Multilingual Meaning-Making during Reading: Collaborative Inquiry into Translanguaging Possibilities and Pedagogies for Elementary Emergent Multilinguals

Leah Shepard-Carey, University of Minnesota

Younger children have been the focus of my work as an educator, teacher educator, and as an emerging researcher. My career as an educator has encompassed working in multilingual early childhood settings for migrant families and elementary English as an additional language contexts in the United States. As a teacher and graduate student, I became increasingly interested in the need for curriculum, resources and pedagogies that empower and connect to the dynamic skill sets of our younger emergent bilinguals, especially in literacy learning contexts. Through my own action research in my classroom (Shepard-Carey, 2019), I found that my second-grade emergent bilinguals had limited opportunities to make sense of texts in ways that included their first languages and drew upon their cultural repertoires. Subsequently, my continued inquiry surrounding second-grade emergent bilinguals' sensemaking during small-group reading demonstrated how a learner expressed and resisted traditional reading comprehension pedagogies in multimodal ways, with the learner using meaning-making resources beyond her linguistic repertoire such as pointing to and using texts and pictures, acting out stories beyond the story-line, and using silence and verbal communication to convey frustration with tasks and her own identity as an "English learner" (Shepard-Carey, 2020). These prior investigations and my own growing knowledge of translanguaging pedagogies led me to focus my research on how teachers can support emergent bilinguals' reading in culturally- and linguistically-sustaining ways. When I became a full-time PhD student, I maintained the connections to my school, and sought to do research in ways that were in line with a humanizing research agenda (Paris & Winn, 2013), "which requires that our inquiries involve dialogic consciousness-raising and the building of relationships of dignity and care for both researchers and participants" (Paris, 2011, p. 137). In my context, this meant that I aimed towards long-term involvement with the students and teachers and worked towards a more collaborative research agenda that resisted monolingual approaches in literacy learning and further sought to leverage students' linguistic repertoires in ways that have not been typically welcomed in school spaces.

My current project, connected to my dissertation research, is a multi-year qualitative inquiry into developing multilingual pedagogies for reading for primary-age emergent bilinguals. I am grounding this work in translanguaging pedagogies (García & Li, 2014), culturally-sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2014), and more holistic and multidimensional perspectives on reading comprehension (Aukerman, 2013) to further examine the nuances of implementing translanguaging pedagogies in early elementary classrooms with students from a variety of language and literacy backgrounds. A translanguaging framework contends that multilinguals are not multiple multilinguals in one but have a dynamic and holistic linguistic repertoire that is employed flexibly and strategically in communication (García & Li, 2014). Translanguaging pedagogies are intentional strategies that leverage students' multilingualism during learning (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). These pedagogies require that educators take up ideologies that see students' multilingualism as integral parts of their identities, intentionally design lessons and assessments that integrate students' multilingualism, and be responsive to students' needs and linguistic practices (García et al., 2017). To implement translanguaging

1

pedagogies, I closely collaborated with my colleague, Ms. Hassan (pseudonym) to develop lesson plans throughout the entire school year that served both whole-group and small-group literacy learning. Ms. Hassan is a Somali-American, multilingual woman whom I considered a dear friend, co-teacher, and was consistently an advocate for all learners. As such, our collaborative relationship involved bidirectional listening and sharing, which included recognition of the realities of her daily context and setting aside time and space dedicated to her larger needs and goals. Drawing on elements of design-based research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012), Ms. Hassan and I established goals for the year, and then engaged in iterative (bi-weekly) plan-implement-reflect cycles to modify and improve our lessons. We tried out a number of pedagogies based on prior literature, such as translation, multilingual vocabulary strategies and building background in students' first languages (e.g., Celic & Seltzer, 2015), along with whole class activities that built the multilingual ecology in the classroom. Ms. Hassan and I also co-taught together the entire year, which yielded rich and experience-based collaborative reflection and improvement. Our co-teaching provided opportunities for us to learn from each other as educators, which resists the researcher and practitioner binary (McKinley, 2019).

The following observations and findings are preliminary but allude to significant implications for research and education. First, classroom research is messy and unpredictable, especially with two adults and 30 second-graders, with parents, administrators and other teachers interacting in the space. The findings in this study reflect the reality of so many teachers, and do not portray translanguaging pedagogies as a panacea that automatically affirms and empowers emergent bilinguals. Ms. Hassan and I quickly learned that successful translanguaging pedagogies involved intentional and consistent efforts towards building a multilingual ecology (García & Kleyn, 2014). As Allard (2017) and colleagues (Allard, Apt & Sacks, 2019) remind us, classrooms and schools are embedded in larger, often monoglossic and English-centric systems. Though we had several successes in our first year implementing translanguaging pedagogies, findings demonstrate the pervasive nature of monolingual bias and how resources and curriculum shape the multilingual opportunities in the classroom. For example, Ms. Hassan and I spent much of our first year troubled by students' resistance towards using their first language, despite the positive presence of a multilingual teacher who spoke the first language of her students frequently in the classroom and school. This encouraged Ms. Hassan and I to rethink and include more lessons and intentional opportunities to discuss and share students' multilingual and multicultural identities. Additionally, strategies in the research on translanguaging pedagogies have been directed towards older learners and learners with print literacy in their home language. Speakers of many languages, such as Somali and Indigenous languages, have rich and varied histories with print literacy and oral literacy. Thus, employing strategies such as reading or writing in students' home languages, especially with young learners who were developing print literacy for the first time, was complex and frustrating at times. However, Ms. Hassan and I also experienced many successes. By the end of the first year, students were excited to share and engage in instruction using a variety of languages and students' enjoyed learning about each other's languages. Additionally, a few of the focal students initiated an action project when they realized that Google Translate did not support the Somali speaking function. With support, they collaboratively wrote and sent a letter to Google to explain why the company should add that function to Google Translate.

Implications of my ongoing research illuminate the need for transparency regarding both the challenges and successes in translanguaging pedagogies research. Authentic teaching and learning do not happen in laboratory settings, and in our quest towards more culturally- and linguistically-sustaining

pedagogies, we must keep this in mind. Deep description of nuances, the challenges, and the imperfect iterative processes of "design-implement-reflect" can contribute to research in ways that may not be replicable but offer significant points of departure and consideration. Additionally, research on translanguaging pedagogies must be further refined and explored in a variety of contexts and with younger students with varying language and literacy backgrounds. Moving forward, I hope to see increased empirical research and methodological guidance related to translanguaging pedagogies in TESOL that foreground collaboration with teachers and schools, especially in ways that highlight the day-to-day realities and processes of implementing translanguaging approaches.

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Leah Shepard-Carey is a doctoral candidate in Second Language Education at the University of Minnesota. Her scholarship focuses on multilingualism and literacy learning of young emergent bilinguals. Her research is also published in the *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* (2019) and *Linguistics & Education* (2020).