Creating and Navigating a Transborder Writing Space: One Multilingual Adolescent’s Take-Up of Dialogue Journaling in an English-Medium Classroom

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ABSTRACT
Centering the literacy practice of a newly arrived, transnational, emergent multilingual student, the author provides insights into how these students, particularly when positioned as lacking literacy and content knowledge when labeled as students with interrupted formal education, might benefit socio-emotionally and educationally from the opportunity to story their own lives and write their way into a new classroom and culture. The author shows how Marlón, a newly arrived immigrant from Guatemala, leveraged existing bodies of linguistic, content, and experiential knowledge to maximize his participation in the classroom-based literacy practice of dialogue journaling. As such, the author demonstrates how the relatively low-stakes, low-tech, dialogic nature of journaling afforded Marlón the opportunity to create a transborder writing space in which he enacted agency in his decisions to translanguaging, engage in multimodal writing, invoke familial knowledge, and share personal experiences. In the process, Marlón created an agentive border space that spanned cultures, nations, and languages in ways that authentically represented his multifaceted and complex identity and lived history. Students like Marlón are a growing demographic; thus, the author calls for teachers to consider the benefits of creating instructional spaces for low-risk, low-tech writing to ease transnational, emergent multilingual students into classroom and school-based writing. The author also suggests the need for further research exploring the implementation and benefits of literacy practices that take into account newly arrived students’ identities holistically.

As [her ninth-grade] students come into the room, Ms. Rosewall asks them to collect their dialogue journals from the stack in the back of the room. Students’ notebooks are always stacked on the air conditioner when they’re ready [to be returned] with feedback. [One student] sits at the table in front of the air conditioner hurrying his classmates along with a quick “¡Vamos! ¡Vamos!” [Let’s go! Let’s go!] As students collect their notebooks, Ms. Rosewall finds Marlón and asks him if he had a nice birthday yesterday. He looks at her, surprised, and smiles. He nods and says he did. He thanks her for the well wishes, gets his notebook from the stack and sits down to read his feedback and begin today’s entry, a shy smile on his face. (field notes, October 7, 2015)

In this article, I examine how dialogue journaling served as a low-risk, low-tech writing opportunity through which one transnational, multilingual, unaccompanied minor, Marlón (all names are
Context of the Study

Beginning in May 2014, the United States witnessed an unprecedented number of unaccompanied youth from the Northern Triangle nations—Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—self-surrendering at the U.S.–Mexico border, causing President Barack Obama to declare it an “urgent humanitarian situation” (Zezima & O’Keefe, 2014, para. 1). To date, in fiscal year 2020, there have been 206,927 apprehended immigrants at the border, 18,796 of whom were unaccompanied minors (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2020). As of February 2018, an estimated 135,589 unaccompanied minors had been released to sponsors across the country to await immigration court appearances (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). By 2018, pending cases had reached an all-time high, with hearings extending “as many as 1,908 days into the future” (TRAC Immigration, 2017, para. 6). Young people under the age of 21 awaiting court hearings are encouraged by advocates to enroll in public schools in their resettlement communities; a letter of affiliation from a public school could support their case.

Immigrant youth fleeing the Northern Triangle came of age in specific political, social, and economic climates where the legacies of historical and economic decisions impact how communities function (Jonas & Rodriguez, 2014). Although each student’s situation prior to resettling in the United States is distinct, many share elements of a common narrative, referred to as the Central American transnational imaginary (Padilla, 2013). This is characterized by experiences with political instability, civil war, economic hardship, and the likely traumatic experience of having migrated through Mexico. Once in the United States, many students encounter new hardships. Since 2016, the racist, anti-immigrant rhetoric used by the Trump Administration has had a profoundly negative effect on students across the country, particularly those who are un- or undocumented (Costello, 2016).

In this context, and throughout the school year, many students like Marlón enroll in U.S. public schools. These parameters render classifying Marlón as an English learner (EL) or as having an interrupted education insufficient. Although I focus here on one TEM student's schooling experience in the United States, his realities and transnational history are representative of thousands of immigrant youth fleeing Central America.

Research Questions

Centering the experiences of a student like Marlón is necessary because “little is known about the ways middle school and high school transnational students...use literacy across diverse context...to make meaning of their
lives and their relationships with other[s]” (de la Piedra, 2010, p. 575). I refer to Marlón as an emergent multilingual to acknowledge that he and many like him are often speakers of Spanish and one or more indigenous language (García, 2009b). In this article, I focus on Marlón’s experience and products as he engaged in dialogue journaling. Three research questions guided my analysis:

1. In what ways does Marlón participate in dialogue journaling in his classroom?
2. What does Marlón say about the value and meaning of his dialogue journaling practice?
3. In what ways does Marlón’s participation reflect his identity as a multilingual, transnational youth?

Drawing on the work of Pérez (1999), de los Ríos (2018) called for a decolonial imaginary, or a space that goes beyond “simply allowing students to draw on their everyday language practices. Instead, it shifts what is possible in literacy classrooms and centers curricula and instruction around who and where students are as historically colonized, racialized, and transnational subjects” (p. 467). By exploring how Marlón invoked and showcased aspects of his multifaceted identity as a TEM youth in his creation of a transborder writing space, I consider how dialogue journaling can serve as a literacy practice that provides TEM students with opportunities to center themselves and their complex identities.

Literature Review

Literacy knowledge supports TEM individuals in creating and maintaining “connections between distant places, often across national borders” (Jiménez, Smith, & Teague, 2009, p. 17). To contextualize Marlón’s literacy knowledge through his participation in dialogue journaling, I explored three areas of research: (1) linguistic landscapes and emergent multilingual students’ literacy development, including writing; (2) agency, participation, and language development; and (3) the role of transnationalism in language learning.

Linguistic Landscapes and Emergent Multilingual Students’ Literacy Development

Research has suggested the benefits of allowing students to use home languages regardless of a teacher’s linguistic background or comfort level (Dávila & Linares, 2020; Ebe, 2016; Flint, Dollar, & Stewart, 2019). Instruction that builds on students’ existing cultural and experiential frames of reference allows them to engage in hybrid language practices that combine a wide variety of linguistic resources and modalities (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Skerrett & Bomer, 2013). As such, grounding literacy instruction and practices in students’ identities and allowing them to mix linguistic resources in their engagement have been shown to facilitate participation and promote the development of metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 2001; Przmys, 2016; Wagner, 2016). This position has been supported by many sociocultural literacy scholars (e.g., Cummins, 2000, 2006, 2007; Gee, 2012; Grosjean, 2010). When teachers recognize students’ first languages as assets to be built on (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007), their entire linguistic repertoire becomes a resource for teaching and learning. When this is not the case, students have limited opportunities to develop literacy skills needed to survive and thrive in multilingual and transnational spaces; when home language is, at minimum, valued by teachers, students benefit educationally and socioemotionally (Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; Machado-Casas, 2009). This is particularly evident in students’ independent writing where there is decreased access to teacher and peer linguistic support resulting in reduced participation, particularly when there are limitations placed on which language(s) students can use (Kibler, 2010; Velasco & García, 2014). Such flexible and fluid linguistic landscapes have been shown to facilitate language learning in ways that are academically, socially, and emotionally responsive (García, 2009a, 2009b; García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017).

Agency, Participation, and Literacy Development

Linguistic fluidity in reading and writing has long been linked to increased agency and social participation (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). A term like agency makes room for the small-scale but undeniably important social moves that TEM students make in an effort to take control of their experiences. These social moves are also evident in classrooms in which students feel more comfortable and encouraged to participate (Echevarría, Frey, & Fisher, 2015). However, a student’s ability to enact agency depends on individual student disposition and experience and on the learning environment’s overall social climate. As such, agency is “not…a property of individuals” but rather something that only “develop[s] in relation to social groups” (Vitanova, Miller, Gao, & Deters, 2015, p. 3). When TEM students make linguistic choices or participate in the classroom, their decision to do so (i.e., to enact agency) is dependent on the context and parameters of the activity and setting (e.g., the degree to which the larger learning community encourages translanguaging). Thus, when encountering fixed linguistic settings, TEMs face restrictions to their capacity to enact agency (Shapiro, Cox, Shuck, & Simnitt, 2016). Moreover, engagement and participation are reflective of the linguistic opportunities that students are afforded (e.g., Gutiérrez, 2008; Martínez-Álvarez, 2017).
The Role of Transnationalism and Literacy Development

Because of their unique experiences and often precarious positionalities, TEM students require access to schooling that recognizes and develops preexisting knowledge, including “their languages and lifeworlds, especially their experiences of border crossing, as tools for producing… academic work” (Skerrett & Bomer, 2013, p. 334). Such an approach shifts the perspective from viewing TEM students as lacking language or content knowledge to viewing them as possessors of rich bodies of knowledge and literacy skills (Cummins, 2006; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007). This look toward more holistic and responsive instruction is not new (e.g., Valenzuela, 1999), yet it continues to be necessary as the population of culturally and linguistically diverse students in public schools grows (García, 2009a). TEM youth often find themselves caught at the crossroads of intersecting identities as they navigate complex social, political, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual borders (Lam & Warriner, 2012). When they engage in classroom-based literacy practices, their participation is informed by their transnational backgrounds and their familiarity with literacy practices; it is also often grounded in their home language(s) and cultural frames of reference (Ward Taira, 2019). When literacy instruction explicitly calls on TEM students’ transnational identities as the basis for the literacy practice, such as through dialogue journaling (Cuero, 2010) or literature discussion groups centered around stories about border crossings (Medina, 2010), TEM students participate. Such a responsive approach grants these students access to meaningful multimodal, multilingual literacy practices that support them in connecting academic development and language learning to personal experience.

Theoretical Framework

To contextualize Marlón’s participation in dialogue journaling, I drew on intersecting theoretical perspectives of sociocultural theory and border theory.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory conceptualizes the influence that society has on individual development (Vygotsky, 1934/2012). In the context of education, literacy practices can be conceived of as sociocultural practices. Literacy practices describe social practices and conceptions of reading and writing (Street, 1984), emphasizing how these practices are specific to the context, social purpose, and larger discourses in which they are embedded. As such, social practices around literacy also influence individual development. Literacy practices comprise the everyday ways that people use literacy knowledge to create and make sense of language and texts within the contexts and discourses of their daily lives (see also Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2012; Heath, 1983; Street, 2006). When thought of as a sociocultural practice, literacy practices become meaningful based on their uptake by an assemblage of people who use language to interact not only with a particular literacy artifact but also with each other and each other’s varying perspectives, opinions, and positionalities. For emergent multilingual students, this conceptualization of literacy practices as sociocultural constructs may manifest in the regulations surrounding when and how they are allowed to use their home language(s), the degree to which their cultural backgrounds are acknowledged, and the ways in which teachers recognize students’ existing literacy skills and knowledge.

From a sociocultural perspective, writing is considered

Thus, writing consists of four key tenets: It is (1) social by nature (see also Gee, 2017; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984); (2) interactive and develops in relation with others; (3) a mediated process of invention (see also Wertsch, 1998) that uses tools such as languages, writing conventions, and illustrations; and (4) dialogic (Rish, Bylen, Vreeland, & Wimberley, 2015; Schultz & Fecho, 2000). (Slavkov, 2015, p. 81)

Border Theory

Border theory is concerned with both physical and imagined boundaries; it recognizes how social practices are points of both entry and exclusion (Anzaldúa, 2012). As individuals cross international borders, both physical and imagined, they carry with them linguistic and cultural knowledge that they strategically use to navigate new and shifting cultural and linguistic landscapes (Jiménez et al., 2009).

TEMP individuals are often faulted along conceptions of assimilation that fail to recognize their “unique capacity to handle different cultures and lifestyles, different social status, different roles and relationships, and to function effectively in different social, political, and economic systems” (Trueba, 2004, p. 39). Add to this the fact that many TEM students live between and across languages, carrying with them multiple languages that
allow them to maintain relationships and connections across national borders (Canagarajah, 2013). Border theory is necessary to recognize the physical and intellectual labor that these students engage in (Mignolo, 2000).

Speakers of more than one language blend linguistic resources in situated interactions as they strategically use language across diverse places, spaces, contexts, and purposes. The reality is that multilingual people “do not think unilingually” because human beings “do not think in a specific, named language separately” (Li, 2018, p. 18). Instead, multilingual people translanguaging, operating in a unique space that makes use of their entire linguistic repertoire (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; García, Lin, & May, 2017; García & Li, 2014).

For individuals who experience multiple marginalizations on account of race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and/or immigration status, ideological borderlands are omnipresent, particularly when they are denied access to social, political, or economic opportunities by those in the dominant culture (Anzaldúa, 2012). TEM youth negotiate aspects of their identities and exercise agency in deciding when and how to assert themselves. For many,

it is not just a matter of accepting one’s [own] differences and learning to live with them, but rather, it is a [process through which] self-awareness is attained and pushes people to transgress the boundaries that dominant groups have imposed on them [as they] dare[e] to enact multiple identities all together. (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008, p. 44)

In this process, students create spaces in which they traverse dominant ideologies and create an alternative kind of space, a third space (Bhabha, 2004). This space becomes “an innovative place for selfhood development, collaboration, and redefining or resisting societal and political boundaries” (Brown, 2016, p. 289) and linguistic boundaries. When individuals’ cultures, languages, identities, and positionality intersect in the third space, a space of hybridity or in-betweenness is created that pushes back on the boundaries that typically dictate how multilingual and multicultural individuals are positioned.

I use sociocultural and border theory to understand how Marlón invoked knowledge, language, and aspects of his multifaceted identity to engage in a dialogic, social literacy practice that gave him space to connect and construct knowledge with his teacher across cultural and linguistic borders.

**Method**

In this article, I draw boundaries around one of the students, Marlón, from the larger study and one particular writing practice, dialogue journaling, that I observed in use in the ninth-grade social studies classroom (for more on this larger study, see Linares, 2017).

**Setting**

The larger study from which the data regarding Marlón and his journaling were taken was an ethnographic case study conducted in an urban city in Kentucky at Green Academy (pseudonym), a newcomer school designed to receive immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking students for whom English is not their home language. The school served 500 students in grades 6–10 during their first two years in the public school system and described itself as a place that provided a welcoming environment specifically designed to support the linguistic, academic, and socio-emotional needs of English learners. Students at Green Academy represented over 50 nations and collectively spoke more than 23 languages. Between 2000 and 2011, Kentucky’s English learner population increased 306%, a rate of increase second only to South Carolina, making Kentucky a state responding to a rapidly changing student demographic (Horsford & Sampson, 2013).

Within each grade level at Green Academy, at least one cohort was designated as the cohort of “students with limited or interrupted formal education” (SLIFE), a label traditionally grounded in a deficit understanding of such students and their perceived shortcomings, not in their real potentials. Students assigned to SLIFE cohorts were those who had received entering (scored 0 or 1) or beginning (scored 1 or 2) scores on the WIDA (2017) ACCESS 2.0 exam. Marlón was in the ninth-grade SLIFE cohort, with peers 14 and 15 years old. Of note, not all unaccompanied minors arrived with interruptions in their schooling; therefore, not all Central American students at Green Academy were assigned to SLIFE cohorts, nor were all students of Central American origin. The overarching study was ethnographic in the sense that I explicitly immersed myself in the everyday school lives of my participants and paid particular attention to the sociocultural dimensions of what I observed for an entire academic year (Black, 2007; Knobel, 1999).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data presented here were gathered through classroom observations, student and teacher interviews and check-ins, and artifact collection. I observed Marlón in Ms. Rosewall’s ninth-grade social studies class four times per week, on average, for 15 weeks in the fall of 2015. Each observation lasted the duration of the 85-minute class period, 25 minutes of which were allotted to the students’ lunch period, giving me a chance to informally check in with Marlón on his way to the lunchroom. I conducted formal interviews and informal check-ins with Marlón and Ms. Rosewall. Formal interviews occurred during the first and final months of the school year; two were
conducted with Marlón in Spanish, and two were conducted with Ms. Rosewall in English. Informal check-ins (also known as conversations with a purpose; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) were brief conversations, usually lasting no more than five minutes, that occurred in response to something I had noticed during observations, and frequently occurred between classes. Many of Marlón’s responses manifested in the form of testimonios, or personal narratives of larger, socially significant experiences (Anzaldúa, 1990; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Saavedra, 2011). I also chose to focus on Marlón’s dialogue journal as a literacy artifact because dialogue journaling is a classroom-based literacy practice that remains grounded in classroom learning while still affording students space to leverage and showcase background knowledge using their entire linguistic repertoires. Analyzing Marlón’s journal entries allowed me to understand the scope of his participation in Ms. Rosewall’s class.

In this article, I provide an analysis of how Marlón’s participation reflected his unique positionality and TEM identity. The subset of data for this analysis included 25 of Marlón’s dialogue journal entries written in fall 2015 and nine instances of feedback and response from Ms. Rosewall. This data subset also includes approximately 45 classroom observations, two interviews each with Marlón and Ms. Rosewall, and approximately 30 check-ins. I coded and analyzed interview transcripts, observational field notes, and Marlón’s journal entries using Bogdan and Biklen’s (2007) recommendations by developing a coding system by reading through the data line by line to identify recurring themes and patterns. The aforementioned literature helped contextualize my understanding of the data, thus influencing my analytic process by providing context for the linguistic landscapes, agency enactment, and influence of transnationalism that I observed. Codes included items such as participation, language mixing, interaction, scaffolding, and dialogue journaling, and I grouped them into categories. Here, I focus primarily on my analysis of how Marlón engaged in dialogue journaling, thus for the category of dialogue journal, codes included multilingual writing, immigration, border crossing, life in home country, life in the United States, transnationalism, and family dynamics. To the extent that they wished, participants engaged in member checks at the end of the fall and spring semesters to confirm my developing interpretations; however, I conducted all initial analysis alone and conferred with others for confirmation.

Accessible literacy practices such as dialogue journaling help students leverage knowledge to develop literate identities as multicultural, multilingual, transnational learners navigating complex social, political, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual borders. In the following subsections, I discuss how dialogue journaling, as taken up by Marlón, served as both a sociocultural and transborder literacy practice.

**Participants**

Participation in the larger study was determined by school assignment to the observed cohort of ninth-grade SLIFEs. Marlón was one of the students, and Ms. Rosewall was their assigned social studies teacher. In this article, I focus on Marlón and his interactions with Ms. Rosewall through dialogue journaling.

**Marlón: Focal Participant**

At the start of the study, Marlón identified himself and his family as speakers of Spanish and both Kaqchikel and Quiché, Mayan languages spoken predominantly in Guatemala (Campbell, 2015, 2016), although as the study unfolded, he described them less as languages that he actively used and more as languages that were part of his family history and that he remembered using as a child, particularly with his grandparents. I chose Marlón as the focal student for this substudy because from the beginning of the year, he spoke more frequently than other students and with the most enthusiasm about dialogue journaling, making him an optimal case for analyzing the practice. I also chose him because of his unique life experiences.

Marlón was 15 when we began working together. He arrived in the United States during the summer of 2014. He was detained at the U.S.—Mexico border, where he described spending one day at a U.S. Customs and Border Protection detention facility and then 15 days at a shelter before being released on bond to relocate to Kentucky to live with his father while awaiting court proceedings. Marlón had only had intermittent communication with his father since his father’s departure from Guatemala 10 years prior. Upon resettling in Kentucky, Marlón enrolled at Green Academy. Prior to leaving Guatemala, he completed formal schooling through sixth grade; when he enrolled at Green Academy, he was placed in the ninth grade based on his age, but it had been about four years since he had last attended a formal school.

In Guatemala, Marlón lived in an urban city with his siblings and grandmother, who was their primary caregiver. His mother was also a transnational border crosser who split time and responsibilities across both the United States and Mexico. Marlón described being affected by “la delincuencia” (criminal activity) when he had forcefully been recruited by a group in his neighborhood to participate in low-level crime: “Nos mandaban hacer unos mandados que uno no quería pero nos obligan y todo eso.” (They made us do errands that one did not want to do, but they force us and all that.) Marlón described forced errands that included extorting money from shopkeepers, which he described as “el impuesto” (the tax) that
shopkeepers were required to pay for protection from other gangs. Marlón stated that when his grandmother learned that he was being forced to do these things, she prohibited him from going outside. He described this situation and his desire to see his father, from whom he had been separated for 10 years, as the impetus for leaving Guatemala. Marlón made the journey with the assistance of a coyote, or human smuggler, contracted by his family.

At school with friends, Marlón spoke primarily in Spanish. Because Ms. Rosewall had made it clear that languages other than English were welcome in her classroom, Marlón regularly spoke to classmates and Ms. Rosewall in both English and Spanish. The majority of Marlón’s writing at school occurred in Spanish, occasionally translanguaging. He described English as a language with which he felt much less comfortable overall; however, his description of his relationship with, and understanding of, English reflected an awareness of the nuances of language. He commented that at school, particularly when it came to completing homework, he saw himself as someone who did not know English: “Es como si no sé inglés…cuando traigo [mis tareas], no salen bien y hay que volver a hacerlas.” (It’s like I don’t know English…when I bring my homework, they don’t come out right and I have to do them again.) However, when describing his use of English outside of the classroom, he felt that he had some abilities; for example, “Entiendo algunas cosas, así como de hablar al patrón o a los meseros [en mi trabajo]. ¡¿Entiendo lo que me dicen, pero para yo hablarles?! Me da mucho trabajo.” (I understand some things, like how to talk to my boss or the waiters [at my work]. I understand what they say to me, but to speak to them?! That takes a lot of work for me.) Marlón’s distinction between his ability to understand language use in nonacademic spaces, such as the restaurant in which he worked, and the more cognitively demanding language use at school suggests an awareness of the complexities of learning a new language.

**Ms. Rosewall: Marlón’s Social Studies Teacher**

Ms. Rosewall identified as a monolingual English speaker with over 15 years of teaching experience who joined the faculty at Green Academy midyear during the 2014–2015 school year. She held an English as a Second Language teaching certification and had spent the previous eight years working for a refugee resettlement agency. Prior to working in refugee resettlement, Ms. Rosewall taught English as a Second Language classes across many levels, including preschool, middle school, and ninth grade in both public and Montessori schools. At the time of the study, she held bachelor’s and master’s degrees and was pursuing an additional master’s degree in library and information sciences. She met with the ninth-grade SLIFE cohort daily.

**School and Classroom Context**

Ms. Rosewall’s classroom was decorated with colorful signage, including the alphabet, high-frequency words, maps, and posters; student work and art covered many of the walls. She had labeled most of the items and surfaces in the room (e.g., chalkboard, whiteboard, bookshelves, desks) in English. Bookshelves held a variety of reading materials, such as issues of student-oriented magazines, easy reader texts, picture books, and a collection of library books from the city’s public library. All of these materials, from classroom decorations to library books, were in English. A bookshelf housed additional resources that Ms. Rosewall regularly encouraged students to access, including bilingual dictionaries, picture dictionaries, a list of high-frequency English words, filler paper, pencils, and erasers.

Ms. Rosewall began the school year by providing each student with a blank notebook to serve as their dialogue journal. She usually collected them every other week and read and responded to their entries in writing and sometimes with seasonally themed stickers. Students had the opportunity to write for 20 to 30 minutes, two or three times a week. Ms. Rosewall often provided prompts to introduce students to content that they would be exploring in the lesson, but she also encouraged free-writes about any topic.

Ms. Rosewall told students at the start of the year to think of the dialogue journal as a space “to experiment…to explore your thinking, to mix up your language into Spanish and English.” She encouraged participation in any language with guidance such as “If you know a word in your language, then write it”; “Remember, you can draw a picture…or write a description”; and “You can write in English or Spanish or Somali or draw pictures.” She emphasized that the dialogue journal was a space for students to write freely, personally, and without worry about a grade or formal evaluation, saying things such as “Remember, you can write about anything you want,” and “Remember, this is not for a grade like A, B, or C.” Ms. Rosewall viewed the journals as a way to provide instruction that could be grounded in students’ identities and experiences (Linares, 2019).

When reading and responding, Ms. Rosewall used context clues, including illustrations; resources, such as dictionaries and translation devices; and conversations with students about their writing. With student permission, she sometimes sought the support of teacher’s aides who spoke students’ home languages. With Spanish, Ms. Rosewall also relied on her own working knowledge of the language. Her responses to student writing was always in English and sought to build on, to the best of her interpretations, what students had shared, with follow-up questions and comments about their writing. On this process, she commented, “[Students] write to me in Spanish, but I
Marlón began to actively use the dialogue journal, primarily on the content of his writing over the mechanics, responses he received from Ms. Rosewall, which focused on his experiences, with time and because of the fear of making mistakes. “(I said a bad word, and my father scolded me.)” Dije una mala palabra y me regañó mi padre. When I asked him to tell me more, he shared about a time when a mispronunciation got him in trouble: “(I always try to write) in English, just in English, but because I can’t, I keep doing it in Spanish…trying, but because I can’t really, then I just keep going in Spanish.” This statement illustrates how even in a translinguaging space, Marlón’s internalization of the importance of English development influenced his writing practice. This internalization may have come from the pressure from his other teachers to shift toward using English.

As such, Marlón’s entries tended to use more Spanish than English, particularly those written earlier in the school year. One of his first entries (written in August 2015; see Figure 1) illustrates how he responded to a prompt about students’ families. Much of this entry was written using invented spelling in Spanish, although he also inserted several terms, some repeated, in English, such as grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, my father, and my baby. In this entry, Marlón’s translinguaging indicated familiarity with family-related vocabulary in English. It is evident that Marlón did not let his developing English knowledge deter him from crafting a detailed response in which he described each member of his family; instead, he strategically accessed knowledge from across his linguistic repertoire using both Spanish and English to convey meaning.

The majority of Marlón’s entries were written entirely in Spanish or contained limited amounts of translanguaging. As such, although not necessarily reflecting his entire body of English-language knowledge, Marlón’s entries showcased his ability to recount life events and convey information, as well as his understanding of illustrations as a device for extending a written narrative. The entries also showed Ms. Rosewall that Marlón understood the prompts she provided and was able to respond accurately in terms of the content by strategically employing the use
FIGURE 1
Marlón’s August 2015 Dialogue Journal Entry About His Family, and the Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My family.</th>
<th>grandmother</th>
<th>my grandfather</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They got married They had 2 daughters and like after 21 years of being married they got divorced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My mother</th>
<th>my father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>are not married but they have six children and we live happily like a great family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My baby</th>
<th>These are my little brothers one is 2 years old and the other is 4 years old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These are my next brothers one is 13 years old and the other is 14 years old and they are happy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| This is me and my sister she is 18 years old and I am 15 and we live happily as our family that we have |

Note. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com.
of more than one language. During an October check-in, Marlón confirmed that when he was unable to write something in English, instead of stopping his entry short, he continued by “traduciendo [sus ideas] al español” (translating [his ideas] into Spanish) to finish. The desire to convey information in writing regardless of the form or language that the writing took potentially indicates that from Marlón’s perspective, one of the purposes of writing was to communicate ideas and feelings regardless of linguistic form.

**Crafting Personal Responses**

Ms. Rosewall used dialogue journal prompts to introduce and access background knowledge regarding content that she intended to introduce. For example, during a unit titled “My Family, School, and Community,” she asked students to write about mountains as part of their introduction to landforms. Marlón initially responded with a brief entry about how he had lived in an urban part of Guatemala where there were no mountains. The next day, without prompting, he returned to his previous entry and extended it by recounting a personal experience that he had had in the mountains of Central America (written in September 2015; see Figure 2). In this entry, he shared an emotional experience that occurred as he made his way back to Guatemala after having been deported by Mexican immigration officials. In the entry, Marlón noted that he had made three attempts to cross the U.S.–Mexico border before gaining access; he recalled the physical challenge of hiking in the mountains but also the beauty of the landscape. Although this entry did not necessarily indicate to Ms. Rosewall an understanding of mountains as a landform in a traditional academic context, it illustrated the personal experience that Marlón had with mountains and his knowledge of geographic space along the U.S.–Mexico border, which could inform how Ms. Rosewall teaches about that topic.

Marlón’s decision to return to the topic, after initially identifying mountains as a foreign landscape as compared with his hometown, indicates a reflective thoughtfulness on his part. After considering the topic further, he realized that he had had meaningful experiences related to the topic, and he chose to share those experiences with Ms. Rosewall. It is likely that the experience recounted in this entry had been traumatic for him and something that he attributed to his positional- ity, as indicated by the end of the entry title, “por ser emigrantes” (because of being immigrants). This entry highlighted aspects of Marlón’s life experience, shedding light on his socioemotional status at the time. It also illustrated the background knowledge and experiences that he would bring to a social studies lesson that might otherwise focus solely on mountains as a landform.

**Using Free-Writes to Engage in “un Desahogo”**

Although Marlón frequently responded to the teacher-provided prompts, he also took opportunities to engage in free-writing. These free-writes tended to reflect his identity as a TEM and illustrated how he used dialogue journaling as a practice in which he could create space to reflect on experiences from contexts beyond Green Academy. The personal nature of his entries exemplified how Marlón used the dialogue journal as a socioemotional space.

One example was written a few months into the school year (October 2015) and coincided with a drastic shift in Marlón’s behavior (see Figure 3). Normally friendly and engaged, that week he had been sleeping in class and received lunch duty from another teacher for behavioral issues. Ms. Rosewall expressed concern and inquired, but he repeatedly told her that he was fine. When she collected the dialogue journals, however, she found that Marlón had written an entry about the immense sadness he felt about his upcoming birthday the following week. He wrote that he and his mother shared the same birthday and that their tradition was to celebrate together with friends and family. That year, because he was in Kentucky and she was in Guatemala, he stated, “este 6 de octubre la pasaré triste sin mi mother y me siento más triste porque no puedo darle un abrazo para su cumpleaños.” (I will spend this sixth of October sad without my mother, and I feel even sadder because I will not be able to give her a hug for her birthday.) The shift in Marlón’s behavior was likely a result of the sadness he felt about his upcoming birthday and the fact that he was away from his mother. In writing about it, he provided Ms. Rosewall with useful information that allowed her to contextualize his behavior. In this entry, he also positioned himself not just as a multilingual immigrant student but as a transnational multilingual immigrant with strong emotional connections to his home country and the individuals he left there. As demonstrated in the field note excerpt at the start of this article, Ms. Rosewall was able to acknowledge where Marlón was in his personal life after reading this entry. In her feedback, she wrote,

Marlón, I know that you are very sad that you are not with your Mom on your birthdays. You are so lucky to share this very special day with her. I hope that you were able to have a happy birthday on Tuesday. I know that your Mom will be thinking about you ALL day. I am grateful to have you as a student. Happy Birthday! —Ms. R.

Another example (see Figure 4), written in November 2015, shows a free-write entry in which Marlón wrote about his most recent border-crossing experience. In it, Marlón detailed, in writing and illustration, the physical and emotional toll of being a border crosser. In sharing about his difficult departure from his mother on his third try, he highlighted the challenges of maintaining transnational familial relationships. The entry provided insight.
In Guatemala the pass with a friend because of being immigrants

One day immigration caught us in Chamik there I met a friend but since I didn’t want to go home because it was far away it was in the middle of Guatemala my friend came and told me that I could go to his house it was a town really close to Mexico called Ajal close to the border of Mexico and he told me let’s go I’m inviting you to my house and I went he lived among the mountains and I had to walk for hours like we were never going to arrive I had already gotten tired but finally we arrived and the next day he took me to the tallest mountain there in Ajal you could see the whole town and the whole Mexican border.
into Marlón’s sense of determination and resilience. It also indicated an understanding of Mexican geography, as evidenced in his ability to name the places and river that he crossed during his travels, further illuminating the bodies of firsthand knowledge on which he drew. In her response to his entry, Ms. Rosewall wrote, “I really enjoyed your story about how you came to America. You were very determined to try coming to the US three times. I’m very glad that you are here and safe now.”

**FIGURE 3**

Marlón’s October 2015 Dialogue Journal Entry About His Upcoming Birthday, and the Translation

When I was in Guatemala my mother celebrated our birthdays but she did it really nice because she decorated. She made the invitations I went to deliver them to my family but now I can’t because I am far away. So now on my birthday and hers we’re not going to do anything because she is in Guatemala. I will spend this 6 of October very sad without my mother and I feel sadder because I can’t give her a hug for her birthday but she says if I am happy she is also happy and I also love her my Mommy a lot to know until when I will be able to give my mom and my brothers a hug.

**Invoking Familial Bodies of Knowledge**

As the fall semester progressed, Marlón continued to write personal, on-topic responses to teacher-introduced
My trip from Guatemala to United States:

The first trip I made to reach United States was the 29th of October but unfortunately immigration caught me and I was not able to reach United States they caught me in [Veracruz] but I made another trip it was the 1st of January I was really happy that I was going to cross I crossed all the Mexican states I crossed [Comitán, Tuxtla, San Cristóbal] when I was arriving to [Reynosa] immigration caught me again and deported me to my house and I didn’t know what to do but I told my dad that I wanted to make the last attempt my dad supported me but my mom did not want to when I left my house my mom stayed crying but on this trip I made it across but many things happened to me on the way that I didn’t like until I crossed the United States border there I had a really ugly accident I fell into the river and there were crocodile and I almost didn’t make it out of the river alive.
prompts. For example, one day in December 2015 at the start of class, after realizing that nearly half the class had congregated at the large windows to watch and discuss a thunderstorm that had quickly developed, Ms. Rosewall changed the journal prompt, inviting students to write about what they had been observing and discussing with classmates. In his response (see Figure 5), Marlón wrote about rain, describing the many things that he would rather do than be outside in the rain, which he noted could make him sick. As we left the classroom that day, he described having learned this knowledge about rain from his great-grandmother, who told him that getting wet from the rain “puede hacer que me duelan los huesos” (could make my bones hurt). His response showed how he had interpreted and personalized the prompt by connecting it to the immediate event, when moments before he had been discussing the loud thunder with classmates. Yet, he grounded the entry in his personal and familial bodies of knowledge and experience.

Marlón’s entry about rain also illustrated his continued desire to write in English, as evidenced by two opening statements in English: “I in” and “Wen its raining I no.” Interestingly, although some might interpret the shift to entirely Spanish after two attempts in English to indicate that Marlón gave up, the linguistic change could also reflect a sense of efficiency and understanding of the overall purpose of writing; in other words, realizing that the point of the dialogue journal was to convey his ideas and knowing that time was limited, Marlón chose to use his writing time as efficiently as possible by writing in Spanish. This entry potentially reflected a desire to write in English but also an even stronger desire to convey thinking and feelings. Marlón’s decision to focus on the narrative over the language or mechanics of his writing indicated a complex understanding of the purpose of writing, which, from his perspective, was to share his grandmother’s warning about the harm that rain can have on people. This linguistic shift could also be reflective of the way language can reflect individual development and familial connection. When talking about himself in the context of the observation, Marlón wrote in English, and in the context of the memory, his thinking and recollection were grounded in Spanish.

**Negotiating Diverse Linguistic Knowledge**

In addition to highlighting important information about his life, Marlón’s entries demonstrated how he was negotiating shifting and developing bodies of linguistic knowledge. In many entries, he engaged extensively in invented spelling that demonstrated his negotiation of both English and Spanish. His translanguaging also indicated a willingness to take risks despite initially being afraid of making mistakes, and his invented spelling reflected his developing awareness of English graphophonemic correspondences and illustrated how he was
expanding his phonemic awareness by making connections between sounds and letters to form English words. This indicates how he was using prior knowledge to develop new knowledge.

Marlón's writing indicated his shifting literacy skills not only in English but also in Spanish, as he infrequently used accent marks, tildes, and diacritics. Although at times this technically changed the meaning of his writing, likely without him realizing it, Marlón would have been understood by any fluent Spanish speaker, given the context. Marlón's invented spelling illustrated how he was negotiating a developing understanding of Spanish phonology and graphophonemic correspondences. Many of his variations reflected those considered to be common for native Spanish speakers developing basic writing skills, because they reflect sounds that are produced in multiple ways. For example, his writing reflected variations across commonly confused consonant sounds, such as the /v/ and /ll/ sounds (e.g., the Spanish word for *her, ella*, spelled as “eya”), the /bl/ and /lw/ sounds (e.g., the Spanish word for *lived, vivía*, spelled as “bibía”), and the /g/ and /j/ sounds (e.g., the Spanish word for *immigration, migración*, spelled as “mijrasión”). Such variations are not surprising given that these sounds are commonly “difficult for Spanish speakers to recognize, produce, and write” (Helman, 2004, p. 454) because the Spanish alphabet has many instances of polyvalence. It is also worth mentioning that in many languages, including Spanish, orthographic conventions are arbitrary, although the Spanish language is considered a transparent orthography in that it has a much better, albeit not perfect, fit to its spoken form.

I do not highlight these variations to disregard Marlón’s writing, efforts, or literacy knowledge but rather to illustrate that although some less agentive students may have cited their developing literacy as a reason not to write or to craft entries using entirely illustrations, an option made available to them by Ms. Rosewall, Marlón chose to take risks and to engage in communication and meaning making. In this sense, these variations are evidence of his resiliency as a literate being and an emergent multilingual; although faced with a multitude of challenges that come with learning a new language, Marlón’s participation demonstrates “the ability to persist and adapt...to persevere” (Custodio & O’Loughlin, 2017, p. 70) in writing. It is also worth noting that during other activities, I observed Marlón asking peers and Ms. Rosewall how to spell words in Spanish and English, respectively, although this occurred infrequently during the designated dialogue journaling time. Ms. Rosewall regularly encouraged students to access a variety of supplementary resources available in the classroom (e.g., picture dictionaries, high-frequency English words list), but Marlón rarely took time to utilize such materials during dialogue journaling time. Whereas some might interpret his limited use of these resources negatively, it more likely indicates an awareness of the time limitations allotted for this particular literacy practice. As such, framing his subsequent decision to focus on content over mechanics is evidence of intentionality and, thus, a strength.

**Discussion**

Via my three research questions, I sought to explore how Marlón participated in the literacy practice of dialogue journaling in Ms. Rosewall’s classroom (research question 1), what kind of meaning the literacy practice carried for him (research question 2), and how his participation reflected his identity as a TEM youth (research question 3).

**Summary of Findings**

Regarding research question 1, Marlón’s participation in dialogue journaling manifested in the form of risk-taking, both emotional and academic. In engaging in translanguaging and experimenting with languages in his writing, Marlón engaged in academic risk-taking. In sharing details about his personal traumas and challenges and his emotions about the transnational nature of his family, Marlón engaged in emotional risk-taking. His willingness to take risks was indicative of how he negotiated multiple languages in the process of developing English and how he negotiated what it meant to engage in writing. It also illustrated his understanding of writing as an inherently social process through which he could communicate his thoughts and feelings, as well as his existing background knowledge on specific topics.

Regarding research question 2, Marlón exercised agency in deciding how he wanted to participate in the practice of dialogue journaling, both in terms of the content about which he wrote and the mechanics and language he used to do so and in defining the relationship he wanted to build with Ms. Rosewall through his writing. In this classroom space, agency was a co-constructed process and set of practices; in other words, Marlón exercised agency because Ms. Rosewall facilitated the creation of a learning space where Marlón could exercise agency. In this space, he was able to share stories about his life experiences that were sometimes heartbreaking and, at other times, enlightening, but his journal entries were always informative in how they shed light on who Marlón was as a young person navigating new educational, linguistic, and personal realities. The ultimate decision to share this information, although facilitated by the parameters set by Ms. Rosewall, was Marlón’s alone. As he described himself, storytelling life experiences in writing provided him space for “desahogo” (unburdening).

Regarding research question 3, in taking risks and sharing about himself as a learner and youth, Marlón...
created a transborder writing space where he could access and traverse his diverse bodies of content and linguistic knowledge and experiences to make meaning of and engage in dialogue journaling. This transborder writing space was one of cultural and linguistic hybridity or in-betweenness, in which Marlón reflected on and showcased multiple aspects of his identity as a TEM youth. His choice to take risks was an option only because of the environment of encouragement and exchange facilitated by Ms. Rosewall and her openness toward students’ multilingualism (Linares, 2019).

In the following subsections, I discuss how dialogue journaling, as taken up by Marlón, functioned as both a sociocultural and transborder literacy practice with attention to how it facilitated student agency.

**Dialogue Journaling as a Sociocultural Literacy Practice**

Writing is an inherently social practice through which readers and writers exchange ideas, information, and feelings (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984). Yet, school-based literacy practices often do not allow TEM students equal opportunities to engage in writing, simply because teachers restrict the bodies of knowledge and skills that TEM students can access when teachers insist on a monolingual approach (e.g., Przymus, 2016). In challenging this traditional approach to teaching and engaging multilingual newcomer students, Ms. Rosewall validated and built on students’ ways of knowing and their ways with words, which facilitated participation and allowed her to uncover and assess where students were in their learning (Heath, 1983). More importantly, it allowed her to more explicitly build on students’ background knowledge in her instruction of new content and to build relationships.

Dialogue journaling is a reasonably standard writing practice in schools that has been used to encourage students to simply write (Denne-Bolton, 2013). For Marlón, this dialogic writing space opened up an important conduit between him and Ms. Rosewall for exchanging ideas, rather than serving as a task whereby he simply practiced writing for writing’s sake. As such, in some ways, Marlón co-opted the neutral school practice of journaling and turned it into something more personal. His writing suggests that for some TEM youth, there may be a desire, or at least a willingness, to participate in writing when the space offered is one where they can engage in familiar practices of reflection and retelling.

For Marlón, agency was reflected in his decision to engage in writing and to manipulate and personalize the journal prompts, which was facilitated by his decision to engage in translanguing. For students like Marlón, there is often little or no recognition of the existing language and literacy that they possess in their home language(s); instead, because those languages are not English, these students are positioned as languageless upon matriculation, which denies them of their agency as learners and literate beings (E.R. Miller, 2016; J. Miller, 1983). Although Marlón’s decision to translanguate in his writing exhibits agency, it also exhibits an awareness of the contexts in which he could enact agency. Agency is multifaceted; as such, one’s ability or willingness to enact it hinges greatly on the larger sociocultural and environmental setting and context (Gao, 2013). In Ms. Rosewall’s class, there was a general openness toward students’ use of their home language(s) that Marlón chose to accept, but was not the case across all of his classes. Research has strongly suggested that TEM students’ ability to continue valuing, if not developing, their home language(s) in tandem with English is important for their educational and socioemotional development (Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; Machado-Casas, 2009). Linguistically responsive literacy practices also afford students, particularly those who are newcomers, the opportunity to get into and learn the academic flow as they become a member of a new learning environment (Calderón, 2019).

Even though Marlón was in a formal school setting, and many of the writing prompts were curriculum-oriented, he took up dialogue journaling as a practice whereby he could share his feelings and experiences with one particular teacher. This affective dimension of writing and meaning making is often overlooked in sociocultural theories (Leander & Ehret, 2019). Therefore, Marlón stands as an important reminder of what might be lost with respect to scholarly understanding and classroom pedagogy if we default to removing affect from considerations of social practices of writing.

**Dialogue Journaling as a Transborder Literacy Practice**

Marlón’s participation was informed by his life experiences, emotions, desires, and personal background. He built on this in his dialogue journal by creating the kind of writing space that served him: a transborder space, neither formal or informal or confined to a single language, topic, structure, or particular way of knowing, in which he accessed and leveraged his diverse, formal and informal or confined to a single language, topic, structure, or particular way of knowing, in which he accessed and leveraged his diverse, formal and informal bodies of knowledge as he established himself as a learner, writer, and student. It is within and because of this space that Marlón had an opportunity to develop, collaborate, redefine, and defy societal and, one could argue, educational boundaries, particularly those imposed by labels such as SLIFE, as he forged his own space of hybridity in his dialogue journal (Bhabha, 2004; Brown, 2016). It was in this space that the intangible borders (Anzaldúa, 2012) that Marlón encountered daily could be traversed, and where he could exercise agency in deciding what he wanted to share with his teacher and how.

As a TEM, Marlón negotiated his identity in connection to location, space, and audience on a daily basis. His
ability to think, live, and produce ideas between and across languages (Canagarajah, 2013) was directly connected to his ability to read and interpret the interlocutors with whom he was interacting, as evidenced by his decision to translanguage in his dialogue journal in a setting where he knew it was supported. In being afforded a space to process out-of-school experiences using all of his linguistic resources, Marlón’s out-of-school life and informally acquired bodies of knowledge were legitimized. This was made possible by the learning environment that Ms. Rosewall created.

Skerrett (2012) called for a “transnational curriculum,” one that involves “the study of students’ evolving language and multiliteracy practices” (p. 388). Although Ms. Rosewall may not have intentionally or consciously set out to create such a curriculum, or did not realize that she did so, her openness to students’ language choices during dialogue journaling gave them an opportunity to experience some of the benefits of a transnational curriculum. She recognized and built on the powerful ways in which Marlón, as a TEM student, engaged in literacy practices in both Spanish and English for purposes of communicating “personal, social, cultural, and political goals” (Skerrett, 2012, p. 388) through a variety of collaborative, creative, and multilingual approaches.

Flores, Kleyn, and Menken (2015) called for classroom instruction that positions TEM students as capable and linguistically agile. Marlón’s journaling suggests that a teacher-valued space that is not confined to specific expectations regarding content or language facilitated the opportunity for him to create a transborder space. In this transborder space, Marlón enacted agency in his decisions to translanguage, to engage in multimodal writing, to invoke familial knowledge, and to share personal experiences that spanned cultures, nations, and languages in ways that authentically represented his multifaceted, complex identity and lived history. This suggests that his writing occurred and existed because of his ability to create and operate in such a space. Had Marlón not had the opportunity to write in a transborder space where he could play with language and share aspects of his identity, it is possible that he would not have shared as much information about himself as a person and, by extension, as a learner (Medina, 2010). Pratt (1991) argued that historically marginalized learners “need places for healing and mutual recognition, safe houses in which to construct shared understandings, knowledges, [and] claims on the world” (p. 40). For Marlón, the transborder writing space served as a safe house where he negotiated aspects of his identity and positionality as a TEM adolescent through conversations with his teacher.

**Limitations**

One limitation to this study relates to the context in which I collected data. Although Marlón made reference to out-of-school experiences, both literacy-related and otherwise, all data were gathered on-site. That said, his journal entries afforded valuable insights into his life experiences and the information he wanted to share with his teacher from outside the classroom. Another limitation is the focus on one student; however, my goal here is to provide a portrait of one student’s participation in dialogue journaling that may resonate with similar students and generate a set of potential recommendations for research and practice. Therefore, although the findings discussed are not generalizable, they serve as an example of what is possible when teachers provide low-risk, low-tech writing opportunities through literacy practices such as dialogue journaling.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This article contributes to the body of research exploring the language and literacy development of TEMs in its exploration of how Marlón enacted agency in choosing to participate through the classroom-based literacy practice of dialogue journaling. The findings offer unique insights on how academic and linguistic development did, and can, occur concurrently to socioemotional development and relationship building. Although educators and researchers often have not disputed the value of socioemotional and relationship-building components, the field has not often qualified the spaces where these processes occur as academic spaces, as illustrated in the findings of this study. As such, the findings of this research have implications for writing instruction and translanguaging pedagogies.

Through dialogue journaling, Marlón showcased his abilities as a TEM learner negotiating his changing identity, shifting bodies of linguistic knowledge, and development. By invoking bodies of knowledge acquired in both formal and informal learning spaces, in multiple languages, on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border, and across time, Marlón created a transborder writing space where he shared aspects of his identity. This transborder space was where Marlón reflected on his lived experiences and inherent precariousness of his life as someone with strong emotional ties to more than one country. In this transborder space, he communicated his feelings and ideas, tested out developing linguistic skills, and built a relationship with Ms. Rosewall.

The findings regarding Marlón and his agency are not generalizable, which is typical of most case study research (Stake, 1995); however, they provide a nuanced account of a schooling experience and literacy practice that, ultimately, was about much more than getting students to write and was responsive to TEM students’ needs. Marlón’s case—and, by extension, Ms. Rosewall’s instructional approach—provides a powerful and potentially resonant example of responsive teaching that can inform...
and expand academic understanding of the possibilities for immigrant youth enrolled in U.S. public schools, particularly those labeled as SLIFEs. Marlón’s dialogue journaling illustrates the continued need for literacy research to adopt translanguaging ideologies. It illustrates the potential for learning that can result from the use of instructional practices that explicitly seek to identify and build on immigrant students’ existing bodies of knowledge as a foundation for expressive, communicative, and meaningful literacy engagement while building students’ confidence as writers. In this way, students’ cultural and linguistic bodies of knowledge can be a resource for facilitating language and literacy development for TEM students while promoting participation.

The findings of this study indicate the need for additional research exploring how students benefit from modified traditional classroom-based literacy practices. My hope is that this article provides inspiration for future studies that look more concretely at the tangential benefits of such practices to continue reimagining what is possible when teachers maintain an open stance toward students’ continued use of their home language regardless of whether the teacher speaks or even understands that language, even if it only occurs for a limited time or during a specific activity, thus creating translanguaging spaces that are purposeful and intentional.

The nature and tone of Marlón’s dialogue journaling indicate that as a young person navigating a new transnational, sociopolitical terrain, he was eager for an opportunity to share his life stories and experiences. As one of thousands of TEM youth living and learning in the United States, he is likely not alone in needing an opportunity to decompress and unpack his experience. However, the reality is that many students in similar situations do not have access to classroom-based literacy practices that make room for this kind of reflective writing. Therefore, future research is needed to continue exploring classroom-based literacy practices that provide students with linguistically flexible, low-risk platforms.

**Final Thoughts**

At a sociocultural and sociopolitical moment in which individuals across the United States and the world continue to grapple with how to respond to the humanitarian crisis unfolding at the U.S.–Mexico border, there is a need for more research that seeks to humanize those, particularly the children and young people, who are most suffering from the violence, instability, and “shock-and-awe actions” (Meissner & Pierce, 2019, para. 1) on the border. For the sake of the thousands of youth who have entered the country through the southern U.S. border, there is a very real and urgent need for discourse that supports teachers and school administrators in understanding where students are coming from, what some of their immigration experiences have looked like, and the reasons why many of them made the decision to leave their homes and loved ones to relocate.

As unaccompanied and undocumented children and youth continue to be enrolled in public schools around the country, particularly given the reality that the majority will be placed in English-medium classrooms, my hope is that this article will help readers see that although these students’ participation may be limited or occur in languages other than English, it should be recognized as evidence that they are engaged and making tangible efforts to integrate themselves into the classroom happenings. I also hope that readers recognize that, like Marlón, many students may be hyperaware of their challenges yet, depending on their comfort level in the learning environment, still feel brave enough to not let those beliefs hold them back, which is an effort worth encouraging, celebrating, and promoting through authentic, low-risk learning opportunities and classroom activities.

NOTE

I gratefully acknowledge Michele Knobel and María Cioè-Peña for their assistance and support in the development of the manuscript.

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Submitted February 20, 2019

Final revision received May 18, 2020

Accepted May 18, 2020

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