

# Valuing the Lives and Experiences of English Learners: Widening the Landscape of Children's Literature

MELANIE D. KOSS  
MAYRA C. DANIEL

Northern Illinois University

This article explores the current landscape of children's picture books in terms of the diversity represented, how having a range of diverse populations authentically depicted in picture books impacts culturally and linguistically diverse students, the importance for teachers to seek out culturally relevant literature, and ways that ideologies of literacy transmitted through picture books impact English learners' (ELs') academic success. The authors suggest that books must offer ELs authentic views of all cultures represented in schools and discuss culturally relevant literature and its uses in the classroom. The article presents three pedagogical lenses teachers can explore and incorporate into their curricula to build on their ELs' cultural capital in the classroom: multicultural, multilingual, and strategic. Specific curricular ideas, including pre-, during-, and postreading strategies, are included as are lists of suggested titles for classroom use.

doi: 10.1002/tesj.336

**As** teacher educators, we believe in making classrooms welcoming by valuing the lives and experiences of English learners (ELs). One way we do this is through the use of culturally diverse, relevant, and authentic children's literature. As noted by Bishop (1990a), children's literature provides learners with an entry point to see themselves and others in books, opening opportunities to discuss the similarities, differences, and varieties of cultures in the world. Multicultural literature helps children

identify not only with their own culture but with the cultures of others, promoting discussions of diversity (Colby & Lyon, 2004).

In this article, we explore the current landscape of children's picture books in terms of its diversity, how this landscape impacts culturally diverse students, the importance for teachers to seek out culturally relevant literature, and ways that ideologies of literacy—the ability to read and write—are transmitted through the books teachers select. Our goal is to share different pedagogical lenses for educators to bring culturally relevant picture books into today's classrooms and provide teachers with ideas on how to capitalize on the lives of their students.

## THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Due to the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and the #WeNeedDiverseBooks grassroots campaign, there is a push for awareness and examination of the books used as educational tools in schools. Specifically, there is an interest in the types of contemporary picture books children have access to in their classrooms. A recent content analysis of diversity in contemporary picture books (Koss, 2015) documented that there was a distinct lack of books in the current market that represented diverse populations in culturally authentic ways. Koss (2015) conducted a study examining 455 picture books published in the United States in 2012 for representations of diversity, including elements such as ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, and age. The corpus of books analyzed in the study was compiled via searching publishers' catalogs and websites. Books selected met the eligibility criteria for the Caldecott Medal, an award given annually by the American Library Association (n.d.) "to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children published in the United States during the preceding year" (para. 3). Thus, books chosen were all released in the same calendar year in order to present a snapshot of the types of books currently being published. All books included in the study were published by major trade publishers, thus ensuring a wide audience of readers, in order to accurately identify books most likely to be

seen by today's children. Additionally, books with international illustrators who do not reside in the United States were not included, because the author wanted to emphasize depictions of diverse characters as presented by illustrators currently living in this country and thus familiar with the beliefs, values, and biases of the United States.

Koss (2015) found a strong predominance of White characters depicted in picture books representing both primary and secondary cultures. Of the books that contained diverse characters, only 59 of 455 titles showed a non-White character in a primary role. Significantly, Koss found that most depictions of diverse characters were portrayed as culturally neutral, defined by Bishop (1992) as books that have multicultural faces portrayed or contain characters from minority groups, but whose depictions are based merely on skin color or physical features. In these titles, the characters' ethnicities were not used to depict insights about the culture or cultural practices. In addition, 71 titles included characters with multiple shades of skin color in the background, most likely to depict diversity, adding nothing to the overall authentic cultural content of the books. Out of the corpus of books, only 36 titles were coded as having a culturally specific primary culture, including details that identify characters as members of a particular cultural group. Koss also found that 75% of human main characters were White. This shows a clear lack of culturally diverse characters in contemporary picture books and an even smaller number of books with diverse characters depicted in culturally relevant settings.

In the U.S. context, some propose the dominance of White characters reflects the diversity of the country's population (63% White non-Hispanic; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). It can be argued that this normalizes and privileges those of light phenotype. The U.S. Census Bureau (2013) also documented that over 50% of school populations are children of color, so although the greater population might appear to be of a light phenotype, the learners in our classrooms are highly diverse. We believe the lack of representation of diversity in picture books sends the subliminal message that nonmainstream groups do not merit representation in books because they play supporting roles in U.S. society.

Addressing this problem is critical for ELs, many of whom speak at least one language other than English, whose bi-, tri-, or plurilingual identity development is validated or sabotaged through their interactions with literature (Ogle & Correa-Kovtun, 2010; Peregoy & Boyle, 2013; Reiss, 2012).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), an estimated 4.5 million U.S. public school students are ELs. The Migration Policy Institute (2015) found that the top language spoken by ELs in the United States is Spanish, with 71% speaking Spanish as their first language. The remaining 29% of ELs are divided into over 200 other languages, with only Chinese, Vietnamese, and French/Haitian Creole amounting to more than 3%. Significantly, Koss (2015) documented only 20 books (4%) that depicted a Latino character in either a primary or secondary role. Forty-three titles (10%) depicted an Asian character (which included Asian Americans and characters from both Asian and Asian Pacific countries), and zero titles depicted a French or Haitian character. Only four of the titles included any non-English words. This sends the message to ELs that their home languages are not valued.

The results of this content analysis make clear the lack of diverse literature in the corpus of children's picture books today. However, this does not mean that such literature is not available; it is just harder to find. We advocate that, given the shortage of children's picture books that represent diverse populations, teachers must make a concerted effort to seek out and include diverse picture books in their curricula. When choosing books to bring into classrooms, we encourage all teachers to intentionally select high-quality culturally relevant literature—literature that reflects and celebrates the plurilingual nature of today's student demographic—to make sure the literature used in classrooms reflects the diversity present in today's classrooms. (See Table 1 for a list of book awards that celebrate diverse populations and Table 2 for a list of resources for identifying quality diverse literature.)

## **CULTURALLY RELEVANT LITERATURE**

Culturally relevant literature, also referred to as culturally pluralistic or culturally specific literature, is literature that shows

TABLE 1. Book Awards That Celebrate Diverse Populations

Award	Website	Description
Coretta Scott King Award	<a href="http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/coretta-scott-king-book-awards">http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/coretta-scott-king-book-awards</a>	Books by and about African Americans that promote understanding and appreciation of “the American Dream”
Pura Belpré Award	<a href="http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/pura-belpré-award">http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/pura-belpré-award</a>	Books by and about Latinos that portray, affirm, and celebrate the Latino cultural experience
Américas Book Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature	<a href="http://www4.uwm.edu/clacs/aa/">http://www4.uwm.edu/clacs/aa/</a>	Works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and traditional literature that authentically portray Latinos in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean
Tomás Rivera Mexican Children’s Book Award	<a href="http://riverabookaward.org/">http://riverabookaward.org/</a>	Books that authentically depict the Mexican American experience
Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature	<a href="http://www.apalaweb.org/awards/literature-awards/">http://www.apalaweb.org/awards/literature-awards/</a>	Books by and about Asian/Pacific Americans that celebrate their heritage
American Indian Youth Literature Award	<a href="http://ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youth-literature-award/">http://ailanet.org/activities/american-indian-youth-literature-award/</a>	Books by and about American Indians that present authentic contemporary and past depictions of American Indians
Middle East Book Awards	<a href="http://www.meoc.us/book-awards/meoc-book-award-listing-by-category">http://www.meoc.us/book-awards/meoc-book-award-listing-by-category</a>	Books that authentically portray Middle Eastern populations
Sydney Taylor Award	<a href="http://jewishlibraries.org/content.php?page=Sydney_Taylor_Book_Award">http://jewishlibraries.org/content.php?page=Sydney_Taylor_Book_Award</a>	Books that authentically portray the Jewish experience
Schneider Family Book Award	<a href="http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/schneider-family-book-award">http://www.ala.org/awardsgrants/schneider-family-book-award</a>	Books that authentically portray the experience of characters with disabilities
Stonewall Book Award	<a href="http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/award">http://www.ala.org/glbtrt/award</a>	Books that authentically portray the GLBT experience

TABLE 1. (Continued)

Award	Website	Description
Jane Addams Children's Book Award	<a href="http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/">http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/</a>	Books that promote peace, social justice, and world community
Notable Books for a Global Society	<a href="http://clrsig.org/nbgs.php">http://clrsig.org/nbgs.php</a>	Books that promote understanding of international people and cultures
Children's Choice Book Award	<a href="http://www.cbcbooks.org/ccba/">http://www.cbcbooks.org/ccba/</a>	Engaging books selected by children and teens
Mildred L. Batchelder Award	<a href="http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward">http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward</a>	International books translated into English for publication in the United States

an authentic snapshot of a culture. The backgrounds of the characters matter; diverse populations are not included as tokens or to fill a void, but the cultural knowledge plays a critical role in the story. Such literature represents a focal culture realistically and authentically, and maintains a culturally conscious ideology (Gray, 2009; McNair, 2010; Yoon, Simpson, & Haag, 2010), one that values the unique diversity represented in today's classrooms. One book cannot represent the minutiae of an entire culture, but one book, in combination with others, can provide students with snapshots of different aspects of many cultures (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014), thereby increasing the chance that ELs will see themselves in books. High-quality culturally relevant picture books are realistic, authentic, and present culturally conscious ideologies. These books should have nonstereotypical real-life images and descriptions of characters engaged in realistic, relatable plots that allow students to make connections with their lives (Ching, 2005; Gray, 2009). Also, picture books should include accurate cultural information and authentic language conventions, images, and cultural experiences. Authentic picture books recognize that many learners begin their schooling with scaffolds to multiliteracies (Kalantzis, Cope, Chan, & Dalley-Trim, 2016). Last, picture books should contain culturally conscious ideologies, story elements true to a culture's beliefs and traditions that support biculturalism and

TABLE 2. Resources for Identifying Quality Diverse Children’s Literature

Resource	Website	Description
Children’s Book Council Diversity Committee	<a href="http://www.cbcdiversity.com">www.cbcdiversity.com</a>	New items of note on diverse literature, opportunities to bring authors into the classroom, and book-finding resources
¡Imaginense Libros! Celebrating Latino Children’s Literature, Literacy, and Libraries	<a href="http://imaginenselibros.blogspot.com">http://imaginenselibros.blogspot.com</a>	A collection of Latino children’s and young adult literature that includes teaching resources
Growing Up Around the World: Books as Passports to Global Understanding for Children in the United States	<a href="http://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/compubs/booklists/growingupwrld/americas.pdf">http://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/compubs/booklists/growingupwrld/americas.pdf</a>	An annotated bibliography of books that promote cultural understanding
Colorín Colorado	<a href="http://www.colorincolorado.org">http://www.colorincolorado.org</a>	A bilingual website for educators and families of ELs
Inclusive Classrooms Project	<a href="http://inclusiveclassrooms.org/practice/culturally-relevant-curriculum">http://inclusiveclassrooms.org/practice/culturally-relevant-curriculum</a>	Book lists and teaching ideas for promoting culturally responsive teaching
International Children’s Digital Library	<a href="http://en.childrenslibrary.org/">http://en.childrenslibrary.org/</a>	Free online access to a range of international children’s literature with the goal of promoting tolerance and respect for diverse cultures, languages, and ideas

biliteracy (Ching, 2005; McNair, 2010; Yoon et al., 2010), because many contemporary ELs traverse between more than one home language and culture. Although it is acceptable for a character to recognize and represent aspects of U.S. culture, it is critical that characters retain their own cultural identity and remain proud of



it, thereby providing readers with spaces to respect their own cultural identities.

## **IMPORTANCE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT LITERATURE FOR ELs**

Our classrooms are diverse, thus having a variety of culturally and linguistically diverse populations depicted in the literature teachers share, especially those representing minority–majority groups in the United States, will help ELs become biliterate in English and their home language(s) and more fully engaged with their own learning (Gangi, 2008; Hughes-Hassell, Barkley, & Koehler, 2009; TESOL, 2010). Students are more likely to read when they see and connect to characters like themselves (Heflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). When students identify with characters and situations found in books, their level of reading enjoyment has been shown to increase (Brooks, 2006; Hicks, 2004; Martinez-Roldán, 2003), leading to increased reading overall (DeLeón, 2002). Increased reading supports ELs’ academic development, because reading is one of the best ways to increase literacy (e.g., H. D. Brown, 2007; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Reading promotes increased language skills, including vocabulary (e.g., R. Brown, Waring, & Donkaewbus, 2008), fluency (e.g., Allington, 2007), comprehension (e.g., Guthrie et al., 2004), critical thinking (e.g., Roche, 2014), and writing (e.g., Parkinson & Thomas, 2000), in addition to allowing readers to explore their own identities. Effective English language teaching revolves around the use of authentic materials that “encourage English learners to question the social order and find their voice” (Daniel, 2016a, p. 35). Thus, culturally relevant books hold great potential for classroom use.

Culturally appropriate picture books convey cultural messages and societal values that help ELs learn about their world. They function “as a major socializing agent. [They tell] students who and what their society and culture values, what kind of behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and what it means to be a decent human being” (Bishop, 1990b, p. 561). Seeing their families and cultural norms reflected in literature may help ELs address and challenge issues of cultural mismatch by providing examples of



their lived experiences (Cummins, 2009, 2012; Gunn, Brice, & Peterson, 2014) and grasp how their cultures and languages are valued in greater society. In addition, ELs need to see images representing other diverse cultures, because seeing a range of individuals in books can impact cultural understandings and increase feelings of belonging. This emphasizes the importance of teachers intentionally selecting and incorporating culturally relevant literature into their classrooms and curricula.

## **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOMS**

The use of culturally relevant literature is a natural pairing with culturally responsive pedagogy, which values and validates the cultures and languages of all students (Dixson & Fasching-Varner, 2009; Gay, 2002; TESOL, 2010). “Culturally responsive classrooms specifically acknowledge the presence of culturally diverse students and their need to find relevant connections among themselves and the subject matter teachers ask them to perform” (Montgomery, 2001, p. 4). This idea aligns with sociocultural learning theory (Larson & Marsh, 2005), sociocultural-historical theory (Larson & Marsh, 2005; Moll & González, 1994), and cultural-historical theory (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009), interconnected theories regarding how an individual’s background influences and impacts his or her learning and that “learning occurs through participation in social practices” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 106). These theories posit that an individual is involved in constructing meaning using their funds of knowledge as a starting point.

“Knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems” (Larson & Marsh, 2010, p. 100). Sociocultural learning theory states that learning is a social and cultural process, thus learning is constructed through interaction with others and recognition of what individuals bring to a learning environment. Sociocultural-historical theory posits that learners have impact on their own learning based on their background culture that shapes their acquisition of knowledge. Building on Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional theory of reading, which discusses how individual readers transact with text based on their lived experiences, sociocultural-historical theory proposes that readers construct

meaning from texts by drawing on prior knowledge in conjunction with text to expand their understanding of concepts and their wider world. Lastly, cultural-historical theory focuses on the individual child, their family, the culture they associate with, and their funds of knowledge, and looks at ways students' literacy practices can build on their background knowledge (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). Using these theories, teachers in culturally responsive classrooms should design activities that share construction of meaning with their individual students, valuing their cultural capital.

All three theories support the use of authentic texts to encourage students to construct meaning and influence their literacy practices. It allows them to make connections between their in- and out-of-school literacies (Larson & Marsh, 2005), promotes cultural competence, and provides a global perspective of the world (Au, 2001; Dixon & Fasching-Varner, 2009; Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). Its use has also been found to increase students' academic achievement (Gay, 2002; Lohfink, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009) and second language acquisition (Clark & Flores, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2016).

Once teachers have found culturally relevant literature, we offer a series of pedagogical lenses on how this literature can be used in learner-centered environments to recognize and affirm the strengths of diverse student populations and increase ELs' literacy.

## **PEDAGOGICAL LENSES TO BRING CULTURALLY RELEVANT LITERATURE INTO THE CLASSROOM**

School environments that take ELs to academic success achieve instructional equity through a focus on relationships, identification and understanding of familial networks, and use of resources that recognize all learners' cultural capital. Macedo and Bartolomé (2014) posit that educational debates have overlooked "the role of language as a major force in the construction of human subjectivities—the way language may either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use it" (p. 32). They encourage educators to "develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunities to use their own reality as a basis for literacy" (p. 33).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and the World Class Instructional Design Standards (Board of Regents University of Wisconsin System, 2009) are documents that help teachers improve their curriculum. The use of culturally relevant picture books can help teachers meet these standards and affirm students' funds of knowledge. The CCSS offer "a fortuitous opportunity for teachers to reevaluate the children's literature they are using and enhance their collections with a rich variety of multicultural selections" (Landt, 2011, p. 1). We propose that educators can consciously value the lives and experiences of the students in their schools and communities by exploring the contributions to literacy inherent in ELs' dynamic plurilingualism. Authentic culturally relevant children's literature is the perfect medium to use to do so. The following three curricular lenses will help teachers identify ways to build on students' cultural capital using culturally relevant picture books as a multicultural lens, a multilingual lens, and a strategic lens.

### **Lens 1: Multicultural**

Our first lens provides teachers with a way to offer students an accurate view of today's world through the use of culturally relevant literature. This lens offers a guide to using literature to link the multicultural realities of the world with their classroom space. It recognizes that students' knowledge base extends beyond their formal schooling to include their cultural capital and nonschooling knowledge (Bourdieu, 1987; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). ELs need to see where their knowledge base fits into greater society and within the cultures and languages represented in their classrooms (TESOL, 2010).

Authentic, culturally relevant picture books offer plots through words and pictures that facilitate conversations to help ELs examine and apply their ideas. Images allow ELs to "have access to the description of a place or a person or even an idea with little or no words being necessary" (Daniel & Huizenga-McCoy, 2014, p. 172). For example, a preK learner may relish eating warm freshly baked naan at home every day and be surprised to be served a turkey sandwich at school. Picture books that include images of

people around the world making bread, such as *Everybody Bakes Bread* (Dooley, 1995) and *Bread Around the World* (Serrano, 2010), can validate the customs of diverse families and communities. (See Table 3 for a list of titles that celebrate many cultures.)

As they read, students engage in negotiations that require them to compare their world to that of the characters in books, and their personal backgrounds impact their understanding of text (Rosenblatt, 1978). An EL working to make meaning in a new language will first peruse a book for similarities and differences comparing their culture of origin and the one presented by the author. After this, the learner interacts with words that, once understood, will reveal new understandings. ELs need to find the content in books accessible, comprehensible, and interpretable given their background experiences.

Teachers build on their students’ cultural capital with literature that explores what it means to be resilient through personal stories that validate learners’ realities (Truebridge & Benard, 2013). We define resiliency as learners’ ability to maintain equanimity in the face of emotionally taxing life events. Resiliency has been defined as “the capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship” (Wolin & Wolin, 1993, p. 5). Resiliency theory (Krovetz, 1999) highlights protective factors in the learner’s family, school, and community that are supported by the strengths and assets in familial and community networks (González et al., 2005). A resilient EL is the student able to develop coping mechanisms to meet crises that may arise due to issues of linguistic and/or cultural mismatch that they may not fully comprehend. ELs develop resiliency when they find ways to overcome their families’ and their own hardships in

TABLE 3. Literature That Celebrates Different Cultures

---

Bahk, J. (2015). *Juna’s jar*. New York, NY: Lee & Low.

Cornelles, N. U. J. (2015). *Mariama: Different but just the same*. Madrid, Spain: Cuento de Luz.

Faruqi, R. (2015). *Lailah’s lunchbox: A Ramadan story*. Thomaston, ME: Tilbury House.

Gilmore, D. K. L. (2014). *Cora cooks pancit*. New York, NY: Lee & Low.

Jules, J. (2009). *A duck for turkey day*. Park Ridge, IL: Albert Whitman.

Kobald, I. (2015). *My two blankets*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

---

transitioning to life in a new country. The effort of striving to master an additional language while facing economic and cultural conflicts will strengthen ELs' character and increase their abilities to carry on in adversity.

Benard (1995) believes all children are innately resilient. She identified characteristics in resilient children that we believe culturally responsive literature helps nurture in ELs in the classroom context. When applying Benard's proposition, teachers grasp that these students need avenues that will support them in developing effective interpersonal intercultural skills. Authentic literature allows ELs to read about other ways of being and envision themselves interacting competently in new circumstances, having a voice in their new world, and developing the coping mechanisms that ensure their pluriculturalism is validated. In addition, resilient ELs are not bystanders but rather contributing citizens who can solve problems in the world they inhabit because others value their opinions and contributions.

Authentic literature mirrors the strengths of the people represented in the characters authors create. It facilitates intercultural understandings as ELs recognize similarities between ways family members and characters resolve challenges. Explicit conversations that show students the strength and resiliency in their familial networks will help them adapt to a new culture. Many ELs have seen their families overcome great hardships before and after arrival to the United States. Some may have swum the Rio Grande with their parents in their search for freedom. Others may have spent their early years living with grandparents in a remote area of China waiting to join their parents in the United States. Some grew up surrounded by the ravages of war before making a journey to a new and unfamiliar place. Many of these children have experienced deep fear and hunger while harboring an uncertain feeling of hope. Culturally relevant picture books will help these learners see a link from their first to their second culture and language. Success for ELs comes from the ways their teachers tug at their hearts and support their life struggles. (See Table 4 for a list of titles that show resiliency.)

TABLE 4. Literature That Shows Resiliency

---

Butirago, J. (2015). <i>Two white rabbits</i> . New York, NY: Groundwood.
Danticat, E. (2015). <i>Mama's nightingale: A story of immigration and separation</i> . New York, NY: Dial.
Foreman, M. (2015). <i>The seeds of friendship</i> . Boston, MA: Candlewick.
Kim, P. (2013). <i>Here I am</i> . North Mankato, MN: Capstone.
Lainez, R. C. (2016). <i>Mamá the alien: Mamá la extraterrestre</i> . New York, NY: Children's Book Press.
Ringold, F. (2016). <i>We came to America</i> . New York, NY: Random House.

---

## Lens 2: Multilingual

Our second lens uses literature to celebrate ELs' evolving multi- or plurilingualism. Communicative competence pedagogies (Nunan, 1999) have changed understandings of language learning by highlighting students' rights to communicate in real contexts using authentic materials. This lens helps us explore how culturally relevant picture books validate the plurilingual nature of today's classrooms. For children growing up in plurilingual environments, observing the people in their lives communicating using one or more languages is the norm. This norm is validated when children see multiple languages reflected in the pages of a picture book.

The plurilingual sociocultural context is perhaps the more important determiner of academic success (Daniel, 2016b; Garcia & Li Wei, 2014). In the classroom, students need to see that the use of multiple languages in interpersonal communication is as natural as breathing. Books that celebrate the unique strengths of multilingual individuals help ELs navigate their worlds. As ELs explore characters and plots in linguistically diverse books, they come to understand how different cultural groups share and express experiences. When learners read through a multilingual lens, they note that regardless of language proficiency, their languages help them communicate and learn about others. (See Table 5 for a list of publishers of multilingual books.)

Inclusive multilingual instruction requires teachers acknowledge all ELs' languages as key instructional scaffolds to academic language development and comprehension. Canagarajah (2011) defines translanguaging as "the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system"

TABLE 5. Multilingual Publishers

Publisher	Website	Languages published
Asia for Kids	<a href="http://www.afk.com/">http://www.afk.com/</a>	49 languages
Bab'l Books	<a href="http://bablbooks.com/">http://bablbooks.com/</a>	9 languages
Bilingual Books for Kids	<a href="http://www.bilingualbooks.com/">http://www.bilingualbooks.com/</a>	Spanish
Children's Book Press: An Imprint of Lee & Low	<a href="https://www.leeandlow.com/imprints/4">https://www.leeandlow.com/imprints/4</a>	7 languages
Cinco Puntos Press	<a href="http://www.cincopuntos.com/">http://www.cincopuntos.com/</a>	Spanish
Del Sol Books	<a href="http://www.delsolbooks.com/">http://www.delsolbooks.com/</a>	Spanish
Lectorum	<a href="http://www.lectorum.com/">http://www.lectorum.com/</a>	Spanish
Lee & Low	<a href="http://www.leeandlow.com">http://www.leeandlow.com</a>	7 languages
Pan Asian Publications	<a href="http://www.panap.com/">http://www.panap.com/</a>	9 languages
Starbright Books	<a href="http://www.starbrightbooks.org/language_list.php">http://www.starbrightbooks.org/language_list.php</a>	21 languages

(p. 401). Teachers promote biliteracy by consciously examining whether the picture books they use give all students opportunities to use their diverse language abilities in the classroom.

Culturally relevant literature provides learners with contexts for the translanguaging spaces they need to become strategic readers. Effective English language teaching involves understanding and applauding the reality of learners' translanguaging in multilingual worlds (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014) and acknowledging that engaging narrative texts are scaffolds to academic success. Teachers should ensure that learners have opportunities to use discourse features from all their languages within a communicative framework (Nation, 2009). For example, a preschool teacher might ask families to help students create bilingual concept picture books, such as alphabet books (Carger & Koss, 2014), focusing on a custom that is similar yet uniquely interpreted across students' different cultures. With the addition of children's drawings, the learners' sense of identity is affirmed. Culturally sensitive books give students access to seeing themselves and their communities represented.

**Lens 3: Strategic**

With our third lens, we acknowledge that learning English cannot be reduced to formulas and techniques. Culturally relevant



literature is an effective tool to teach ELs pre-, during-, and postreading strategies. Selecting picture books that reflect students' worlds makes it easier for them to comprehend and develop metacognitive skills. When choosing strategies to teach ELs, note that students will acquire meaning of new words and expressions when they use them in context. Conversations focused on ways to extract meaning from text give ELs opportunities to use language as a scaffold to reach higher levels of understandings while they experiment with their entire linguistic repertoire (Daniel, 2016b).

As teachers, we have the ability to create strategic readers able to examine, justify, or reject the perspectives of the people in their world. Classroom conversations revolving around culturally relevant literature will expedite this process. Identifying steps that help ELs grasp the gist of lessons and decipher the meaning of the language they are learning empowers them to develop their voice (Bakhtin, 1981; Giroux & McLaren, 1986). Picture books that capture students' interests provide a medium that eases the transition from reading for aesthetic purposes to reading strategically for efferent purposes.

Culturally relevant literature is an important instructional tool for new immigrants. Learners whose schooling began in another country need to learn performance expectations for their new educational context. Heritage language speakers also need to learn this information. These ELs embody the juncture of old and new cultural norms—their families' ways of life before and after arrival to the United States. High-quality multicultural multilingual literature provides a lifeline of meaning for ELs. For example, a student of Mexican origin will know the underlying significance of *El Día de los Muertos*/Day of the Dead and may not find it difficult to grasp why U.S. citizens celebrate Halloween. On the other hand, an EL from Kenya may not have the background knowledge to understand this holiday. This is why selection of culturally relevant picture books matters.

Educators can use the curriculum to widen students' worldviews and help them direct their own learning (Daniel, 2016a). Teaching ELs to use prereading strategies helps them examine, acknowledge, and respect the differences they see

TABLE 6. Pre-, During-, and Postreading Strategies

Prereading strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Teach students to lead each other during picture walks.</li><li>2. Introduce students to language they will need to comprehend new text.</li></ol>
During-reading strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Compare and contrast book characters with neighborhood community members.</li><li>2. Teach adjectives and adverbs using the book’s context as the backdrop.</li></ol>
Postreading strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Teach students how to ask questions that help them evaluate ideas presented by authors.</li><li>2. Engage learners in rewriting the endings to stories.</li></ol>

between their classmates and themselves. Effective during-reading strategies consider students’ learning styles and provide translanguaging spaces that foster natural processes in second language acquisition while students develop understandings about different cultures (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014). Postreading strategies help students find their voice and develop a sense of citizenship. (See Table 6 for a list of pre-, during-, and postreading strategies.)

CREATING POSSIBILITIES

Past research informs us, but the future is enthralling when we consider the possibilities that exist to help contribute to worlds of intercultural understandings. Culturally relevant picture books that authentically represent the current student demographic offer educators a vision of tomorrow’s world citizens. Educators who open their hearts and ensure that their classrooms welcome students’ diverse cultural and linguistic makeup will make concrete the vision of a socially just world. We encourage all teachers to intentionally find and include culturally relevant children’s literature in their classrooms and curricula to create learning environments that validate ELs’ lives and experiences and offer promises for the future.

THE AUTHORS

Melanie D. Koss is an associate professor at Northern Illinois University. Her research focus revolves around representations of

diversity in children's, young adult, and multicultural literature. She believes that all children should have access to books that reflect themselves accurately and authentically.

**Mayra C. Daniel** is a professor at Northern Illinois University. Her mission in work and life is to ensure that English learners across the world are able to explore their plurilingual worlds and that together with their teachers they are free to celebrate their pluricultural identities and experiences.

## REFERENCES

- Allington, R. L. (2007). Intervention all day long: New hope for struggling readers. *Voices from the Middle*, 14(4), 7–14.
- American Library Association. (n.d.). Caldecott Medal: Terms and criteria. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecotterms/caldecotterms>
- Au, K. (2001). Culturally responsive instruction as a dimension of new literacies. *Reading Online*, 5(1), 1–11.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Benard, B. (1995). *Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, schools, and community*. Portland, OR: Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990a). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3), ix–xi.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990b). Walk tall in the world: African American literature for today's children. *Journal of Negro Education*, 59, 556–565. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295312>
- Bishop, R. S. (1992). Multicultural literature for children: Making informed choices. In V. Harris (Ed.), *Teaching multicultural literature in Grades K–8* (pp. 37–54). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.
- Board of Regents University of Wisconsin System. (2009). *World Class Instructional Design Standards*. Madison, WI: Author.
- Bourdieu, P. (1987). What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32, 1–17.

- Brooks, W. (2006). Reading representations of themselves: Urban youth use culture and African American textual features to develop literary understandings. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41, 372–392. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.41.3.4>
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman.
- Brown, R., Waring, R., & Donkaewbua, S. (2008). Incidental vocabulary acquisition from reading, reading-while-listening, and listening to stories. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 20(2), 136–163.
- Canagarajah, S. (2011). Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable strategies of translanguaging. *Modern Language Journal*, 95, 401–417. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01207.x>
- Carger, C. L., & Koss, M. D. (2014). Getting to know you: Using alphabet books to develop vocabulary and exchange cultural information with English language learners. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 42(4), 11–18.
- Ching, S. H. D. (2005). Multicultural children's literature as an instrument of power. *Language Arts*, 83(2), 128–136.
- Clark, E. R., & Flores, B. B. (2016). Multicultural Latino children's literature: A tool to enrich the lives and the learning of Latino bilingual learners. In R. Clark, B. B. Flores, H. L. Smith, & D. A. González (Eds.), *Multicultural literature for Latino bilingual children: Their words, their worlds* (pp. 3–24). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Colby, S. A., & Lyon, A. F. (2004). Heightening awareness about the importance of using multicultural literature. *Multicultural Education*, 11(3), 24–28.
- Cummins, J. (2009). Pedagogies of choice: Challenging coercive relations of power in classrooms and communities. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2, 261–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050903003751>
- Cummins, J. (2012). The intersection of cognitive and sociocultural factors in the development of reading comprehension among immigrant students. *Reading and Writing*, 25, 1973–1990. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-010-9290-7>

- Daniel, M. (2016a). Critical pedagogy's power in English language teaching. In L. R. Jacobs & C. Hastings (Eds.), *The importance of social justice in English language teaching* (pp. 25–38). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- Daniel, M. C. (2016b). Planning instruction for English learners: Strategies teachers need to know. In J. Grinberg, D. Schwarzer, & M. Molino (Eds.), *Successful teaching: What every novice teacher needs to know* (pp. 89–106). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Daniel, M. C., & Huizenga-McCoy, M. (2014). Art as a medium for bilingualism and biliteracy: Suggestions from the research literature. *GIST Education and Learning Journal*, 8, 171–188.
- DeLeón, L. (2002). Multicultural literature: Reading to develop self-worth. *Multicultural Education*, 10(2), 49–51.
- Dixon, A. D., & Fasching-Varner, K. J. (2009). This is how we do it: Helping teachers understand culturally relevant pedagogy in diverse classrooms. In C. Compton-Lilly (Ed.), *Breaking the silence: Recognizing the social and cultural resources students bring to the classroom* (pp. 34–48). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Dooley, N. (1995). *Everybody bakes bread*. New York, NY: Carolrhoda Books.
- Gangi, J. M. (2008). The unbearable whiteness of literacy instruction: Realizing the implications of the proficient reader research. *Multicultural Review*, 17(1), 30–35.
- Garcia, O., & Li, Wei. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism, and education*. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765>
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106–116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487102053002003>
- Giroux, H., & McLaren, P. (1986). Teacher education and the politics of engagement: The case for democratic schooling. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(3), 213–238. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.56.3.trr1473235232320>
- González, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Funds of knowledge for teaching in Latino households*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085995029004005>

- Gray, E. S. (2009). The importance of visibility: Students' and teachers' criteria for selecting African American literature. *The Reading Teacher*, 62, 472–481. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.62.6.2>
- Gunn, A. A., Brice, A. E., & Peterson, B. J. (2014). Ideas for the classroom: Culturally responsive teaching: Exploring children's names and cultural identities. *Childhood Education*, 90(2), 174–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2014.894836>
- Guthrie, J. T., & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research*, Vol. 3 (pp. 403–422). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Guthrie, J. T., Wigfield, A., Barbosa, P., Perencevich, K. C., Taboada, A., Davis, M. H., & Tonks, S. (2004). Increasing reading comprehension and engagement through concept-oriented reading instruction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96, 403–423.
- Heflin, B. R., & Barksdale-Ladd, M. A. (2001). African American children's literature that helps students find themselves: Selection guidelines for Grades K–3. *The Reading Teacher*, 54, 810–819.
- Hicks, D. (2004). Back to Oz? Rethinking the literary in a critical study of reading. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 39(1), 63–84.
- Hughes-Hassell, S., Barkley, H., & Koehler, E. (2009). Promoting equity in children's literacy instruction: Using a critical race theory framework to examine transitional books. *School Library Media Research*, 12, 1–20.
- Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., Chan, E., & Dalley-Trim, L. (2016). *Literacies* (2nd ed.). Port Melbourne, Australia: Cambridge University Press.
- Koss, M. D. (2015). Diversity in contemporary picturebooks: A content analysis. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 41(1), 32–42.
- Krovetz, M. (1999). *Fostering resiliency: Expecting all students to use their minds and hearts well*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Landt, S. M. (2011). Integration of multicultural literature in primary grade language arts curriculum. *Journal of Multiculturalism in Education*, 7(1), 1–27.



- Larson, J., & Marsh, J. (2005). *Making literacy real: Theories and practices for learning and teaching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473910508>
- Larson, J., & Marsh, J. (2010). *Making literacy real: Theories and practices for learning and teaching* (2nd ed.). London, England: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473910508>
- Lohfink, G. (2010). The nature of Mexican American third graders' engagement with culturally relevant picture books. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 33, 346–363.
- Macedo, L., & Bartolomé, L. I. (2014). Multiculturalism permitted in English only. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 8(1), 24–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2014.852426>
- Martinez-Roldán, C. (2003). Building worlds and identities: A case study of the role of narratives in bilingual literature discussion. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 37, 494–526.
- McNair, J. C. (2010). Classic African American children's literature. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(2), 96–105.
- Migration Policy Institute. (2015). Top languages spoken by English language learners nationally and by state. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/top-language-s-spoken-english-language-learners-nationally-and-state>
- Moll, L., & González, N. (1994). Lessons from research with language minority children. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 26, 439–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10862969409547862>
- Montgomery, W. (2001). Creating culturally responsive, inclusive classrooms. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(4), 4–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990103300401>
- Morrison, K. A., Robbins, H. H., & Rose, D. G. (2008). Operationalizing culturally relevant pedagogy: A synthesis of classroom based research. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 41, 433–452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680802400006>
- Nation, I. S. P. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL reading and writing*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). Fast facts: English language learners. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=96>
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core*



*State Standards*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

- Nunan, D. (1999). Communicative tasks and the language curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, 279–295. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587464>
- Ogle, D., & Correa-Kovtun, A. (2010). Supporting English-language learners and struggling readers in content literacy with the “partner reading and content, too” routine. *The Reading Teacher*, 63, 532–542.
- Pacheco, M., & Gutiérrez, K. (2009). Cultural-historical approaches to literacy teacher and learning. In C. Compton-Lilly (Ed.), *Breaking the silence: Recognizing the social and cultural resources students bring to the classroom* (pp. 34–48). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Parkinson, B., & Thomas, H. R. (2000). *Teaching literature in a second language*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.
- Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. F. (2013). *Reading, writing, and learning in ESL: A resource book for teaching K–12 English learners* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Reiss, J. (2012). *120 content strategies for English language learners: Teaching for academic success in secondary school* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Roche, M. (2014). *Developing children’s critical thinking through picturebooks: A guide for primary and early years students and teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Serrano, J. (2010). *Bread around the world*. New York, NY: Newmark Learning.
- Souto-Manning, M. (2009). Negotiating culturally responsive pedagogy through multicultural children’s literature: Towards critical democratic literacy practices in a first grade classroom. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 9(1), 50–74.
- Souto-Manning, M. (2016). Honoring and building on the rich literacy practices of young bilingual and multilingual learners. *The Reading Teacher*, 70, 263–271.

- TESOL. (2010). *Standards for the recognition of initial TESOL programs in P–12 ESL teacher education*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.tesol.org/advance-the-field/standards/tesol-caep-standards-for-p-12-teacher-education-programs>
- Truebridge, S., & Benard, B. (2013). Reflections on resilience. *Educational Leadership*, 71(1), 66–69.
- Tschida, C. M., Ryan, C. L., & Ticknor, A. S. (2014). Building on windows and mirrors: Encouraging the disruption of “single stories” through children’s literature. *Journal of Children’s Literature*, 40(1), 28–39.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2013). 2013 census data. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/2013census/data>
- Wolin, S. J., & Wolin, S. (1993). *The resilient self: How survivors of troubled families arise above adversity*. New York, NY: Villard.
- Yoon, B., Simpson, A., & Haag, C. (2010). Assimilation ideology: Critically examining underlying messages in multicultural literature. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 54, 109–118.