

# Translanguaging Along the Mode Continuum

Scaffolding Multilingual Learners  
Meaning-Making and Development  
to the Target Language

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**Language & Culture**  
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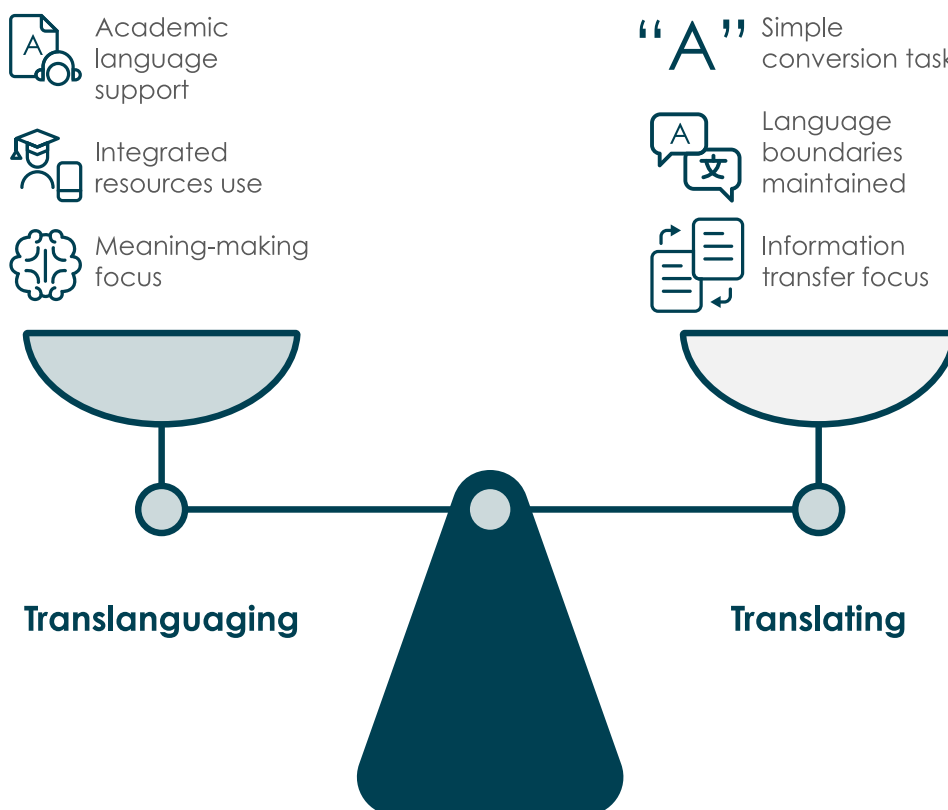
In multilingual classrooms, just like in life outside of classrooms, students often navigate between languages to make meaning, build relationships, communicate, and learn. This process is called “translanguaging” and is defined by Ofelia García as a fluid and dynamic use of language which allows students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires (García & Wei, 2014). For classroom teachers, English Learner (EL) and bilingual teachers, understanding and creating conducive spaces for translanguaging can be a powerful strategy to support students’ linguistic and academic growth. In this paper, we will describe how translanguaging can be used along the mode continuum, a strategic framework from moving students from spoken-like language to written-like language for fostering academic language development in a bilingual program.

## What is Translanguaging?

Translanguaging is the practice of using a student’s entire linguistic repertoire to support learning and communication. It involves fluid language use across various linguistic modes, including speaking, writing, reading, and listening. García emphasizes that translanguaging is not about switching between fixed language systems but rather using linguistic resources in an integrated way (García & Kleyn, 2016). In the classroom, this means allowing students to use all their language abilities, whether they are speaking, writing, or thinking, to fully engage with academic content.

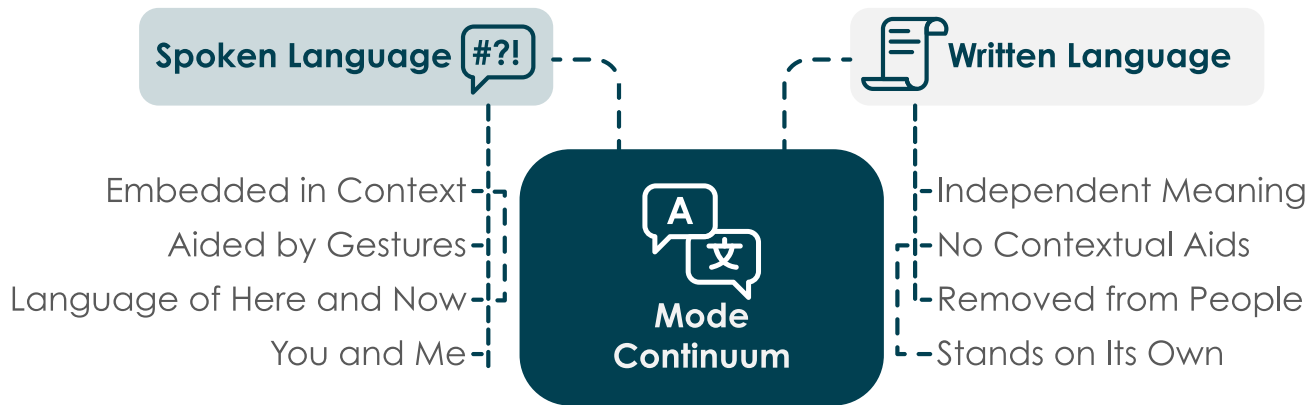
## How Translanguaging Differs from Translating

Translating typically involves converting text or speech from one language to another, maintaining a clear boundary between the two languages. In contrast, translanguaging is more holistic and dynamic, allowing students to weave together different languages to make meaning and express their understanding. For example, a student might read an academic text in English, discuss the concepts in their first language (e.g., Spanish), and then write a summary that integrates elements from both languages. Translanguaging focuses on meaning-making and learning processes rather than merely transferring information between languages.



# What is the Mode Continuum?

The Mode Continuum is a way of looking at language on a continuum from spoken-like to written-like. On the spoken end of the continuum, language is heavily embedded in the physical space and aided by the people, objects, and gestures, what is often called “language of here and now, you and me” (Macken-Horarick, 2011). This understanding has significant implications for teachers as they scaffold students’ language development along the continuum, guiding them toward a more formal register of literate discourse (Gibbons, 2015).



### Language Shift Across the Mode Continuum with Translanguaging


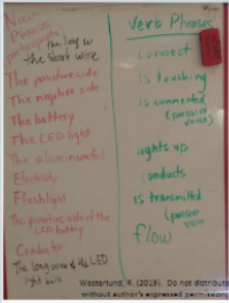
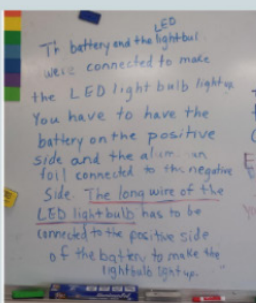
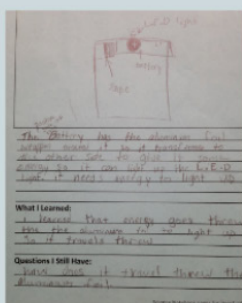
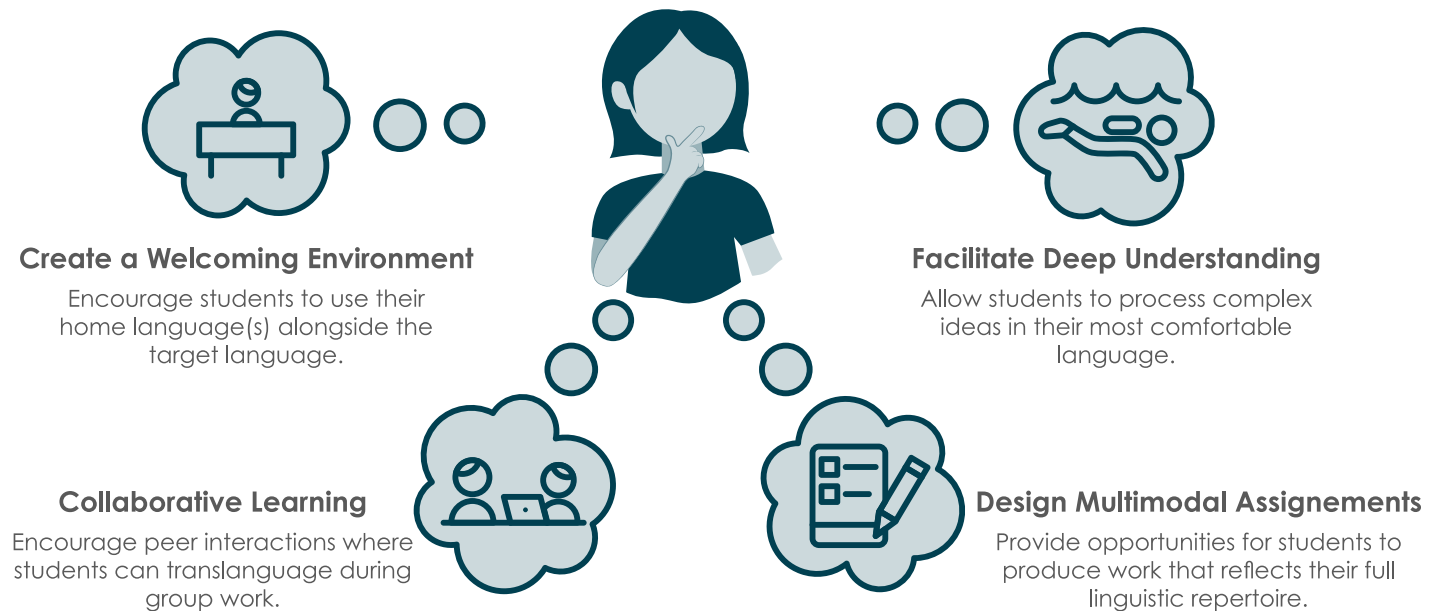
			
<p>“Look, it doesn’t work, <i>pon esto aquí, conecta esto con esto.</i>”</p>	<p>Student’s everyday oral language is translated into academic language by the teacher. Students then practice constructing sentences with the noun groups and verb phrases to explain the phenomenon.</p>	<p>The teacher and students jointly construct an explanation. Students orally practice using their newly learned English noun groups and verb phrases in joint construction.</p>	<p>Independent construction of explanation in their science journals.</p>
<p><b>Concreted, everyday. Language of here and now, you and me, supported with gestures and objects. Students use all of their linguistic resources for meaning making.</b></p>	<p>Language is more removed from the original experience and objects are named. All students are translating from their everyday/social/Spanish/English to more technical and specialized English.</p>	<p>The text is written with the technical and precise language of English and stands on its own, cohesion holds the sentences together.</p>	<p>Students use what they have learned to write their own text based on their level of proficiency. The text stands on its own, cohesion holds the sentences together. Students use as much English as possible and may also fill in with Spanish or other forms of scaffolding (language appropriation, sentence frames).</p>

Figure 1. Mode Continuum Framework with Translanguaging. Adapted from Westerlund (2024).

# Utilizing Translanguaging in a Bilingual and Multilingual Program

Translanguaging can be a valuable pedagogical tool in a bilingual program to enhance students' learning and linguistic development. Here are several strategies to integrate translanguaging into classroom practice:

## How to support multilingual students in the classroom?



### 1. Create a Welcoming Environment:

Encourage students to use their home language(s) alongside the target language. This allows them to participate fully in classroom activities without feeling restricted by the language of instruction. For example, students can use their first language to brainstorm ideas or clarify concepts before expressing them in the target language.

### 2. Facilitate Deep Understanding:

Allow students to process complex ideas in their most comfortable language and then express their understanding using the target language. This approach helps deepen comprehension and supports the acquisition of academic language.

### 3. Collaborative Learning:

Encourage peer interactions where students can translanguage during group work. This practice supports students in using all their linguistic resources to negotiate meaning, solve problems, and co-construct knowledge.

### 4. Design Multimodal Assignments:

Provide opportunities for students to produce work that reflects their full linguistic repertoire. For example, assignments can include writing tasks that integrate multiple languages or projects that combine visual, oral, and written elements in different languages.

### 5. Holistic Assessment:

Assess students' ability to use all their linguistic resources to demonstrate understanding, rather than focusing solely on proficiency in the target language.

# Moving Students on the Mode Continuum

Moving students along the mode continuum from social and everyday language to more academic, written-like language in the target language involves scaffolded and intentional instruction. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a framework for this process by emphasizing the development of linguistic resources for different contexts and purposes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Here are strategies to support this progression:



## 1. Utilize Students' Full Linguistic Repertoire:

Start by allowing students to express their ideas using their first language or everyday language. This helps them build a solid conceptual foundation. For instance, they might discuss a topic in their first language before the teacher scaffolds them to more precise academic English.

## 2. Bridge from Spoken to Written Language:

Incorporate activities that bridge spoken language to written language. Begin with oral discussions in everyday language, then model how to express these ideas in a more formal, academic style. Gradually guide students in practicing this shift by first speaking and then writing their responses using increasingly formal language.

## 3. Explicit Language Instruction:

Teach the linguistic features that differentiate everyday language from academic language, such as complex sentence structures, specialized vocabulary, and formal tone. This instruction helps students understand how to transform simple spoken statements into more sophisticated written expressions.

## 4. Leverage Translanguaging as a Scaffold:

Use translanguaging to help students navigate the mode continuum. For example, allow students to draft their ideas in their first language and then guide them in translating those ideas into the target language's academic form. This strategy helps them draw on their linguistic strengths to meet academic language demands.

## 5. Model Academic Language Use:

Provide consistent modeling of how to use academic language in both spoken and written forms. Use examples, read aloud from academic texts, and highlight specific language features that make the language more “written-like.”

## 6. Scaffold Writing Tasks:

Break writing tasks into smaller steps, guiding students from simple to complex language use. Use sentence frames, graphic organizers, and peer feedback to support their development of written-like language.

## 7. Encourage Reflection and Self-Monitoring:

Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their language use and set goals for incorporating more academic language. Tools like self-assessment checklists can help students monitor their progress in using more formal language features.

# Classroom Examples from Belleville, Wisconsin

Multilingual Learner Students in Belleville, Wisconsin, benefit from a translanguaging approach in their classrooms. Katie Worple, Bilingual and EL Teacher, shares how she works with educators and students to develop a translanguaging ecology in the classroom as well as in instruction and assessment for students.

## Classroom Vignettes

**1. Using Bilingual Mentor Texts:** Teachers can utilize bilingual children’s literature as a way to model translanguaging. For example, one teacher used bilingual mentor texts during a narrative writing unit to explore how authors integrate multiple languages. Through this activity, students analyzed the texts, identified narrative elements in both languages, and later applied these features to their writing.

**2. Interactive Writing in Third Grade:** In a letter-writing project, a third-grade teacher used interactive writing as a strategy to co-construct a letter with students. During this activity, the teacher engaged in a “think aloud” process to model how to incorporate multiple languages in writing. This approach provided a scaffolded experience for the students before they wrote their own letters.

## Student Examples

**1. First-Grade Personal Narratives:** A first-grade student, with advanced Spanish and English academic language proficiency demonstrated translanguaging in her personal narrative by incorporating speech bubbles in her illustrations. Although she was hesitant to include Spanish in her written text due to the structured modeling of the narrative project, this adaptation allowed her to bring her full linguistic repertoire into her work.

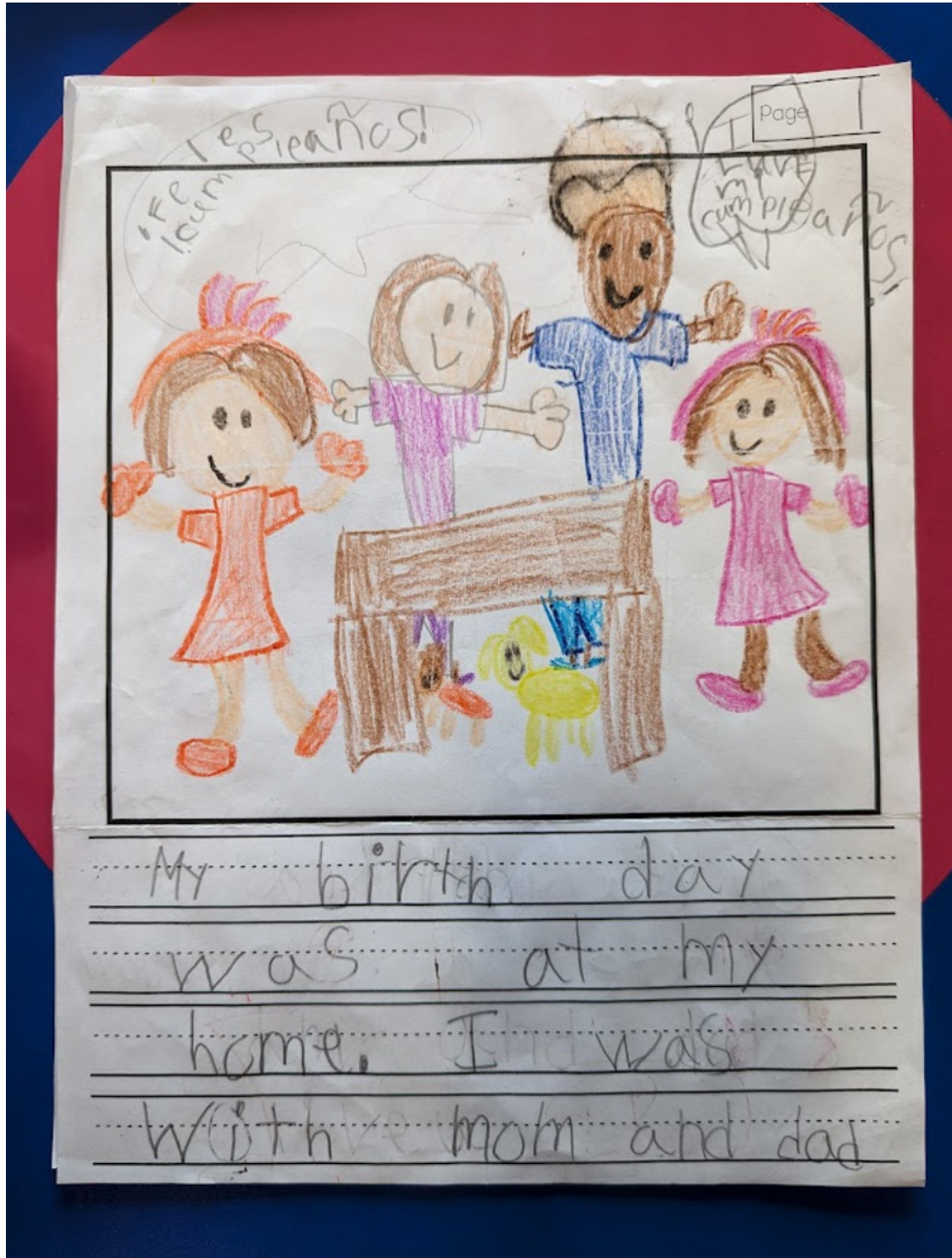
**2. Fourth-Grade Personal Narratives:** Heritage Spanish learners benefitted from a writing group in Spanish and English throughout the writing process during a personal narrative unit. Students used bilingual mentor texts to analyze personal narrative text features, as well as the author’s craft of incorporating strategic translanguaging. Step by step, students drafted their own personal narratives through a cycle of mini lessons and independent writing time. The final drafts varied in notable ways. One student with a low English proficiency took a translating approach to translanguaging, but continued to need the support of a teacher. Other students incorporated both languages fluidly throughout all stages of the writing process. A final observation was that a student included more authentic details in their writing when incorporating Spanish into the writing process.



## Conclusion

Translanguaging and the mode continuum offer valuable frameworks for supporting multilingual learners in developing academic language proficiency. By recognizing and leveraging students’ full linguistic repertoires and providing targeted instruction on moving from everyday to academic language, educators can foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This approach not only validates students’ linguistic identities but also equips them with the skills needed for academic success.

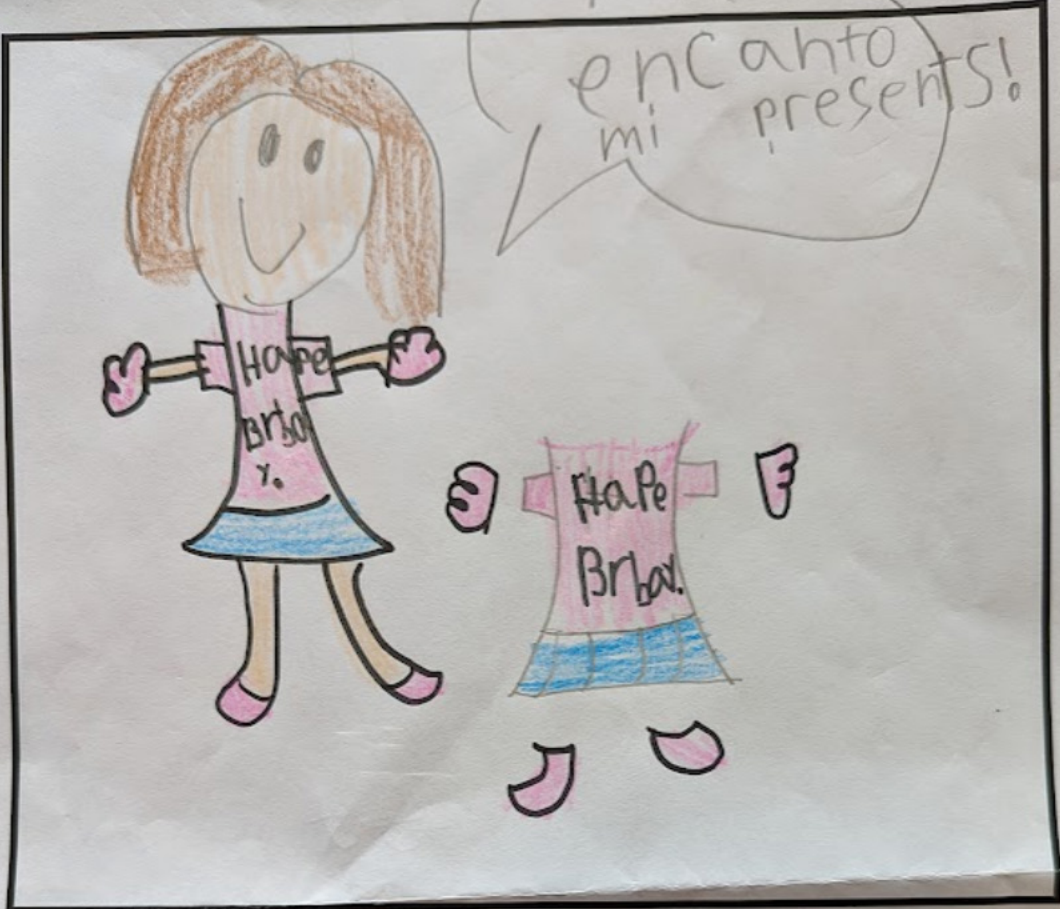
# Appendix 1: Student Work Sample of Published 1st Grade Personal Narrative



## Appendix 2: Student Work Sample of Published 1st Grade Personal Narrative

Page 3

time  
encanto  
mi presents!



A gift I got  
was a dress.  
On my birthday  
I felt surprised.



# Appendix 3: Student Work Sample of 3rd Grade Revised and Published Personal Narrative

Have you ever had to stay in the hospital for a whole week? I couldn't eat for a whole day! First, my tummy was hurting for no reason. I told my Mom and Dad "mi panza me duele." ~~it was hurting even more so~~ I told my Mom and Dad again. Then I decided we should go to the hospital. I thought I would only be there for a day and then I would be okay. I ended up being there another day. I was getting sad because I was starting to miss ~~\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_~~. I even started to cry. I had to have surgery on my appendix!! I was asleep for it all. Afterward I was unable to walk. The food they served me was disgusting! The lasagna was the worst! When it was time to leave, my body felt much better though it took me a whole week to recover.

Having your appendix taken out is a really awful thing.

*apēndice*

i told MY mom and dad  
"mi Panza Me duele."  
the translator asked MY Parents como c'Tiene fiebre? would be okay I ended up

# Appendix 4: Student Work Sample of 3rd Grade Revised and Published Personal Narrative

The Time I had my Appendix Removed

By: [REDACTED]

Have you ever had to stay in the hospital for a whole week? I couldn't eat for a whole day! First, my tummy was hurting for no reason. I told my Mom and Dad **mi panza me duele**. I told my Mom and Dad again. Then I decided we should go to the hospital. The translator asked my parents **como ¿tiene fiebre?** We watched spider-man. My dad put the movie in Spanish when I was sleeping. I thought I would only be there for a day and then I would be okay. I ended up being there another day. I was getting sad because I was starting to miss [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I even started to tear up. I had to have surgery on my appendix!! I was asleep for it all. Afterward I was unable to walk. The food they served me was disgusting! The lasagna was the worst! When it was time to leave, my body felt much better though it took me a whole week to recover. Having your **apéndice** taken out is a really awful thing.

## Appendix 5: Student Work Sample of 4th Grade Personal Narrative

The first time I saw snow.

*By* J. G. ...

Do you think that all people have seen snow in their lives? Well let me tell you NO and I am one of those people.

The first time I saw the snow was like this: First, it was a Saturday. My mom woke me and my uncle up and she looked excited, sleepy, and disheveled. Then my mom whispered to me super happy, "mira afuera! Está nevando" (look outside! It's snowing) My tio Cesar and I didn't think it was true because in Texas it doesn't snow a lot. My mom said, "Mira afuera en la ventana." (look out the window.) We woke up and looked out the window, and she was right!!! It was snowing!!! There was no sun and it was cloudy and the trees didn't have leaves. All the streets looked white and also pretty.

I'm super duper happy and excited and I think my uncle was more excited than me because it was his first time seeing the snow too!! I put on my jacket and we went outside. It was cold but the snow made me happy and also calm because there was no sound anywhere and it was so tranquilo (calm). When I was walking on the ground it sounded like, "crunch!" Finally me and my uncle played a lot because he is like a hermano (brother) to me. My tio cesar made her hand print in the snow and I made my hand too. We made snow angels and her snow angel was bigger than mine because he is taller than me, Finally my uncle took a picture of all of them. Then, we threw the snow because there was not a lot of snow. We had a lot of fun

Now I am waiting to play with piles of snow, not piles TONS of snow! Here in Wisconsin!! In conclusion, that day was so special for me and was wonderful.

# Appendix 6: Student Work Sample of 4th Grade Personal Narrative

## Mi cumple de 4 años

By *[Handwritten Name]*

Pum! El palo golpeó la piñata y los dulces cayeron. Todos los niños gritaron y agarraron dulces. Estaba feliz.

My family llegaron a la party. The smell of the party era salt, salsa, pimienta y chile. I smell salsa verde and spice and meat and humo. We made tacos with cream, salsa verde, and chile habanero. Preparé 8 tacos con salsa verde y 2 con chile habanero. Comí tacos de carne asada. La carne asada is my favorita, I saw my grandma was preparing carne asada and I helped her.

Entonces, los invitados estaban llegando, comieron tacos y bailaron. El baile se llama el Payaso del Rodeo y otros bailaron cumbia. Se escucha los gritos y cohetes y música 🎆. Luego, pusieron más música como cumbia, como El Viejo Sombrero, y también la de Mariachi Loco. Las personas cantaron, bailaron, y disfrutaron. Mi abuela bailo porque a ella le encanta la musica igual que a mi. Mi abuela bailo y bailo y bailo hasta que se cansó se sentó un rato, y cuando descanso bailo otra vez Mi abuelita es graciosa porque juega conmigo y baila conmigo.

La piñata no se rompía. Los niños le pegaban a la piñata otra y otra vez. Los adultos gritaban "¡cuidado, cuidado!" Mi abuela le pego conmigo. Cuando se rompió la piñata los niños gritaban y agarraban dulces. Yo también agarraba dulces. Había 4 piñatas para mi cumple de 4 años. Creo que compraron la cantidad de los años que cumplía.

Dijo chiste mi abuela en mi cumple. Luego, jugamos, bailamos y comimos pastel y abrí los regalos.

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## About the Authors:



**Gretchen Lettau** is a consultant in the Language and Culture Center of Excellence. Gretchen has worked as a teacher and coordinator for 20+ years with culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Throughout her career, Gretchen has collaborated with school districts in the areas of best practices, EL Co-teaching methods, academic language development, literacy and language practices when implementing workshop models, program reviews, and professional learning. Gretchen has a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and holds administrative licenses for the principalship and director of curriculum and instruction.



**Katie Worpel** is an elementary multilingual teacher at Belleville Elementary School in Belleville, Wisconsin. She also coordinates the Multilingual Program for the school district. Katie enjoys working in a small district, which allows her to collaborate closely with students and their families, staff, and administrators. Katie received her Master’s Degree in World Language Instruction through Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, where she researched Translanguaging and has worked to implement this practice in her instruction. This is her tenth year in education.

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