

## **Biliteracy and Latinidad: Catholic Youth Group as a Site of Cosmopolitan Identity Building**

**Authors :** Natasha Perez

**Abstract :** This autobiographical narrative inquiry explores the relationship between religious practice, identity, language and literacy in the author's life experience as a second-generation Cuban-American growing up in the bilingual spaces of South Florida. The author describes how the social practices around language, including the flexibility to communicate in English and Spanish simultaneously, known as translanguaging, were instrumental to developing a biliterate cosmopolitan identity, along with a greater sense of Latinidad through interactions with diverse Latinx church members. This narrative study involved cycles of writing, reading, and reflection within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space in order to discover the ways in which language and literacy development in the relationship between the personal and the social, across time and space, as historically situated phenomena. The findings show that Catholic faith practices have always been a source and expression of Cuban-ness, a means of sustaining Cuban identity, as well as a medium for bilingual language and literacy practice in the author's life. Despite lacking formal literacy education in Spanish, she benefitted from the Catholic Church's response to the surge of Spanish-speaking immigrants in South Florida in the 1980s and the subsequent flexibility of language practice in church-sponsored youth groups. The faith-sharing practices of the youth group created a space to use Spanish in more sophisticated ways that served to build confidence as a bilingual speaker and expand bilingual competence. These experiences also helped the author develop a more salient identity as Cuban-American and a deeper connection to her Cuban-ness in relation to the Nicaraguan, Venezuelan, and first-generation Cuban identities of my peers. The youth group also fostered cosmopolitan identity building through interactions with pan-ethnic Spanish speakers, with Catholicism as a common language and culture that served as a uniting force. Interaction with these peers also fostered cosmopolitan understandings that deepened the author's knowledge of the geographical boundaries, political realities, and socio-historical differences between these groups of immigrants. This narrative study opens a window onto the micro-processes and socio-cultural dynamics of language and identity development in the second generation, with the potential to deepen our understanding of the impact of religious practice on these.

**Keywords :** literacy, religion, identity, comopolitanism, culture, language, translanguaging

**Conference Title :** ICREV 2023 : International Conference on Religion, Education and Values

**Conference Location :** Miami, United States

**Conference Dates :** March 16-17, 2023