Linguistically & Culturally Responsive Reading Conversations

UNDERSTANDING AND FOSTERING CHILDREN'S READING ENGAGEMENT

2 October 2026

Joane Durate, Charlie Robinson-Jones, Alice Chik, & Huachen Wang
Macquarie School of Education

"I liked sharing my Italian language with them [peers]."
(Ludovica, aged 9, Italian, Australia)

"I felt really good [about using my home language] because I didn't really use my home language at school before."
(Alicja, aged 10, Polish, Netherlands)

Why Linguistically & Culturally Responsive (LCR) Reading Conversations?

MONOLINGUAL BIAS IN FORMAL READING EDUCATION & ASSESSMENT

- Monolingual assessment frameworks in formal reading education often give an *incomplete picture* of learners' reading skills (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; García, 2020)
- This can perpetuate deficit framings such as labelling learners as "struggling readers" (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021, p. 469)
- One overlooked area in practice is *reading engagement* (Lee et al., 2021; McGeown & Conradi Smith, 2024)
  - linked to improved literacy, empathy, well-being, and reduced impact of low SES on achievement (Clark & Teravainen-Goff, 2018; Eekhof et al., 2022; Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020)
- Learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires are increasingly recognised in literacy research (Turner et al., 2022; Wouters et al., 2024) , but little is known about how teachers *assess and support reading engagement through them* in practice
- We asked: how might our understanding of learners' reading engagement change if we recognise and capitalise on their linguistic and cultural resources, and what implications might this have for supporting reading engagement across languages and cultures?
  - *Linguistically & Culturally Responsive (LCR) Reading Conversations* – a low-stakes (i.e. no grades) Assessment *for* Learning approach – to help teachers explore learners' behavioural, cognitive, affective, and social reading engagement while drawing on their home languages and cultural backgrounds

Rethinking reading engagement

A LINGUISTICALLY & CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LENS

TABLE 1 | Reading engagement dimension definitions from monolingual and linguistically and culturally responsive perspectives.

Engagement dimension	Definition from a monolingual perspective (based on Lee et al. 2021; McGeown and Conradi Smith 2024)	Linguistically and culturally responsive definition
Behavioral *What I do when I read*	Time spent reading (frequency and duration) and text types read	Time spent reading (frequency and duration) and text types read, including texts in home languages and/or texts that are culturally specific or universal
Cognitive *How I think when I read*	Cognitive effort and implementation of cognitive strategies to improve comprehension (e.g., re-reading)	Cognitive effort and strategies that also draw on home languages to support comprehension (e.g., translating unfamiliar words), such as through metalinguistic and cross-linguistic awareness (e.g., recognizing similarities and differences between languages, such as cognates–e.g., Dutch: *appel*; English: *apple*)
Affective *How I feel when I read*	Emotional response to the text (e.g., empathizing with a character or how reading makes an individual feel)	Emotional responses to texts and experiences of reading when texts are also in home languages and/or are culturally specific or universal
Social *How I share reading with others*	Sharing and discussing texts with others	Sharing and discussing texts with others, including texts in different home languages and that are culturally specific or universal, using home languages and/or the language(s) of schooling

- **Pedagogical translanguaging:** learners fluidly mobilise all linguistic and multimodal resources (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; García, 2020)
- **Linguistically and culturally responsive teaching:** languages and cultures as assets (Gay, 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2013)
- **Funds of knowledge / identity:** out-of-school knowledge and skills are valid assessment evidence (Esteban-Guitart, 2012, 2023; González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Veerman et al., 2023;)

What is a Reading Conversation?

- **Reading Conversations** complement formal reading instruction and assessment by engaging learners in dialogic, formative discussions organised around three interconnected areas that align with the four dimensions of reading engagement (Lee et al., 2021; McGeown & Conradi Smith, 2024; SLO, 2024):
  - **Reading skills** (cognitive): “How would you go about reading this book?”
  - **Reading environments** (behavioural and social): “Where do you like to read, and with whom?”
  - **Reading preferences** (behavioural and affective): “How do you feel when reading fantasy books?”
- Differs from *shared* or *dialogic reading*, which includes reading aloud (Batini & Toti, 2024), whereas Reading Conversations often do not
- Can be used with individual learners, small groups, or whole classes, and conducted as often as teachers or schools consider appropriate

LCR Reading Conversations & the Assessment *for* Learning cycle

MACQUARIE University
SYDNEY·AUSTRALIA

LCR Reading Conversation:

a teacher-facilitated dialogue that elicits learners' self-reported reading strategies (e.g., re-reading and translating unfamiliar words), reading environments (e.g., where and with whom they read), social reading practices (e.g., discussing or sharing texts with others), and reading preferences (e.g., genres and languages) beyond the school context, providing insights into their behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social reading engagement across languages and cultures. (Robinson-Jones, Abdul Hussain, et al., 2026, p. 4)

TABLE 3 | Example Assessment for Learning cycle (Feedup -- Feedback -- Feedforward) for Linguistically & Culturally Responsive Reading Conversations.

	Where am I going? (Feedup) *Learning intentions and success criteria*	How am I going? (Feedback)	Where to next? (Feedforward)
Teacher	To understand what learners do (behavioural), how they think (cognitive), how they feel (affective), and how they share reading with others (social), across all their languages and cultures, to make reading more engaging and support their growth as readers	"When you shared your ideas about the story in Mandarin Chinese, you explained your thinking clearly and helped the group understand what you noticed about the story. You also connected the story to your own experience – great work!"	"Next time, choose one part of the story that stands out to you. Tell us how it makes you feel and connect it to something you have experienced or recognise from your own culture. You can use English, your home language(s), or both to explain your ideas."
Peer	To learn what you do when you read, how you think when you read, how you feel when you read, and how you share reading with others, while recognising your languages, cultures, and experiences To help make reading more fun and help you grow as a reader **I can...** • talk about my reading habits – where, when, how often, with whom, and in which languages I read • describe a way I used or would like to use my home language and the language(s) of schooling to understand a text, like looking for similar words in both languages • explain what I liked or didn't like about a book (in any language) and why, and how it reminds me of my life, family or culture, using my home language, the language(s) of schooling, or both • share my ideas or recommend books in/using my home language, the language(s) of schooling, or both	**Activate learners as learning partners:** "When you talked about the character visiting their grandmother and told us about visiting your grandparents in China, I understood why that part of the story was important to you. It helped me think more about the character and their family. Next time, you could see if another part of the story reminds you of something from your life, family, or culture. If it does, you could tell us about it in English, Mandarin Chinese, or both!"	
Learner		**Activating learners as owners of their own learning:** "I read at home in Mandarin Chinese and English. Mandarin Chinese helps me enjoy the story, but in English I wasn't sure about some words. The story also reminded me of something from my family, so I wanted to talk about it. Next week, I'll choose one new English word from my reading. I will try using Mandarin Chinese, a dictionary, or the words around it to help me work out what it means. Then I will use the word to talk about the story."	

(based on Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wiliam & Thompson, 2007; CCSSO, 2018)

The pilot study: Australia and the Netherlands

- Co-designed LCR Reading Conversations through participatory design research (Robinson-Jones, 2026; Robinson-Jones, Duarte, et al., 2026)
- **7 teachers, 38 learners (aged 4–11), 4 primary schools**
  - Netherlands (2024): 5 teachers, 27 learners, 3 schools, including a newcomer school for learners still learning Dutch
  - Australia (2025): 2 teachers, 11 learners, 1 school in Sydney
- About 20 home languages (e.g. Arabic, Polish, Thai, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, and Japanese)
- **Most teachers did not share learners' home languages**
- Small groups of 2–4 learners, two rounds: language of schooling only, then LCR Reading Conversations
- Data: video observations, learner Exit Tickets and interviews, teacher self-reflections

Source: Robinson-Jones, Abdul Hussain, et al. (2026)

Implementing LCR Reading Conversations

1. **Before (Feedup):** collect baseline data (e.g. the Reading Engagement Scale; McGeown & Conradi Smith, 2024), choose 1–2 focal dimensions and set learning intention, group learners based on language background, reading proficiency, etc., and select diverse texts
2. **During (Feedup + Feedback):** state the learning intention; use open-ended prompts (Hulan, 2010)

   Responses such as “I don’t have any books at home” or “Nobody reads with me” count as valid assessment evidence that can be used to open up an asset-based conversation (*funds of knowledge*/identity; Moll et al., 1992)
3. **After (Feedback + Feedforward):** short, concrete next steps tied to engagement dimensions (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

When the teacher does not speak or understand learners' home languages

- **Three scenarios:** (1) teacher shares learners' home language(s), (2) learners share a home language(s), (3) mixed-language groups
- Strategies when the teacher doesn't share the home language(s):
  - Peer discussion in the home language, then report back in the language(s) of schooling
  - Bilingual books, visuals, gestures, drawings
  - Translation apps (check accuracy first)
  - Learners as experts in their own language and culture
  - Learners *choose* when to use home languages

Source: Robinson-Jones et al. (2026)

Case Study (Sydney)

MACQUARIE University
SYDNEY · AUSTRALIA

USING BILINGUAL BOOKS TO ENCOURAGE CROSS-LINGUISTIC REFLECTION

- Two 9-year-olds, Ludovica (Italian) and Madee (Thai). Teacher is a monolingual English speaker with basic Italian.
- Bilingual Italian-English book (Sagolski, 2023): Ludovica reads the Italian, Madee reads the English translation
- Ludovica links *adoro* to *I love* and *l'autunno* to *autumn* (Admont, 2020), making connections between languages (cognitive engagement)
- **Worked:** bilingual texts enabled peer and teacher interaction; Italian became a shared focus language
- **Challenge:** limited home-language proficiency
- **Feedforward:** more bilingual texts; scaffold cross-linguistic awareness to improve reading comprehension

Ms Callaghan:	What was the title of that book that you were reading?
Ludovica:	*Sotto le stelle*, which means *Under the stars* [book by Sagolski, 2023]
Ms Callaghan:	*Under the stars*. Are there any words that you think it looks a bit like the word that means the same thing in English?
Ludovica:	I recognise "stelle" as "stars" and "le" I recognise that as "the". But "sotto", I don't really ... I don't really see how that's "under".
Ms Callaghan:	So, it doesn't ... It's not similar. Are there any words that are similar? Was there one about autumn that you were going to look at as well [book by Admont, 2022]? What do you notice about that?
Ludovica:	Well, I can see "adoro" as "I love", because you think of like, "I adore autumn", so "adoro" and "l'autunno". I can see how that means autumn, so I can pretty much understand the title.

Voices from the classroom

MACQUARIE University
SYDNEY·AUSTRALIA

Learners

- “I felt good because I was heard and I find it really important to be heard.” (Lara, aged 9, Turkish, Netherlands)
- “I felt a little scared because it was my first time reading in Japanese at school, but then I felt happy” (Kenji, aged 9, Japanese, Sydney)
- Alicja set a goal to read as many Dutch *and* Polish books as she can

Teachers

- Richer understanding of learners’ reading preferences and engagement
  - “Having conversations like these … would be beneficial for class teachers to keep their finger on the pulse regarding student preferences” (Ms Taylor, Sydney)
- Teachers gained confidence facilitating LCR Reading Conversations without sharing learners’ home languages
  - “I have really learned that children really appreciate being able to speak in their own language, even if I don’t know it. I'm going to do this more often!” (Ms Al-Haddad, Netherlands)

Moving forward

- **Take-aways**
  - LCR Reading Conversations can reveal aspects of learners' reading engagement that may stay hidden in monolingual approaches
  - May support sense of identity, well-being, and belonging, and benefit *all* learners (reading engagement, language awareness, and intercultural understanding)
  - Teachers do not need to speak or understand every language in the classroom, but learners' languages and cultures should be an integral part of how we recognise and support learners as active readers.
- **Limitations:** preliminary, small-scale pilot findings from observation and self-report
- **Future work:** validate and refine the framework; extend beyond primary years; make the approach more inclusive of sign language and braille users; study effects on reading engagement over time; compare monolingual and LCR Reading Conversations

References

Scan the QR code to read the article and for the reference list!

The Reading Teacher

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN PRACTICE OPEN ACCESS

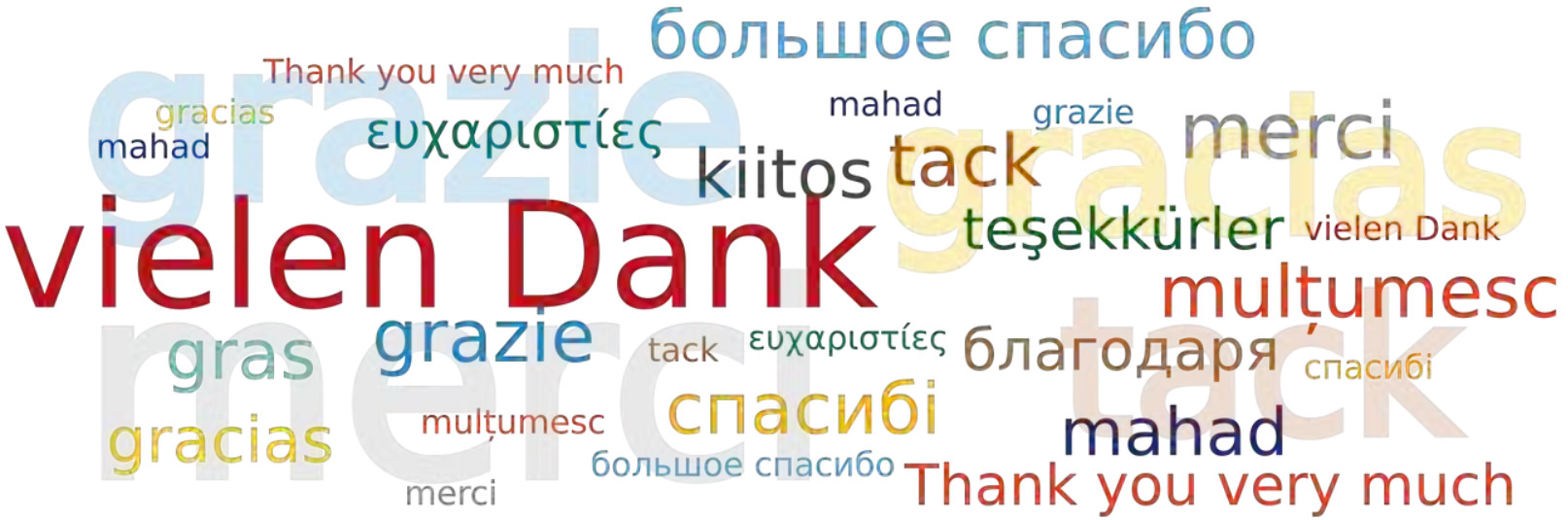
Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Reading Conversations: Understanding and Fostering Children's Reading Engagement

Charlie Robinson-Jones[1,2,3] | Doaa Abdul Hussain[3] | Jude Callaghan[4] | Onno Visser[5] | Mirthe Stevens[5] | Hua-Chen Wang[2] | Alice Chik[2] | Joana Duarte[6]

[1]Center for Language and Cognition Groningen, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands | [2]Macquarie School of Education, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia | [3]Professorship on Multilingualism & Literacy, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, Leeuwarden, the Netherlands | [4]Primary school, Sydney, Australia | [5]ASKO scholen, Amsterdam, the Netherlands | [6]Department of Teacher Education, Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands

AI for Language Teachers

A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE DESIGN

This is a Coursera Course, designed by the Macquarie University Team especially for language teachers! For more information, please use the QR code.

Thank you for listening!