spaces. Scholars (Akom, 2009; Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Yosso, 2005) have pointed to the importance of ethnographic field work for students to identify and problematize deficit views of culture and form an action plan for reassessing community assets and cultural wealth. Added to
this is the aspect of language pluralism. Educators overseeing student ethnographers must be intentional about student collaboration and sharing in the process of research, calling upon students to share fieldwork data in discussion workshops, while also demonstrating to student fieldworkers the importance of projects delving into issues affecting local bilingual communities. Finally, the possibilities of incorporating digital tools, such as video and podcasts, offer exciting opportunities for recording the stories and lived languages of students’ communities.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that VBL operates as a bilingual community learning space engaging the full linguistic repertoires of its attending members and administration. As a bilingual educational provider, VBL is a public space for communities to promote and reclaim their home languages distinct from local public schools. VBL’s structure was built from the immediate linguistic needs of a local constituency, and grew out of the dynamic bilingual perspectives that its attending members, staff, and manager brought to the space. Welcoming community learning sites like VBL enable bilingualism and cultivate translanguagegating practices that are creative and critical resources. We nod to a translingual orientation to literacy practices and linguistic repertoires of students, extending the asset-based pedagogies research that seeks to foster, explore, and transform multilingual public spaces.

A translingual orientation contests the very notion of a monolingual one. This is something that was often visible in the VBL’s context in Kentucky, in which patrons and staff at the library spoke several varieties of Kentuckian Englishes and North and Central American and Caribbean Spanishes. A translingual orientation applauds more inclusive appreciation for the full linguistic repertoires of all local communities. Educators can leverage students’ translanguaging in order to extend their existing linguistic performances. Teachers do this by helping emergent bilingual students integrate new features into their existing linguistic repertoires, which in turn provides them with more linguistic options and permutations.

Our conclusion from this study at VBL focuses on how bilingual public spaces beyond schools become advocates for communities by instilling confidence in the voices of the community to feel welcomed to participate. This instilled confidence is more than being bilingual and certainly more than believing in students. Rather, the confidence that communities like VBL instill does not necessarily lead to a prescribed path toward success, but does translate into a reciprocal relationship built on mutual trust and support. For example, because homework help is a common need among language-minoritized families, afterschool ventures that focus on homework and aim at securing academic support and mentorship tend to succeed with family involvement. As resilient language-minoritized communities collectively organize their linguistic resources, they locate spaces where their translanguaging finds value, and where their confident voices count. The timeframe for confidence has no expiration. This sounds simple enough, to build relationships, but in practice it is very difficult and absolutely impossible without the confidence to respect emergent bilingual communities on their own terms.

Note

1. All names of organizations and individuals are pseudonyms.

References


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