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From Principal to Author: Nurturing Multilingualism in Children

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During my tenure as a principal working with multilingual learner (ML) students, I discovered that using bilingual texts was a productive method for learning English. These texts offered the unique advantage of empowering ML students to become teachers of their language for their English-speaking peers, fostering improved collaborative skills and creating a more multilingual learning environment.

When the pandemic hit, I turned to writing children's books as a retired principal. I began writing stories tailored to my granddaughter's interests and self-published them on Kindle Direct. This period of isolation became my "pen"demic. I wrote the book, *Arthur Becomes an Author*, which outlines ten steps for children to write their own books. I invited a kindergarten group of ML students to draw the illustrations for the text. This exercise helped them connect the text to their drawings, and their fellow students provided feedback by listening and looking for what was missing in the illustrations. This not only encouraged the students but also invited parents to celebrate how their children were learning English through writing.

When I visited schools to read my books, I noticed that the ML students were only exposed to the English version. This sparked the idea of demonstrating respect for and the value of other languages by incorporating side-by-side translations in my books. My first bilingual book titled, *José Moves Today*, encapsulates the experience of speaking a language in a neighborhood where people may not comprehend your words. The protagonist, José, learns English and volunteers to teach his classmates Spanish, creating a setting where all students become bilingual. In the bilingual books featured on my

website, the left page presents the English version, while the right page offers the Spanish translation. Students can hear and see both languages as they read together.

During a visit to an ESOL classroom to read my bilingual book, I read the English text while the teacher read the Spanish text. Smiles, expressions of surprise, and understanding of the story radiated from the students. The confidence shone through comments made during our reading session, and their responses to questions in a combination of English and Spanish, showcased comprehension and the building of vocabulary in English and Spanish.

It is crucial to have children's books translated into different languages. Having different versions to read strengthens vocabulary development, comprehension, fluency, and confidence. When both a ML and English-speaking student share reading of the same bilingual story, they begin to teach each other and can learn another language. This process can cultivate multilingualism, a superpower for all the learners.