

# From Uncertainty to Advocacy: A Longitudinal Study of a Teacher’s Journey in Translanguaging Pedagogy

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## Background:

### What is Translanguaging?

- “Translanguaging is a potent tool for constructing meaning, for thinking, for authentic communication and expression; it is not simply a scaffold to support students who are not yet fluent in English. It allows students to capitalize on their linguistic repertoire without rigid language boundaries.” (Espinosa & Ascenzi-Moreno, 2021, p. 25)
- Transformative Process
  - Translanguaging is not a scaffold and should be transformative. (Garcia et al., 2017)
  - It should transform how the students think about themselves. Both languages should be valued and represented within the classroom environment and teacher’s instruction (Garcia & Li, 2014)
- Social Justice and Social Practice
  - Emergent bi/multilinguals (EMLs) should be encouraged to participate in different ways because bilingual pedagogy revolves around equity and a democratic classroom where everyone has an equal opportunity to participate (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Li, 2014; Garcia et al., 2017).

### Teacher Education

- The deeply rooted nature of monolingual teaching approaches continues to influence teachers’ identities and instructional decisions (Wong, 2023).
- Although recent literature has shown that teacher candidates can develop and transform their translanguaging stance, their practices reflect their monolingual ideologies (Wong & Du, 2025).
- Translanguaging pedagogy- The goal is to promote equity and inclusion by empowering EMLs to use their full linguistic abilities to their advantage. By leveraging students’ bilingualism, teachers are creating valuable home-to-school connections and facilitating more meaningful learning.

- Research Gap:** Several studies have investigated teachers' development of translanguaging pedagogy, but they focused on short-term periods, typically lasting a semester. However, teacher education is a prolonged process that requires sustained growth and development over time.

## Purpose of the Study:

- This longitudinal study examined my growth in translanguaging pedagogy throughout my 2-year graduate studies where I explored my professional growth as an educator with translanguaging pedagogy to address the needs of the growing population of EMLs.

## Methods:

### Longitudinal study (2 years)

**Narrative Inquiry:** Understanding an individual's experiences through the stories they share about their lives; collaborative process between the researcher and participants to explore and interpret these lived experiences (Wong, 2022).

### Data Sources:

- Course assessments from 5 courses that addressed translanguaging across the program
- My own teaching recordings that spanned across the program (4 total)
- Written reflections on the teaching recordings
- Mentor meeting notes throughout the program

### Data Analysis:

- Narrative Analysis:** analyze the structure and meaning of narratives within research, often focusing on the content, form, and function of the stories being told (Wong, 2022).

### Protagonist:

A bilingual speaker of English and Tagalog, labeled as an EML from preschool to 3rd grade. I didn’t view my bilingualism as a barrier—until I was laughed at by peers. A teacher encouraged me to embrace it, inspiring my goal to support EMLs. I am now a full-time teacher and a graduate student in an MEd/ESL program.

## Findings:

### 1) Initial understanding of translanguaging

- Translanguaging was just another name for culturally responsive teaching
- Wondered how translanguaging was any different from all the other pedagogical approaches that emphasized the importance of culturally responsive practices.
- Felt “silly” implementing translanguaging in my classroom because it seemed to be intuitive for most teachers.
- My pedagogical beliefs were challenged after self-reflecting on unconscious stereotypes and biases and the deeply rooted monolingual ideology that influenced my instruction.

### Internal/external challenges during initial implementation:

#### Self- Doubt:

- Uncertainties regarding my ability to properly implement translanguaging
- Unsure of how to create translanguaging lessons and activities that were differentiated and engaging for students as a novice teacher
- Worried about my students’ initial reactions to translanguaging
- Fear of administration’s feedback about my teaching
- My understanding became more complicated. I turned to my peers for discussion and found that most of them were running into the same problems
- Felt overwhelmed by the abundance of resources because I was not sure how to fully utilize them.

### First Implementation:

- I attempted to use translanguaging by using multilingual, multimodal, and semiotic resources, but felt overwhelmed.

### Reflection:

- I tried to use as many resources as possible without considering which ones would be most effective for my students.
- I was transfixed on applying all the strategies I learned instead carefully selecting them to address the needs of each student.
- I believed that translanguaging supported both students and allowed them to be seen and heard within my classroom. However, I was still struggling to find the “right” strategies and resources to address their individual abilities and needs.

### Mentorship:

- My professor stated that *“each step should be intentional, it doesn’t need to be extravagant or complicated,”* emphasizing the importance of deliberate planning and instruction.

### What I learned from this experience:

- All my concerns were due to my **unconscious monolingual ideology**
- I was **shocked** because I did not think that I would fall prey to monolingual ideologies and was confident in my own beliefs and stance on bilingualism
- Should not sacrifice the content of my lessons for the sake of using as many new resources as possible (**quality over quantity**)
- I built some confidence, but I was **still lost** about how to implement translanguaging to truly support my students.

### 2) Continued to implement translanguaging in my practices

*As I gained more knowledge about translanguaging pedagogy, I became more confident. However, I realized that I was controlling how my students learn and make meaning.*

### Challenges to my professional identity:

- I thought I knew what to do to support my EMLs. However, I wanted to be in control of the lesson and use the support that I had intended based on what I thought was best for my students.
- Shocked to find out that they learned differently even with similar backgrounds.

### Reflection:

- I had to step back and let them make decisions to support their learning.
- I had a better understanding of translanguaging pedagogy and how to select appropriate resources, but I was still learning how to be flexible in my approach.

### Mentorship:

- Explained how I was feeling with my professor and she encouraged me to review my initial video and reflection.
- She said, **“Now that you have experience... You could think of more questions that link students’ experiences and linguistic repertoire,”** indicating that teachers should facilitate discussions, guiding students and then encouraging them to thrive

### What I learned from this experience:

- Difficulty relinquishing control and empowering students to take ownership of their learning
- Practice flexible thinking and welcome change as it comes
- Encouraged students to take control of their learning and saw positive reaction

### 3) Refining my instruction

- In the following semester, I allowed students to select ways they made meaning and demonstrated knowledge using their full linguistic repertoires.
- Although it worked effectively, I was still unsure how translanguaging could continue to help EMLs and I didn’t want my monolingual students to feel neglected.

### Mentorship:

 My professor advised me to seek students’ feedback

- EMLs:** Mentioned how they liked using Spanish because it was easier for them, yet some teachers did not want them to use it in class. One student shared that **“some teachers had discouraged me from rolling my “r” because it wasn’t necessary in English.”**
- Monolinguals:** Positive response to bilingualism and were eager to learn from their peers; One student said they could **“learn from each other and use resources like Google Translate to help understand each other.”**

### What I learned from this experience:

- Many teachers have a deficit view on bilingualism
- Easy to default back to monolingual norms
- Lack of support from administration can be a major deterrent (institutional restrictions)
- Translanguaging is not just a strategy that we can follow step by step➔ Act of advocacy (social justice oriented)
- Learned to let go of control and saw students’ positive reaction
- Importance of mentorship➔ Engage in “tough” conversations with mentors/peers and request guidance as frequently as needed
- Be willing to shift your perspectives and accept constructive criticism (productive struggle)

### 4) Advocacy

*Based on my learning, continuous practices, and mentorship received throughout the program, I decided to take on a mission to educate others about translanguaging:*

- Submitted a TED Talk Proposal
- Participated in a Research Exhibition
- Co-author a research paper with professor
- Proposed professional development to school administration

## Discussion & Implications

- The findings clearly indicated that translanguaging has a transformative power for equitable education for EMLs (Garcia et al., 2017)

- Monolingual students can develop appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity through translanguaging– promoting global citizenship.

- Translanguaging pedagogy offers guidelines, not rigid rules.

- Translanguaging should be integrated through a teacher education programs, not as a stand-alone topic (Wong, 2023; Wong & Du, 2025).

- Teacher educators need to create multiple opportunities for teacher candidates to implement the pedagogy, followed by discussion to address challenges and opportunities to grow.

- Mentorship and reflective practices are important ingredient to development in translanguaging pedagogy.

- Educators need to be flexible with translanguaging (Garcia et al., 2017). Change can be daunting but as educators, we must forge forward to adapt to our ever-changing world.

- Allow the strategies and approaches to inform your practice, but do not hesitate to adjust and adapt your instruction to meet your students’ needs.

- Acknowledge the fear of the unknown; it is normal to feel unsure of yourself or worried about the outcome.

- Recognize that even the little things hold great significance for our students, and we must follow through with them to truly see the benefits.

- Welcome challenges and mistakes and work through them together with peers and professors.

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