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Erin E. Flynn

*Portland State University, erinfly@umich.edu*

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# “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, *Lanza Tu Pelo*”: Storytelling in a Transcultural, Translanguaging Dialogic Exchange

Erin E. Flynn

Portland State University, Oregon, USA

## ABSTRACT

In this study, we examined story circles to understand how the small-group activity supports and shapes the storytelling of young students in multicultural, multilingual preschool classrooms. Through a representative example, we show how language development unfolds in the context of a transcultural and translanguaging dialogic exchange of stories. We describe features of increasing linguistic complexity present in students' storytelling as they established affinity-affirming connections over ideas, shared ways of languaging, and shared ways of storytelling. By examining changes in one student's storytelling in the context of a mixed-language story circle group, we offer insights into both language development and features of the language ecology in which such changes are supported.

And one night, when the baby was sleeping. One, uh. *Una bruja* [a witch], you know. And she taked her, to a, tower. Uh. Y [and]. Every day, she brushed her hair. And, one day. A prince hidid by some bushes or something. And. And saw, what the *bruja* said. She said, “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, *lanza tu pelo*” [throw your hair]. And then he knew what to do. So he said the same thing. The end.

A multilingual preschooler in an urban Head Start center, Mariana (all names are pseudonyms) told the well-known story of Rapunzel in a small-group storytelling activity called story circles. Stories like this are short but sophisticated uses of language that demonstrate understanding of the underlying patterns of story genres used by more mature community members (Flynn, 2018b). Mariana's story contains several moments of syntactic complexity with clause complex constructions, such as “And then he knew what to do.” This kind of clausal complexity is important because it is the very type of language children encounter as future readers. Further, varied and syntactically complex language like this is associated with language learning (Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Cymerman, & Levine, 2002; Justice, McGinty, Zucker, Cabell, & Piasta, 2013). In this story, Mariana moved fluidly between English and Spanish, drawing on her full linguistic repertoire to make meaning with others. Such flexibility has been well documented among adult bilinguals who make nuanced choices in language dependent on factors such as context, audience, and the resonance of particular concepts in a language. Even young children have shown a budding situational sensitivity and a capacity for the complex hybridity of navigating a multilingual world (Bengochea, Sembiente, & Gort, 2018; García, 2011; Gort & Sembiente, 2015; Hammer et al., 2014; Kyrtziz, 2010; Soto Huerta & Riojas-Cortez, 2014). Such sophisticated hybridity is evident here in

Mariana's bilingual retelling of a classic European fairy tale. In transcultural and translanguaging moments like this, we can see how children productively reconfigure linguistic and cultural forms for their own meaning-making ends.

Translanguaging reconceptualizes the languaging practices of bilingual meaning makers, pointing out the way that children, like more mature community members, draw from a single, sophisticated repertoire of language (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). Any one child's linguistic repertoire reflects the complex array of socio-cultural experiences encountered in the home, school, and broader community. The way emerging bilinguals use language goes beyond the externally imposed boundaries constructed and maintained between named languages, such as English, Spanish, or Arabic (García & Kleyn, 2016). There is something transgressive in the hybridity, fluidity, and liminality of translanguaging in that it counters the very conventions invented to maintain hierarchy between ways of saying, doing, and being (Gee, 2014) and the people who employ such practices.

Transcultural conceptions equally recast meaning makers as harnessing an emancipatory, transgressive potential as they borrow, repurpose, and combine semiotic forms in new and complex ways that go beyond the forms' cultural origins (Pennycook, 2007). Rather than viewing children as merely subjected to the coercive, hegemonic forces of Standard American English and its attendant meaning-making imperatives, transcultural conceptions urge greater complexity. Emerging bilinguals like Mariana face powerful, well-documented, top-down pressures to conform to white, upper middle class conventions (Genishi & Dyson, 2015; Michaels, 1981, 2006; Souto-Manning, 2013; Souto-Manning, Dernikos, & Yu, 2016), and simultaneously local, bottom-up meaning making constructs new potentials that go beyond any one set of cultural forms.

We might argue that it is Mariana who appropriates a European storytelling style in the context of a locally shaped, small-group storytelling activity, although we rarely accord young children, much less children from nondominant identities, such power. In overlooking this possibility, educational researchers and educators alike miss that children make choices not only from their full linguistic repertoire but also from a larger cultural repertoire shaped, for instance, through the complex sociocultural experiences of a 4-year-old living in a multicultural, multilingual community, nested in the larger context of a predominantly white, urban context.

## Multilingual Classrooms as Sites of Potential

Multicultural, multilingual preschool classrooms are sites of potential for centering language diversities as the norm,

the language-learning end toward which all children are oriented (Genishi & Dyson, 2015). Transcultural conceptions point our attention to the moments when top-down impositions and bottom-up renditions meet, fashioning something liminal and new. The spaces, places, and practices that give rise to these moments show the potential of orienting children's language learning toward developing a more complete and complex linguistic repertoire in which all children are encouraged and supported to develop greater control of diverse linguistic and cultural forms (Genishi & Dyson, 2015).

Young children are not unaware of the marginalization of multicultural and multilingual ways of making meaning in the classroom (Michaels, 1981, 2006; Souto-Manning, 2013). They quickly become attuned to the dynamic tension inherent in a system of hierarchy maintained between named languages and other semiotic forms. Recognizing language as an instrument of power, in multilingual classrooms, students have been shown to fluidly use language to align themselves with others, negotiate the power and status of ways of using language, and juxtapose different registers and genres (Flynn, 2018a; García, 2011; Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2011; Kyratzis, 2010). Juxtaposing, aligning, and affirming affinity illustrate the bottom-up bubbling up (Pennycook, 2007) of local meaning-making practices in a hybrid space, revealing the potential of multicultural, multilingual classrooms to invite and encourage students to draw on their full linguistic and cultural repertoires, to readily blend, borrow, and repurpose cultural forms in ways that go beyond the cultural meaning-making commitments of any one group.

## Storytelling as a Resource for Transcultural Dialogue

Storytelling offers unique potential to invite a transcultural, dialogic exchange in the classroom because stories are varied in form, reflecting distinct meaning-making priorities of cultural communities (Au, 1993; Champion, 2003; Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2011; Dyson & Genishi, 1994; McCabe, 1997; Michaels, 1981, 2006; Minami, 2002; Schick & Melzi, 2010). Whether drawing on the diverse genres typical of oral storytelling in the home and community (Martin & Rose, 2008; Rothery & Stenglin, 1997) or repurposing the participants, plots, and catchphrases storied in popular media (Dyson, 2002; Paley, 1984), children make meaning from a larger, multisourced repertoire of meaning-making imperatives. Juxtaposing stories that reflect different, underlying patterns of meaning making creates a local context at a kind of crossroads of all the eclectic cultural forms that even young children have begun to interpret, internalize, and reproduce.

## Storytelling as a Resource for Language Learning

Transcultural, dialogic exchanges accord value to varied and hybrid cultural forms while harnessing storytelling's language-learning potential (Nicolopoulou, Cortina, Ilgaz, Cates, & de Sá, 2015; Rowe, 2013; Snow & Matthews, 2016). During the preschool years, emerging bilinguals' linguistic repertoire is shaped by a number of complex factors in the home and school settings, including factors such as a child's status as a sequential or successive emerging bilingual (for reviews of the literature, see Hammer et al., 2014; Unsworth, 2016). Although still understudied, research has shown that emerging bilinguals' ability with language depends on the amount (Bowers & Vasilyeva, 2011; Hammer et al., 2014), quality (Gámez & Levine, 2013; Scheele, Leseman, & Mayo, 2010), and variety of sources (Jia & Fuse, 2007; Place & Hoff, 2011) providing exposure in each language.

All young students benefit from participating in classrooms where the kind of transcultural and translanguaging dialogic exchanges, uniquely made possible by storytelling, occur. Emerging bilinguals and their monolingual peers develop more complete and complex linguistic repertoires when the sociocultural contexts in which they find themselves offer language models that use language in ways that go beyond what the students can currently do with language. Exposure to more varied and sophisticated vocabulary (Dickinson, 2011; Hoff, 2003; Weizman & Snow, 2001), hearing and using syntactically complex language (Gámez & Levine, 2013; Huttenlocher et al., 2002; Justice et al., 2013), referring to happenings that occurred in another context (Demir, Rowe, Heller, Goldin-Meadow, & Levine, 2015; Rowe, 2013), and extending utterances in the kind of multi-clause turns needed to develop an idea (Dickinson, 2011; Huttenlocher et al., 2002; Snow & Beals, 2006; Weizman & Snow, 2001) all expand children's capacity with language, leading to a more complete and complex linguistic repertoire. Storytelling occasions using language in these ways (Flynn, 2016).

## Theoretical Orientation

The study of language development in preschool students' storytelling can best be understood by describing language development as it unfolds in the sociocultural context of classroom activity, rather than as an isolated product of decontextualized language performance. Situated in two major theoretical frameworks, in this study of Mariana's storytelling, we drew on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and *trans-* theories of language: transcultural and translanguaging. Although distinct, these theoretical approaches view meaning makers as

agentic, emphasizing choice from among a larger system or repertoire of linguistic and cultural options.

Although rooted in the study of the English language, SFL is ideal for studying young children's language development in transcultural and translanguaging exchanges. SFL shows how children coordinate the resources of language to make meaning, with an emphasis on functional purpose rather than the kind of rule-based prescription central to maintaining language as an instrument of hegemony. In SFL (Halliday, 2006), speakers and writers are viewed as construing experience through choices in the grammar of language. Meaning is constructed through language as speakers make selections from the system of language, "a vast network of possibilities" (Halliday, 2006, p. 8).

From a SFL perspective, language plays a vital role in students' school learning, taking a place of centrality given that much of children's early learning involves learning language, learning through language, and learning about language (Halliday, 2006). Development in the ability to expand on an idea, develop different logical relations between ideas, and realize underlying patterned ways of deploying language are important because they enable young children to access new meaning potential as they develop a system of language from which to select when construing experience (Halliday, 2006).

*Trans-* theories of language, such as transcultural conceptions and translanguaging, illustrate how language in use in socioculturally shaped spaces goes beyond the externally imposed boundaries and rigid hierarchies used to elevate some ways of saying, doing, and being (Gee, 2014) over others. Students' stories in the classroom are transcultural as students draw on participants, practices, ideas, and stories of varied and multiple cultural groups, rather than passively recapitulating the meaning-making imperatives of one group (Pennycook, 2007). Transcultural dialogic exchanges occur when students blend, borrow, or repurpose culturally shaped meaning-making forms. Transcultural exchanges can occur in the context of a single story in which multiple culturally shaped meaning-making imperatives are combined or across stories when genres and culturally shaped storytelling styles are juxtaposed by one or more students.

The theory of translanguaging, like SFL, emphasizes choice, highlighting the hybrid language practices of multilingual speakers who interpret, process, and construct meaning flexibly using linguistic resources drawn from multiple languages and dialects (Orellana & García, 2014). Whereas SFL conceives of language in terms of the development of a system of meaning potential (Halliday, 2006), translanguaging points to the need to activate and support emerging bilinguals' full linguistic repertoire (García, 2009) in the classroom to maximize language learning and optimize the potential for bilingualism, biliteracy, and the maintenance of bilingual identities (García, 2011).

The current investigation rests on the premise that children enhance their meaning potential by developing an ever more complex and complete system of language, a full linguistic repertoire. As this repertoire develops, children evidence increasing variation and complexity in their ability to expand on an idea (story length), construe experience through different logical relations (clausal complexity), and deploy features of culturally relevant genres. To describe this development, in this study, we examined the storytelling of a multilingual preschooler telling stories in a small-group storytelling activity over the course of one school year. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How does a small-group storytelling activity that invites transcultural, translanguaging practices support language development?
2. How does students' storytelling change in length, clausal complexity, and the deployment of features of story genres?

## Method

### Context

#### The School

This study was conducted in an urban, culturally and linguistically diverse Head Start center serving primarily a mix of European American, Latino, Middle Eastern, and North African families, many of whom were relatively recent immigrants to the United States. The school made considerable efforts to reflect the cultures and languages of the students participating in the program, hiring teachers from the community and recruiting parent volunteers to participate in classroom activities. Although considerable linguistic diversity existed in the parent-reported home languages of the children, classroom instruction and much of the classroom play proceeded in English.

#### The Focal Classroom

In Mariana's classroom, the teachers, Ms. Loretta and Ms. Sofia, worked together to create an inviting environment where students of diverse ability and linguistic experience played and learned throughout the day. Ms. Loretta was adept at using a strong routine, visual displays, gesture, and shortened utterances to aid understanding for students new to an English-dominant environment. Ms. Sofia modeled translanguaging by engaging students in Spanish, moving flexibly between English and Spanish, and talking with students about the languages they spoke and the languaging practices of their parents.

#### The Students

A mixed group of 14 students learned together in Mariana's classroom. Mostly 4- and 5-year-olds, the average age in

the classroom was 4.6 years (standard deviation [SD] = 0.37 year). The majority of the students were boys (64%) in this linguistically diverse classroom. See Table 1 for a breakdown of the students' home languages.

Mariana was 4.3 years old at the time of the first story circle. A multilingual speaker who was skilled with Spanish and English, she spoke some Portuguese as well but was reluctant to use Portuguese in the classroom, perhaps because it was not a shared language. In the context of classroom instructional activities, she tended to be shy and more soft-spoken, reluctant to speak in front of the group. For instance, in the story circle activity, she told 12 stories across the 25 weeks of the activity, often choosing to listen instead. In the context of classroom play, Mariana was more bold, offering play scenarios and speaking more freely.

Mariana's storytelling offers a useful exemplar. The length and syntactic complexity of her stories were typical for this classroom of students at the beginning and end of the school year. Further, she employed rhetorical strategies common to this group of students and preschool students in another study of story circles (Flynn, 2018a), such as continuing ideas introduced by other students; retelling known stories drawn from television, movies, and literature; repeating and varying a story across more than one story circle; and telling a story first in one's heritage language and then in English (Flynn, Hoy, Lea, & García, 2019).

### Data Collection

The data in this study were generated in story circles that consisted of five or six students each. The story circles met once a week for 25 weeks, lasting from October to May. Each story circle group consisted of a group of students mixed in terms of language ability and monolingual or emerging bilingual status. Story circles began with the facilitating teacher prompting students by stating, "This is a story circle. In a story circle, you can tell a story about anything you want." After students became familiar with the activity, the prompt was no longer used. The teacher's primary role was to facilitate students' participation by helping them listen and take turns. As the year progressed,

**TABLE 1**  
Home Languages of the Study Participants<sup>a</sup> (n = 14)

Home language	Percentage
English	28.6%
Spanish	28.6%
Arabic	21.4%
Creole	7.1%
Russian	7.1%
Somali	7.1%

<sup>a</sup>Per parents' reports.

the teachers devised several prompts to help students end long stories by inviting them to “think of a good way to end the story” or “tell one more thing” or simply reminding a student that others were waiting.

In the focal classroom, a total of 237 stories were told, with students telling 16.92 stories ( $SD = 4.89$ ) each, on average, over the course of the school year. Of the 237 stories, 8.9% of them were told, at least in part, in a named language other than English. Overwhelmingly, the story circles unfolded with minimal teacher scaffolding, intentionally making space for students to shape the activity and allowing diverse storytelling offerings to be in conversation with one another without teacher evaluation. Despite this, the presence of a bilingual teacher who shared the language background of students proved especially important, as only one story was told in Arabic, despite the large presence of Arabic speakers in the story circles. An illustration of the interactional supports provided by Ms. Sofia and Ms. Loretta when working with a bilingual learner in need of additional support with language was described elsewhere (see Flynn et al., 2019).

### Transcription of Stories

All story circles were audio recorded and transcribed. Each transcription was reviewed for accuracy by a second transcriber, with differences in transcription resolved through discussion. A third transcriber, fluent in Spanish, reviewed transcripts of stories that involved translanguaging. We marked moments where the students’ language could not be determined as inaudible. We used commas to mark short pauses in students’ speech, and periods to represent longer breaks in speech. Because the young students frequently paused to gather their thinking when telling a story, we frequently divided what would constitute a grammatically expected written sentence into smaller phrasal parts in the transcription.

### Analysis

In this study, we relied on a multipart linguistic analysis using SFL to illustrate how ideational meanings were constructed in students’ stories. We then analyzed the stories in terms of length and clausal complexity to show how students advanced in the ability to extend ideas and construe experience through new and more complex logical relations. The fine-grained clausal analysis informed the analysis of story genres as stages of stories were identified through both the grammatical realization and functional purpose of clause-level ideas (for a more thorough description of story genre analysis, see Flynn, 2018b).

### Ideational Meanings

We determined ideational meanings by parsing students’ stories into configurations of participants, processes, and

circumstances. Children construe experience through participants, processes, and circumstances, as well as the way that “sequences of activities, the people and things involved in them, and their associated places and qualities” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 73) are related to one another as a story unfolds. Process types are central to an analysis of how children represent what is going on in a story. Process types include doing, sensing, saying, behaving, existing, and being as experience unfolds from happenings, such as doing things in the world; the interior experiences of thinking, feeling, and knowing; and the verbalization of activity, such as saying, shouting, or whispering (Derewianka, 2012). Participants are the doers, sayers, sensors, and behavers who engage in the process. Circumstances expand processes in terms of dimensions of time, location, manner, and cause, for example. An analysis of ideational meaning makes visible the way young children construe experience through clauses, the way those clauses relate to one another, and the way children continue ideational threads (Flynn, 2018a)—participants, processes, and circumstances—from one story to another.

A number of differences exist between the grammatical realization of ideas in Spanish and English (for a systemic functional grammar of Spanish, see Lavid, Arús, & Zamorano-Mansilla, 2010). With the more constrained range of young children’s meaning potential given the emerging status of their developing linguistic repertoires, few significant differences exist in the way students construed experiences through participants, processes, and circumstances in this sample. One notable exception, the inflectional richness of processes in Spanish (Lavid et al., 2010), allows the omission of an explicitly named participant in Spanish. For example, in the statement “*Y fuimos a tirar. Um. Bolita de nieve a nuestro carro*” (And we went to throw. Um. Little snowball at our car), the conjugation of “*fuimos*” indicates that the actor is *we*. We parsed such statements by labeling the acting participant and process, as realized in the process itself, like so:

<i>Y fuimos a tirar,</i>	<i>um, bolita de nieve</i>	<i>a nuestro carro.</i>
Actor/Doing process	Goal	Circumstance of location

Such moments demonstrate young children’s budding capacity to deploy language in ways that reflect multiple meaning-making resources.

### Story Length and Clausal Complexity

Story length and clausal complexity show the expansion of a child’s meaning potential as children advance in their capacity to expand on and relate ideas in new ways. We determined a story’s length by counting the number of main clauses in the story. We determined clauses by the

presence of a verb group, or a process and its accompanying participants and circumstances. Phrasal groups without a process, such as “the end,” were not included in the story length.

### Complex Clausal Construction

Through clause complexes, children manage the flow of information, establishing logical relations between clause-level ideas through relations of projection and expansion (Eggins, 2010). We determined clausal complexity by coding students’ stories for the presence of clause simplexes, consisting of one clause, versus clause complexes, where two clauses together formed a larger meaning. In the excerpt of Mariana’s Rapunzel retelling, “Every day, she brushed her hair” constituted a clause simplex because it consists of a single process with its accompanying participants and circumstances. “And then he knew what to do” represents a clause complex because there are two process groups, the first a sensing process which projects the second clause through a reported idea. Clausal complexity like this is important because it shows the development of new meaning potential that makes up a more complex linguistic repertoire.

In some instances, students moved fluidly between named languages in one clause complex. One instance of this was when Mariana said, “She said, ‘Rapunzel, Rapunzel, *lanza tu pelo*’” (throw your hair). Moments like this were coded as a clause complex given the presence of two process groups: one in English and one in Spanish. Here, Mariana used a verbal process that projects the second clause through reported speech. Such a clause complex construction can be grammatically realized in English, in Spanish, or in this case, by skillfully combining the two.

Given that students told stories in short clausal bursts, often breaking a single sentence into smaller phrasal parts as they thought through an idea, we coded a portion of the clause complexes based on grammatical construction and intonation even though a more prolonged pause was present. For example, we coded “When I was playing in the snow with my sister. I was making snowballs with my mom” as a clause complex given the logical relation of interdependence between the two clauses, as the first clause functions to establish the time frame in which the action occurred.

### Complex Process Construction

We also coded utterances as simple or complex on the basis of process, or verb, construction following clausal coding schemes provided by Huttenlocher et al. (2002) and Justice et al. (2013). Simple process constructions include single lexical verbs even when modified by a modal auxiliary, such as *can*, *could*, or *might*. Complex process constructions included infinitive forms with an additional process, a *let* process with another process,

gerund forms with another process, and coordinated clauses with single or multiple subjects. See Table 2 for examples of these processes.

## Story Genres

Story genres reflect the meaning-making imperatives of cultural communities (Schick & Melzi, 2010). The underlying structure or pattern of a story communicates a kind of root meaning, emphasizing the exploits of the individual in overcoming obstacles or the people, places, and things that undergird and give meaning to experience, for example. We determined story genres by identifying story stages based on the functional purpose and grammatical realization of clause simplex and clause complex constructions (see Flynn, 2018b). We analyzed stories in relation to three well-known story genres found in oral storytelling: recount, narrative, and observation.<sup>1</sup>

Recounts unfold as a series of events, moving from point A to point B. Often characterized as casting life as a journey, the prototypical recount unfolds as a distinct series of story stages:

Orientation^Events^Reorientation

with reorientation serving as an optional story stage. Recount stories have also been shown to conclude with a so-called natural ending, such as the end of a day, the return home, or the conclusion of an event (Hasan, 1984). These types of natural endings are especially common in the storytelling of young children, as reorienting events is a more sophisticated storytelling move.

In contrast, narratives, as described by Labov and Waletzky (1967), are prototypically structured as:

Orientation^Complication^Evaluation^  
Resolution^Coda

with coda serving as an optional story stage. Although recount and narrative stories both unfold through a series of events, the two are distinguished in SFL by the presence of a moment of counterexpectancy, a problem, or a complication, which constitutes the defining and signature stage of a narrative story.

Observation stories offer a slice of life, describing and commenting on an entity, a place, or an occurrence (Rothery & Stenglin, 1997). Structurally, observations unfold like so:

**TABLE 2**  
**Complex Process Types**

Complex process types	Example
Infinitive with process	“My two teeth want to come off.”
Let with process	“My mom let me have candy.”
Gerund with process	“Stop running everywhere.”
Coordinated clause	“And then she takes them and gives them money.”

Orientation^Description^Comment

Although stories are often thought to be solely event focused, more descriptive story turns, such as observations, offer an important way to construe what something was like, while evaluatively commenting on the meaning. Such descriptive turns are a viable meaning-making alternative practiced by children and adults alike (Martin & Rose, 2008). Descriptive story turns, especially deep descriptions of the people and places that give rise to experience, have been documented among more cohesion-oriented cultures, where relationships occupy a place of primacy for community members.

**Culturally Shaped Storytelling Styles**

Culturally shaped meaning-making imperatives are reflected not only in the underlying patterns evident in story genres but also in stylistic approaches to storytelling. We analyzed students’ stories for evidence of culturally shaped storytelling styles, including the presence of topic associating between spatially and temporally distinct occurrences in one story (Champion, 2003; Michaels, 1981, 2006); stories of personal experience, including joking and teasing (Au, 1993); emphasis on descriptions of people and places over temporal events (Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2011); and long, exaggerated, humorous accounts (Champion, 2003).

**Findings**

Over the course of the school year, students showed an expansion in their meaning-making potential. They told longer and more clausally complex stories as they construed experience through stories that realized different genres and fulfilled various culturally shaped meaning-making priorities. In the fall, stories told in the story circle consisted of an average of 9.09 (*SD* = 3.87) main clauses, 1.67 (*SD* = 1.64) of which were complex clausal constructions. In this first month, 18% of students’ utterances consisted of syntactically complex clauses. In the final month of the activity, students told stories that averaged 30.59 (*SD* = 16.20) main clauses, 7.77 (*SD* = 5.68) of which were complex clauses. In the final month, 25% of students’ utterances consisted of syntactically complex clauses, on average, showing an increase in both frequency and proportion of clausal complexity.

To illustrate how a classroom ecology that makes space for transcultural, translanguaging practices supports language development, we examined the storytelling of Mariana in the context of her mixed-language story circle group. Over the course of the school year, she expanded her meaning potential, refining and extending her storytelling and advancing in her ability to tell a

complete and ever more complex story. See Table 3 for average story length and complexity in the fall and spring.

Over the school year, Mariana developed key features of language, such as clausal complexity. She drew on her full linguistic repertoire, telling stories in English, in Spanish, and by flexibly combining the two. She told different genres of story and appropriated and repurposed cultural forms for her own meaning-making ends.

Mariana began the storytelling activity as many of the students in the class did, with a short statement containing a kernel of a story. Right before Mariana’s story, Daima, a 4.5-year-old, Arabic speaker from a North African family, told an extended, topic-associating story, a type of story associated with African American storytelling styles (Michaels, 1981, 2006). Daima told about playing with her sister and losing a tooth, shifting the experiential context of the story from the home, to the doctor, to the dentist, and finally home again as she connected multiple, distinct episodes into an elaborate tale in which multiple teeth were lost in “painful,” “scary,” and dramatic fashion. In part of her story, Daima said,

And then, my two teeth want to come off. And then, the new one is going to come back. And then, and then, I don’t know which of, which one of them will go. But, I didn’t try, try, try all the time. And my tooth, it didn’t comes out. And then, it comes out slowly.

Mariana responded to Daima’s story by picking up the ideational threads of “my sister” as a participant of interest and losing a tooth as a significant idea. She continued these ideas by saying, “My sister has a wiggly tooth. And she already has one growing up.” In storytelling moments like this, students extended and explored ideas of shared relevance in the classroom while establishing relational affinity, connecting to one another as people with shared interests.

**TABLE 3**  
**Fall and Spring Story Length and Syntactic Complexity<sup>a</sup>**

Story length and complexity	Overall class mean (standard deviation)		
	Mariana		Range
Story length: Fall	2.00	9.09 (3.87)	2.00–16.75
Story length: Spring	36.25	30.59 (16.20)	6.00–58.50
Syntactic complexity: Fall	1.00	1.67 (1.64)	0.25–5.25
Syntactic complexity: Spring	10.75	7.77 (5.68)	0.75–19.50

<sup>a</sup>Story length and syntactic complexity represent averages for the first and last months of participation in the story circle.



Importantly, Mariana’s short, single-event story about her sister’s “wiggly tooth” stands juxtaposed with Daima’s more elaborate, episodic story that reflects culturally shaped features that run counter to the shorter, linear accounts most valued in European American storytelling. The two distinct story turns stand as equally valid, storytelling alternatives, reflecting the transcultural potential of putting children of diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in a storytelling context together. They can connect over ideas of shared relevance, while practicing and hearing distinct ways of construing those same ideas.

It would be easy to overlook the budding sophistication in meaning potential evident in this first storytelling turn. However, in this simple, single-event story turn, Mariana laid the foundation for later storytelling turns as she described her sister’s teeth by using a clause simplex:

<b>My sister</b>	<b>has</b>	<b>a wiggly tooth,</b>
Carrier	Being process	Attribute

and also a clause complex, an element of syntactic complexity:

<b>and</b>	<b>she</b>	<b>already</b>	<b>has</b>	<b>one growing up.</b>
	Carrier	Circumstance of time	Being process	Attribute with embedded doing process

This nascent story is very like an observation story in that it orients the listener to the experiential context and describes, briefly, an entity, place, or occurrence, but the story falls short of more fully elaborating and commenting. Description is grammatically realized through the use of a being process. Even in this early story turn, Mariana included evaluation in the circumstance of time, “already,” which qualifies the described occurrence and communicates interpersonal significance. Daima told how “the new one [tooth] is going to come back,” after she loses a tooth, but Mariana’s sister “already has one [tooth] growing up.” This shows the responsive, dialogic quality evident as the two students told culturally contrasting styles of story: long, exaggerated, episodic versus short and observational, a slice of life.

After telling her initial story, Mariana chose to listen instead of telling a story over the next several weeks. Then, in early December, she told a story about playing in the snow, responding to her circle mate Amina, a primarily receptive, emerging bilingual who frequently peppered her stories with Spanish phrases and culturally relevant events. Amina finished her story about the snow with “snow make *frío*” (cold). Mariana, again, continued an ideational thread, this time telling a story about a “*bolita de nieve*” (little snowball):

*Yo ayer fuimos. Afuera de la casa. Y fuimos a tirar. Um. Bolita de nieve a nuestro carro. Después. Fuimos hacer un snow angel.*

*Y fuimos allá in un sled. The end. (I yesterday, we went. Outside of the house. And we went to throw. Um. Little snowball at our car. After. We went to make a snow angel. And we went there in a sled. The end.*

Opportunities to use one’s full linguistic repertoire served as important moments for meaning making, providing vital practice in students’ heritage language. Mariana responded not only to the idea in Amina’s story but also to her use of Spanish. The majority of stories told in a named language other than English occurred when another student or teacher modeled bilingualism, as students were more likely to tell a story in their heritage language when communicating with someone who understood the language and when it was modeled as a viable meaning-making strategy. In this story, Mariana moved flexibly between Spanish and English, naming important ideas, such as “snow angel” and “sled,” in English.

When thinking of the development of her linguistic repertoire, Mariana told stories much like the story of the “*bolita de nieve*” for the majority of the school year, as most of her stories were recounts of similar length and clausal complexity. She included more complex process constructions as she construed experience through a process and a second infinitive process form, as in “*fuimos a tirar.*” She used the conjunctions “and” and “after” to connect the clauses in additive and temporal relations.

In contrast to her earlier story turn with observational story qualities, Mariana presented a more complete story, orienting the listener and recounting a series of events. In the orientation, there was a brief moment of confusion as Mariana began with “yo” (I) but continued with “fuimos” (we went). Despite this, she successfully oriented the listener to the experiential context for the story, signaling the participants of interest and construing experience through circumstances of time and location:

<b>Yo</b>	<b>ayer</b>	<b>fuimos.</b>	<b>Afuera de la casa.</b>
Actor	Circumstance of time	Actor/Doing process	Circumstance of location

The story then unfolded through a series of three events, construed through doing processes: went to throw, went to make, and went, with circumstances of location and manner:

<b>Y</b>	<b>fuimos a tirar. Um.</b>	<b>Bolita de nieve</b>	<b>a nuestro carro.</b>
	Actor/Doing process	Goal	Circumstance of location

<b>Después.</b>	<b>Fuimos hacer</b>	<b>un snow angel.</b>
	Actor/Doing process	Range

Y	<i>fuimos</i>	<i>allá</i>	in <i>un sled</i> .
	Actor/Doing process	Circumstance of location	Circumstance of manner

Mariana concluded the story with an explicit statement signaling the end to her story turn. The story was a simple but complete recount genre of story.

Importantly, Mariana responded to Amina’s story about “*frío*” snow in a moment of thematic and linguistic continuity. When Mariana told her first story, she and Daima offered contrasting, culturally shaped story turns about an idea of shared relevance (losing a tooth), offering a model of the diverse range of ways to story any one experience. In this translanguaging instance, Mariana and Amina told stories again about the same idea of significance, playing in the recent snow. The two students did so by flexibly drawing on their full linguistic repertoires, modeling not only diverse, culturally shaped story styles but also diverse ways of languaging. Responsive ways of using language, such as translanguaging in response to translanguaging, create affinity-affirming connections between students, in this case, centering bilingualism as a vital way to say, do, and be (Gee, 2014).

Just as Mariana drew on the ideational threads of her classmates, other students continued ideas and ways of languaging that Mariana introduced. In this case, Diego, also an emerging bilingual, was lingering on the carpet, listening to the story circle. When his own story circle group went next, Diego continued Mariana’s idea. He began his story by saying, “*Una vez, cayó nieve. En la casa de David, tiramos nieve*” (One time, snow fell. In David’s house, we throw snow). Diego was a child identified as in need of further support with language in both his heritage language and English (for a report on Diego’s storytelling trajectory, see Flynn et al., 2019). In this instance, we see how opening the space for translanguaging in the classroom supported the language learning of more novice and advanced bilinguals alike as both Mariana and Diego were supported to say more than in previous story circle turns while drawing on shared experiences and shared ways of using language.

In January, Mariana told her longest and most syntactically complex story yet, retelling the well-known fairy tale Rapunzel. Emma, a circle mate who spoke English at home, had just told a long, elaborate story about a “feather elf” and a “magic fairy.” Mariana responded by telling a fairy tale of her own:

Mariana: There was. Um. A young princess. And two fathers. One day. One king. One. Um. Queen. Um. Wanted to celebrate. The. The. The, one party for their baby. Her name was. How do we say Rapunzel (with an accent) in English?

Ms. Loretta: What word?

Mariana: Rapunzel?

Ms. Loretta: Sure, you can say it in Spanish.

Mariana: One, girl that was call Rapunzel. One day, she. One day, they wanted to celebrate with lights. So, they put some lights up. And one night, when the baby was sleeping. One, uh. *Una bruja* (a witch), you know. And she taked her, to a, tower. Uh. Y (and). Every day, she brushed her hair. And, one day. A prince hided by some bushes or something. And. And saw, what the *bruja* said. She said, “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, *lanza tu pelo* (throw your hair).” And then he knew what to do. So he said the same thing. The end.

Students in the study established affinity through responsive and shared ideas, ways of using language, and in this instance, ways of telling stories. In past instances, Mariana drew on and responded to an idea introduced by other students when telling about losing teeth or the shared experience of playing in the snow. So too, she responded to ways of languaging, translanguaging in response to Amina’s story of “*frío*” snow, which in turn served as a point of departure for her classmate Diego’s story of throwing snow, which he told in Spanish. This time, Mariana responded to a type of story, telling a fairy tale in response to her friend Emma’s fairy tale. In moments like this, one can almost imagine Mariana saying, “I know a fairy tale, too,” dialogically connecting with classmates as they establish for themselves the ideas, ways of languaging, and ways of telling stories that had relevance in their classroom community.

Interacting with a monolingual English-speaking teacher, Mariana sought support to ensure understanding. She pronounced Rapunzel with an accent and asked how to say it in English, showing an awareness of Spanish and English as distinct while attending to the needs of an English-speaking audience. The teacher responded by affirming that Mariana could say the word in Spanish. Such instances show how students and teachers midway through the school year were still negotiating viable and valuable ways to make meaning in the classroom.

Mariana’s story was much longer and clausally complex, revealing a much more sophisticated meaning potential when retelling a known story versus construing her own experience. Not including the conversational aside with Ms. Loretta, Mariana’s story was 15 clauses long, five of which were complex clauses with multiclausal constructions or complex verb forms. Her syntactically complex clauses were varied in form, including complex verb constructions:

<b>They</b>	<b>wanted</b>	<b>to celebrate</b>	<b>with lights.</b>
Senser	Sensing process	Doing process	Circumstance of manner

saying processes with quoted speech in which she moved fluidly between English and Spanish:

<b>She</b>	<b>said,</b>	<b>“Rapunzel, Rapunzel, lanza tu pelo.”</b>
Sayer	Saying process	Verbiage

and sensing processes with a projected idea:

<b>he</b>	<b>knew</b>	<b>what</b>	<b>to do.</b>
Senser	Sensing process	Goal	Doing process

This type of varied and syntactically complex language plays a key role in language learning and marked a leap forward in Mariana’s storytelling, such that the participants in her stories were now thinking and speaking, rather than Mariana simply recounting what occurred. Storytelling moments like this illustrate what it means in practical terms to develop one’s meaning potential (Halliday, 2006), as the participants in Mariana’s story were now feeling and thinking participants, rather than just doers.

We see an expansion in Mariana’s linguistic repertoire not only in the way she used complex processes and clausal forms to more fully flesh out thinking and speaking participants but also in the more transactional exchange of multiple participants complicating, evaluating, and resolving events. It is a more complex task to index and coordinate multiple participants in this way. This type of coordination of multiple participants is typical of narrative stories, which structurally unfold through a complication, evaluation, and resolution in the middle stages. Grammatically, the complication, evaluation, and resolution are prototypically realized through shifting participant roles. In this story, Mariana constructed the complication through the *bruja* taking Rapunzel to the tower. Events were evaluated by indicating the extent of Rapunzel’s confinement as she brushed her hair “every day.” When the prince overhears and then repeats Mariana’s version of the well-known phrase “*lanza tu pelo*,” an implied resolution occurs as the prince now “knew what to do.”

In an important transcultural, translanguaging moment, Mariana appropriated and repurposed a European fairy tale in her bilingual retelling. Young children are often cast as passive recipients of cultural forms, especially of the culturally shaped practices of the dominant group. We take for granted that children are as able as more mature community members to borrow and recombine cultural forms, fashioning meaning-making moments that go beyond the rigid hierarchies maintained

between cultural and linguistic forms. For instance, *una bruja* served as an important ideational thread in the classroom, especially among the Spanish-preferring students who incorporated this character in their stories and play throughout the year. Mariana’s story continued and amplified this idea as a central part of the classroom culture in another affinity-affirming moment that aligned Mariana not only with her monolingual close friend, Emma, but also with her Spanish-preferring classmates and with the translanguaging practices of bilingual speakers more broadly. Mariana was not simply passively repeating a European fairy tale but also strategically constructing a story that affirmed her affinity to others in complex ways.

A few months later, Mariana continued to alternate between telling short stories and patiently listening, not wanting to tell a story. In an unusually cold winter, there was another major snow that blanketed the community and once again filled the students’ stories with tales of playing in the snow. Amina began the story circle with a story about a snowman who throws a snowball at a human, which quickly turns into a horror movie-like scene. Jason, a 4-year-old who spoke English as his primary language, followed with a story about a snowball fight with family and building a snowman. In the story circle interaction, Mariana received the encouragement of Ms. Sofia, who modeled and normalized bilingualism in the classroom throughout the school year and in the story circle interactions:

- Ms. Sofia: Little sister. *Dime*. (Tell me.)
- Mariana: (Inaudible) when everyone else is around.
- Ms. Sofia: *¿Tu me quieres decir?* (Do you want to tell me?)
- Mariana: When I was playing in the snow with my sister. I was making snowballs with my mom. And then. One of. One of my friends came. We threw the snowball at her car. And we went sledding in a sled. The end.
- Ms. Sofia: OK. Thank you. Good job.

The continuation and expansion of an ideational thread offered another opportunity for students to exchange stories that differ in features of genre and cultural imperatives as they drew on experiences from the home in a transcultural dialogue. Amina started her story by borrowing a convention from European fairy tales familiar to many young children: “Once upon a time.” Amina drew on features of horror stories as ghost snowmen multiply after being eaten by hungry penguins. In contrast, Mariana told a recount story of everyday events experienced in the home with family and friends, reinforcing

affinity through shared ideas while juxtaposing culturally shaped forms.

Mariana very nearly retold her previous story, as many students did at some point during the course of the school year. Emerging bilinguals who retold the same story frequently told the story in their preferred language first (Flynn et al., 2019) and later told the story in English, just as Mariana did here. This may serve as one way for students to strengthen their ability in a weaker language by building on stories told in a preferred and more familiar language first.

**English translation of earlier story:**

I yesterday we went. Outside of the house. And we went to throw. Um. Little snowball at our car. After. We went to do a snow angel. And we went there in a sled. The end.

**Story retelling in English:**

When I was playing in the snow with my sister. I was making snowballs with my mom. And then. One of. One of my friends came. We threw the snowball at her car. And we went sledding in a sled. The end.

Although Mariana’s story is another recount story of similar length and syntactic complexity to her previous stories, there are signs of a developing linguistic repertoire. She construed the events through clause simplex constructions. However, she began her story with a clause complex construction, common to story orientations in this sample: “When I was playing in the snow with my sister. I was making snowballs with my mom.”

<b>When</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>was playing</b>	<b>in the snow</b>	<b>with my sister.</b>
Conjunction of time	Actor	Doing process	Circumstance of location	Circumstance of accompaniment

<b>I</b>	<b>was making</b>	<b>snowballs</b>	<b>with my mom.</b>
Actor	Doing process	Goal	Circumstance of accompaniment

In her original story, Mariana used the doing process, “*fuiamos*,” to say, “we went,” but never indicated who constituted the “we” in the story. Compared with her first version of the story, she included a number of circumstances indicating the time, location, and accompaniments for the events that unfold, demonstrating a much higher level of specificity in her storytelling.

In the spring, the teachers’ roles in the classroom shifted somewhat such that Madison, a monolingual English-speaking aide, began to lead the story circles on her own while Ms. Sofia worked with students on small-group activities carried out concurrent to the story circle activity. This seemed to be an important shift, as Mariana did not tell additional stories in Spanish, although she continued to speak Spanish in the classroom when

communicating with Ms. Sofia or occasionally in play with other Spanish-preferring students.

In the following weeks, Mariana told a couple stories that reprised her first story about her sister losing a tooth. As with the repeated snowball story, she was able to expand on her earlier story, telling a longer and more complete accounting over time. In seemingly simple storytelling moments like this, we see visible growth in Mariana’s meaning potential, as earlier renditions of an idea that consisted of a kernel of story were now more fully developed:

Um. My sister. First she lost a tooth. At. At home. She lost two tooth. And then at daddy’s she losed. She losed one tooth. And today. She losed. Um. There’s two wiggly teeth on her.

On this occasion, Mariana, the patient listener and thoughtful responder, initiated the idea that Jason continued in a story about a “tooth doctor” and that Amina amplified through a topic-associating story about the “tooth fairy” and a “black tooth.” In a moment reminiscent of the very first story circle in which Daima and Mariana told stories about a shared idea through juxtaposing culturally shaped storytelling styles, Amina told a topic-associating story that relied on an underlying associative logic that unites distinct episodes with an implicit thematic link. Her story draws on culturally shaped storytelling styles, which prioritize long, exaggerated, playful, or funny stories over more linear, temporal accounts typical of European American storytelling.

Amina began her story by saying, “If you look at the tooth fairy. She will explode. And if you give the black tooth to the tooth fairy. She will explode. And throw up. And she only likes white tooth.” She went on to associate a series of thematically related events about her sister Yvette’s black tooth, her sister Jenny’s quinceañera, the loss of her own tooth after eating “one true candy,” and in the end, a situation in which the tooth fairy confuses chocolate and gold coins.

Absent the evaluating voice of teachers who have been shown to mischaracterize diverse storytelling styles (Michaels, 1981, 2006), especially stories that rely on associative or circular logic, the students’ diverse ways of storying stood in conversation. In drawing on diverse genres and culturally shaped styles, the students’ stories created moments of transcultural exchange as students told and heard stories reflective of the diverse meaning-making priorities of family and community life.

In the final two months of the storytelling activity, Mariana’s storytelling became much longer and syntactically complex. It was common in the sample for students to continue at about the same level of performance for a prolonged period before making a large leap forward in length and complexity. In a typical story during the final months of the activity, Mariana followed a student’s story about “a bigger bird” and “bird nest”:

Um. Once upon a time. I was on the floor. And I saw my sister. And then. I stood up. I went. I walked. And then. I saw. A pond. I walked around it. And I went back home. I saw my sister in the house. Sitting in her bed and she was playing. So. I told my sister. If we could go to the park. And we went to the park. And then. Um. I told my mommy. That we were coming back on my phone. And then my sister talked on her phone to her friend. Ana. And then we walked back home. We walked. To the movie theater. And we ate at home. Some popcorn. And we went to bed.

And the other day. We went. Um. I saw my sister playing gymnastics. At home. When. I woke up. And then. Mommy. Saw a bird in the window. She blew. She blew it and it made a flute for her. And then. I gave a bird a chew. And the birdie gave me. Some boot. Some sparkly purple boots. And then. My sister. Gave. The. The birdie. A skirt. And the birdie gave my sister a butterfly skirt. And then. Teacher Madison came over. She saw the birdie. And she gave it. Butterfly antennas. And she. And the birdie gave her butterfly antennas.

And then. I. I went to the park with my sister. And we found out. That the birdie was magical. And then. We walked a little farther. And the birdie flew a little farther. We walked. Behind. And the birdie walked in front. And then we ran. The birdie tried to catch up. And then when we got home. We can't. We closed the door. And the birdie got in through the window. We closed the window before it came in. And. And we locked all the windows except. We closed the door but we didn't. One window so we, so we could. So we could see the birdie. And we keep the door locked so nobody bad could come in. And then.

Ms. Madison: Mariana, tell one more thing, OK?

Mariana: When we saw. Outside. We saw a car. And we saw who the car. And then we remembered. It's a black car with us. The end.

Ms. Madison: The end. Beautiful story.

In the final months of storytelling, Mariana continued to draw on the ideational threads introduced by other students in the circle. Her stories in the final months of school also combined her everyday experience with elements of the fantastic, which is typical in fairy tales and folkloric traditions. This turn in Mariana's storytelling, in which she began each week to combine the real and fantastic, marked a departure from her previous storytelling, in which she retold a known fairy tale and primarily recounted everyday events with small moments of evaluation and little exaggeration.

This story of the magical "birdie" unfolds in three parts. In the first, Mariana recounted an everyday excursion to the park with her sister, which unfolds as a series of events. In previous months, such a recount-type story would have constituted Mariana's entire storytelling turn.

The story takes a magical turn when Mariana's mother "saw a bird in the window. She blew. She blew it and it made a flute for her." A series of exchanges occur between the bird and Mariana, her sister, and the teacher. Including

teachers and classmates in stories became a popular affinity-affirming strategy in the final months of the story circle activity as students not only included and expanded one another's ideas but also included one another as well.

In the third part of the story, having encountered this bit of magic, the girls return to the park with the magic bird. They eventually return home and attempt to keep the bird out of the house but still visible. The everyday encroaches again as Mariana commented, "And we keep the door locked so nobody bad could come in."

In this longer story, Mariana construed experience by drawing on the underlying logic of narrative stories with complications and resolutions, especially in the third part of the story. Again, we saw Mariana managing the more complex task of indexing and coordinating multiple active participants. In this instance, Mariana and her sister return to the park following the now realized magical bird and ultimately run away as the bird gives chase and is narrowly locked out of the house by the girls. Locking the door "so nobody bad could come in" is a familiar scene in many books and shows, including fairy tales in which protagonists often seek refuge in the home from the so-called wolf at the door. This was another moment when Mariana drew from a cultural storehouse to repurpose and combine meaning-making elements for her own ends.

The expansion of Mariana's linguistic repertoire is clear from the length and syntactic complexity of the story. The story of the magical "birdie" is 53 clauses long, 12 of which are clause complexes of varying constructions. As before, she used complex process constructions such as a clausal circumstance of time:

<b>We</b>	<b>closed</b>	<b>the window</b>	<b>before</b>	<b>it</b>	<b>came in.</b>
Actor	Doing process	Goal	Conjunction of time	Actor	Doing process

Mariana also included clause complex constructions with relations of purpose:

<b>And</b>	<b>we</b>	<b>keep</b>	<b>the door</b>	<b>locked</b>
Conjunction of addition	Agent	Causative process	Token	Value

<b>so</b>	<b>nobody bad</b>	<b>could come in.</b>
Conjunction of purpose	Actor	Doing process

Here, Mariana interconnected two clauses in a consequential relation with the conjunction, "so." In previous stories, she established relations between clauses that were additive or temporal. In this story, she included logical relations, which she had previously only used when

telling the known story of Rapunzel. This shows how children advance in their ability to construe different relations between clause-level ideas using the resources of language in more complex ways, an everyday example of an expanding meaning potential.

Mariana's storytelling offers a powerful illustration of the way young students' storytelling develops over time in the context of a routine, small-group storytelling activity called story circles. Through repeated engagement with construing experience with classmates, students develop a budding capacity to expand on ideas, relate ideas in new relations, and try out different cultural forms, such as different story genres, storytelling styles, and ways of languaging. These ways of using language occur in the context of dialogic exchange where students juxtapose culturally shaped meaning-making imperatives, borrowing, repurposing, and cleverly recombining storytelling elements for their own meaning-making ends. Their stories surface the expanding meaning potential of their developing linguistic repertoires, unfolding in an affinity-affirming, dialogic exchange of shared ideas, ways of languaging, and ways of telling stories.

## Discussion

In this article, we combined transcultural and translanguaging theories of language to show how young students draw from a larger cultural and linguistic repertoire that goes beyond the rigid divisions and hierarchies maintained between named languages and attendant culturally shaped meaning-making imperatives evident in things such as story genres and storytelling styles. We used SFL to describe how students construe experience through ideas, packaged together through larger logical relations, and ultimately the underlying patterns evident in different genres of story.

How does a small-group storytelling activity that invites transcultural, translanguaging practices support language development? In moments like when Daima or Amina told long, topic-associating stories that stood in juxtaposition to Mariana's more spare stories of experiences in the home, important, although often overlooked, transcultural exchanges occurred in the classroom. So too, when Mariana appropriated a classic European fairy tale in a bilingual retelling, it showed how young students can reconfigure cultural and linguistic forms for their own meaning-making ends and, in doing so, pointed to the potential of multicultural, multilingual preschool classrooms as spaces for centering linguistic and cultural diversity as the norm toward which all students' language learning might be oriented (Genishi & Dyson, 2015).

Transcultural conceptions point our attention to the moments when top-down impositions and bottom-up renditions meet, fashioning something liminal and new.

Multicultural, multilingual preschool classrooms stand in this dynamic tension between the hegemonic pressure of white, Eurocentric ways of languaging and the bottom-up, bubbling up (Pennycook, 2007) of local meaning making informed by varied cultural and linguistic repertoires. Story circles harness this dynamic tension by making space for students to hold the floor, center their own meaning-making imperatives, and juxtapose different cultural and linguistic forms as they co-construct an ideational fabric unique to their classroom culture. As they do so, they make important affinity-affirming connections.

How does children's storytelling change in length, clausal complexity, and the deployment of features of story genres? Examining language development in the context of sociocultural classroom activity shows how young students expand their meaning potential as they develop more complete and complex linguistic repertoires. Over the course of the school year, Mariana and her classmates advanced in their ability to extend an idea by telling longer stories.

The students managed the flow of information, packaging ideas in more complex logical relations as students like Mariana moved from clause simplexes, logically related through additive and temporal relations, to increasing clausal complexity, using projection and expansion to construct larger meanings. Changes in meaning potential are evident in moments when Mariana's stories were filled with thinking and speaking participants engaged in transactional exchanges. From a SFL perspective, clause complex relations function to make new meanings possible by construing experience through logical relations. We saw this meaning potential realized in the differing intentions of the magic bird that tries to get in the house, while Mariana and her sister lock the door "so that nobody bad could come in."

Students in this study, and another study of story circles (Flynn, 2018a, 2018b), told stories of varied story genres and culturally shaped storytelling styles, showing the way they drew from a larger cultural repertoire of multiple meaning-making imperatives. The root meaning of a story is carried by the underlying pattern of an individual overcoming obstacles, everyday events cast as a journey, or an observational slice of life given significance through an evaluative comment. Mariana construed experience by using a range of story genres, moving from a short, kernel of an observational story, to simple but complete recounts of everyday experience, to more complex narrative stories that borrowed from folkloric traditions in combining the imaginative and the everyday. Over the course of the year, she deployed language in multiple underlying patterns of meaning making that successfully managed the expectations of her circle mates by doing things such as orienting listeners to the experiential context and bringing events to a close in predictable ways. She demonstrated increasing specificity in

the way she construed events for an audience of students who had not shared the experience.

## Implications

All students gain when exposed to multilingual classrooms. If students stand in a dynamic tension between hegemonic forces that homogenize the ways that they construe their experiences and linguistic and cultural repertoires that go beyond any one named language and any one cultural set of meaning-making imperatives, how do we best support students in harnessing the productive potential of spaces and practices where more than one way of making meaning meets? How do we center going beyond as the language-learning foundation on which preschool education rests?

## Theoretical Innovations

Just as *trans-* theories of language show the way hybridity fashions something liminal and new in everyday meaning making, aligning and recombining distinct theoretical orientations in ways that go beyond the theories' origins yields fertile insights for understanding the language learning of young students anew. Viewing *trans-* theories of language and SFL as complementary rather than competing powerfully illuminates a language-learning promise in ways that go beyond what any one theory of language makes evident.

To realize and replicate the potential of transcultural, translanguaging dialogic exchanges, early childhood teachers need an openness to, awareness of, and active encouraging of the multiple ways to make meaning that students bring to the classroom. Teachers need to know and value the multiple story genres, culturally shaped meaning-making styles, and languages that make up the linguistic and cultural repertoires of the students they teach. Given that less than 10% of the stories were told in the heritage languages of the students in this study, strong supports, modeling, and active encouragement are needed to support bilingual storytelling.

The strategic coupling of *trans-* theories of language and SFL bring to teachers' awareness the complexity in what seems simple by showing how students coordinate the resources of language. When Mariana said, "She said, 'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, *lanza tu pelo*'" (throw your hair), it was a moment of 4-year-old linguistic sophistication. She construed experience through a complex clausal construction, while translanguaging, in the fulfillment of an underlying pattern of language practiced by more mature storytellers—a clever bilingual appropriating of cultural forms that responded dialogically to her friends' invented fairy tale. Young students construct these moments of meaning together. SFL and *trans-* theories combine to show how, in ways that are vital for supporting teaching practice oriented toward cultivating diverse, sophisticated ways of languaging in the classroom as the norm.

## Culturally Relevant Practices

Story circles set a foundation for language learning animated by the meaning-making imperatives of communities of color. Story circles draw from the black activism of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (Michna, 2009; O'Neal, O'Neal, Hofmann, & Rao, 2006) and resonate with indigenous knowledge creation and cultural forms as practiced in talk circles (MacLean & Wason-Ellam, 2006). Story circles are dialogic, power-sharing activities that center students' experiences and surface and support their linguistic and cultural repertoires. The activity centers collaborative, collective sense-making over individualistic, competitive achievement, offering a departure from white, Eurocentric, upper middle class norms and expectations.

Story circles also draw on the foundational commitments of early childhood education to sociocultural and constructivist approaches. Early childhood education has long relied on modes of instruction in which teachers create routine situations that provoke students' thinking and active exploration, rather than positioning students to passively receive and parrot isolated bits of information, decontextualized from a meaningful context. As top-down academic pressures continue to cast students from lower socioeconomic families as at risk and unready, teachers need a repertoire of practices that build from the intellectual, linguistic, and cultural repertoires that all students bring. Making active, social, and reciprocal teaching practices routine creates a culturally relevant classroom context where students are unrushed and have time for relationships and learning to develop.

## Recursive Educational Policy

Recursion in educational practice calls for a move away from linear conceptions of learning that overemphasize the new. Instead, recursive models recognize the value of meaningful repetition, envisioning curriculum as a kind of progressive spiral in which learners advance by engaging over long periods of time, "revisiting, reflecting, and actively constructing understanding in the context of their accumulated knowledge and experience" while participating in "communal activity and sharing of perspectives and cultures" (Cullen, Harris, & Hill, 2012, p. 51).

Recursion operated on multiple levels in this study. Mariana and her circle mates engaged in recursive learning as they revisited, constructed, and shared differing perspectives and culturally shaped stories throughout the school year, progressing over time through their important repetitions. Drawing on story circles, as a teaching activity, is an act of recursion by repeating a past practice in a new context while making a critical return to ways of organizing instruction that counter white, Eurocentric orientations to teaching and learning.

Applying a recursive stance to educational policy means recovering the value of past practice, drawing on the wisdom of diverse cultures and perspectives, and deepening our understanding of accumulated knowledge and experience. As a research and policy community, we must stand at the eclectic crossroads not bent on maintaining the dominance of one set of meaning-making imperatives over others but actively seeking the unexpected intersections and building an early childhood system attuned to the diversity and sophistication that young students bring. Otherwise, students will continue to stand in the tension where top-down and bottom-up meaning making meet, capable of drawing on diverse repertoires but limited to those that are accorded the most value in educational spaces.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> SFL recognizes a wide range of story genres, including anecdote, which relays a remarkable event and reaction, and exemplum, which relays an incident and a moral judgment or interpretation (Martin & Rose, 2008). The present analysis has been limited to recounts, narratives, and observations because these types of stories have been documented in the storytelling of young students (Flynn, 2018b).

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**ERIN E. FLYNN** is an associate professor in the Department of Child, Youth, and Family Studies at Portland State University, Oregon, USA; email [flynn2@pdx.edu](mailto:flynn2@pdx.edu). She is an educational researcher who specializes in language and literacy development during the early childhood years, with an emphasis on the social, emotional, and linguistic power of storytelling.