

Chapter 1

New Teacher Spotlight: Considering Student Groupings for Productive Talk

Speaking and listening play critical roles in literacy development. In fact, language is central and mediates all children's learning. Emergent bilingual students need ample opportunities to talk in the classroom. These opportunities are best accomplished when the teacher intentionally organizes a variety of grouping experiences (e.g., pairs, small groups, large groups, strategic seating arrangements by language). Purposeful ways of grouping students enable and promote translanguaging.

When grouping students, there are a variety of considerations, such as each child's expressive language (how talkative the children might be), their personalities, their relationships to each other, their language proficiency, their areas of need, their interests, etc. For instance, regardless of the program the students are in (general education, bilingual education, or English as a New Language), you may want to form partnerships with students who speak the same language for one activity, while for another activity you may pair a strong Mandarin speaker with a Mandarin speaker who is just developing this language practice (see page 12 for our definition of language practice). In the first instance, you may group students who exhibit an equal command of the same language when you want students to delve deeply into the topic through their talk. At other times, the grouping might be created because you need to teach a specific reading strategy lesson. It is important to highlight that for students to engage in rich talk with their partners about a particular topic, they should do so in the language they feel most comfortable using.

It is important to keep groups flexible throughout the year, as well as strategic and intentional. Students no longer remain in the same rigid leveled group for an entire year (yellow birds, blue birds, red birds, etc.). At the core of grouping students is the teacher's understanding of the whole child, including his or her linguistic practices (Velasco & Espinosa, submitted)

Talk in the classroom flows from teacher to student, from student to teacher, and from students to audience. While that flow often happens organically, it is important for you to plan out those interactions with intentionality. We provide the following questions to spur your curiosity and reinforce your commitment to supporting all the students in your classroom.

- When you speak to emergent bilinguals, how do you model language and how do you capitalize on your and their entire linguistic repertoire?

- How do you extend their understanding through your responses?
- How do your questions help emergent bilinguals to elaborate more?
- Regardless of who's speaking to whom, do you invite emergent bilinguals to use their entire linguistic repertoire?

All of these teaching moves can incorporate translanguaging depending on the student and your objective. In addition, you can provide students with different opportunities to communicate with you and with others.