

In this book, we focus on the academic or formal language and literacy across content areas required for school success, and our work is aligned with state-mandated content and language-development standards. But we also look at the social or informal oral and written language that our students use with family and friends outside the classroom. This holistic, sociocultural view of language and literacy as communicative practice encourages teachers to build on the ways students use language and literacy at home and in their communities as a means of developing the oral and written language they need for school success.

Literacy research and practice has long been dominated by a monolingual perspective, surprisingly even in bilingual programs. Recently, however, an encouraging shift has begun to occur in language and literacy education to a multilingual perspective (de Jong, 2011; Escamilla et al., 2010). Thus, in contrast to the once widespread practice of labeling students who are developing bilinguality in dual-language programs as either “English-dominant” or “Spanish-dominant,” more and more educators now refer to all students involved in developing bilinguality as “two-language learners” (Escamilla, 2000) or “bilingual learners” (de Jong, 2011), the terms we use interchangeably throughout this book. These educators see bilingual development as a dynamic, holistic process that stands in contrast to the static notion reflected in the terms “English-dominant” and “Spanish-dominant.” Furthermore, they recognize that many bilingual learners use languages in ways that challenge these traditional labels. These students come from homes and communities in which English and Spanish together or in combination with one or more other languages are used orally and in writing for a wide range of purposes.

Educators who take a multilingual perspective look at the two (or more) languages each student speaks as complementary, comparing these students with other bilingual learners and viewing their use of more than one language as an asset. They place these students in bilingual classrooms that can take advantage of their multilingual resources, and they use assessment practices that accommodate the two languages. Most important, they view these students as learners who use their knowledge and skills in both languages for learning.

In contrast, educators who take a monolingual perspective look at the two languages each student speaks as separate and compare the students to monolingual speakers in each language. These educators generally see the students’ use of a second language as a deficit and label their performance in both languages as “low” (Escamilla, 2000). They place these students in a single-language literacy class in the language they determine is “dominant” and assess them only in that language.

The following incident reflects a question heard often in the field today, and it brings into focus some of the negative consequences of a monolingual perspective on bilingual learners. This incident occurred in a graduate bilingual certification course for bilingual teachers.

One of the teachers, Samuel, brought an example of student writing to class and asked his classmates for help. One of his 1st grade students, María, had written “*Voy a una party con mi broder*” as part of a language experience activity. Samuel wondered whether María has fully developed her home language and asked his classmates, “How can I teach her when she doesn’t speak either of the two languages well?” Several classmates questioned

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figures prominently. The scientific method, show-and-tell, persuasive essays, church sermons, and free-style rap are all examples of genres. The structure of the language used within a genre is relatively stable within a speech community, which makes it comprehensible to members of that community. The ways that genres are structured linguistically reflect the cultural contexts of which they are a part.

whether María was even in the right program. Some argued that since María's Spanish isn't good to begin with, perhaps she should be placed in an all-English program.

Biliteracy teachers who look at this example from a multilingual perspective do not see María's code-switching, that is, her use of both English and Spanish within the utterance, as a deficit. Rather, they see it as evidence of "translanguaging," of her taking advantage of and using all her available linguistic resources (García, 2009). These teachers value and build on the language resources and linguistic creativity evidenced in their students' use of two languages, and they make space for it.

## *The Bridge and Bridging*

Teaching for biliteracy has three parts: Spanish (or one of the two languages) instruction, the Bridge (both languages side by side), and English (or the other language) instruction. The Bridge occurs once students have learned new concepts in one language. It is the instructional moment when teachers bring the two languages together to encourage students to explore the similarities and differences in the phonology (sound system), morphology (word formation), syntax and grammar,<sup>4</sup> and pragmatics (language use) between the two languages, that is, to undertake contrastive analysis and transfer what they have learned from one language to the other. The Bridge is also the instructional moment when teachers help students connect the content-area knowledge and skills they have learned in one language to the other language.

The Bridge is a simple but powerful concept: with strategic planning, the Bridge allows students who are learning in two languages to strengthen their knowledge of both languages. The Bridge is a tool for developing metalinguistic awareness, the understanding of how language works and how it changes and adapts in different circumstances. An important aspect of the Bridge is that it is two-way. It goes from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish. It recognizes that because bilinguals transfer what they have learned in one language to the other language, they do not have to learn content in both languages, even when they are tested only in English. For example, if students study math only in Spanish, the Bridge provides opportunities for them to attach English to that math content without relearning the math concepts and skills again in English.

For many years in the United States we have taught students to keep their two languages separate. One reason for this practice is to avoid devaluing Spanish, which often occurs when English comes into Spanish learning time. While the potential for devaluing Spanish and thus limiting students' ability to reach deep levels of learning in Spanish is a consideration that must be addressed, keeping the two languages separate has had the unfortunate effect of emphasizing to students that what they know in one language cannot be used in their other language. We have also assumed that students have engaged in contrastive analysis on their own. But not all students know, for example, that pairs of words like *energía*–energy are cognates. Recent research has shown that bilingual students who receive instruction in how their two languages are similar and different engage more regularly and successfully in cross-linguistic transfer, the application of a skill or concept learned in one language to another language, than do bilingual students who do not receive such

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<sup>4</sup>Syntax and grammar refers to the word order within sentences (how sentences are constructed) and the rules governing this word order, as well as other rules describing a language.

phasis on this skill. Another distinct difference between cultures is revealed in how poetry is used in social gatherings. In many Spanish-speaking countries, the ability to *declamar* (recite) poetry from memory with appropriate intonation and emotion at gatherings where there is music and poetry, such as family celebrations or New Year's Eve parties, is highly valued. This use of poetry, which crosses socioeconomic levels and reflects the strong story-telling tradition of many Spanish-speaking countries, rarely occurs in gatherings in the United States.

In the United States, literacy skills are closely tied to the demands of the workforce and the technology that is available. Learning to write and organize original ideas and go through the “writing process” is a very common expectation in schools in the United States. Brisk and Harrington (2007) state that in the United States, the writer is expected to make the text clear to readers. In contrast, according to Escamilla and Coady (2001), Spanish narrative writing is divergent, often switching from one topic to another and then returning to the first topic.

As these few examples reveal, because of differences in context and expectations, literacy practices that work in English in the United States may not work in Spanish, and Spanish literacy practices from Spanish-speaking countries cannot necessarily be applied in the United States. Furthermore, both languages are used differently in different regions, social classes, and social groups.

Students enter school with background knowledge and experiences stored in overlapping linguistic reservoirs. The strategic use of two languages in content and literacy instruction, including the teacher-guided Bridge, is the best way to take advantage of these resources. Once bilingual students have a solid grounding in a particular content area in one language, they can transfer this knowledge to the other language by the Bridge.

### *Creating Bilingual Units of Instruction: A Biliteracy Unit Framework*

Teaching for biliteracy requires the strategic use of Spanish and English. Literacy instruction should ensure that students acquire listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in Spanish and English across content areas. This book is anchored in the strategic use of two languages, organized in a biliteracy unit framework. That framework has three parts: (1) learning new concepts and literacy skills in one language, (2) the Bridge where both languages are side by side, and (3) extension activities in the other language. (See the template for the biliteracy unit framework on pp. 16–17.)

In the first part, which includes planning and teaching in one language, students learn the concepts. The teacher chooses the curricular theme and accompanying big idea drawn from learning standards in the areas of math, science, language arts, and social studies. For example, for a 1st grade social studies class, the theme might be The Family with the big idea, “We all have families, but each family is unique.” The teacher develops language and content targets related to the theme, language targets in Spanish for the instruction delivered in Spanish, and language targets in English for the instruction delivered in English, which she teaches and assesses throughout the unit. She initiates the unit in one language (Spanish or English) and develops new concepts using authentic tasks for reading and writing. If the policy for the school in the preceding example is to teach 1st grade social studies in Spanish, all instruction before the Bridge would be conducted in Spanish. The teacher focuses first on speaking and listening, creating a comprehensible context by building on and developing students’ background knowledge and vocabulary.

She focuses next on reading comprehension and writing, often integrating the two. She then addresses and teaches the discrete skills needed to read and write, such as word study and fluency.

The second part is the Bridge, the moment when students compare the concepts in two languages. Once the students have learned and expressed the curricular language and concepts, the relevant words and phrases are written on a chart in Spanish and English, side by side. Next, students and teachers engage in contrastive analysis of the two languages.

In the third part, students engage in extension activities conducted in the other language using listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Taking the key concepts and language identified during the Bridge, they apply their learning from one language to the other language. In our example, the 1st grade students would apply the words and concepts about the family they learned in Spanish to activities in English.

During the instruction, teachers must plan their use of language carefully to ensure that they are strategic in their use of the two languages. Students, using all they know in all their languages, may switch back and forth between Spanish and English at any time. Their switching is a normal developmental process. But language use for teachers is different. Before the Bridge, teachers should choose Spanish only or English only for teaching a particular unit and ensure that they know the academic words in the language they choose. In teaching the unit, they should use language supports, such as word banks and sentence prompts, to help students develop the academic language they need in the unit.

The Bridge is student-centered. During the Bridge, the teacher visually places the two languages side by side, first guiding students to communicate what they have learned, for example, in Spanish about the family, and making a list of terms. The teacher and the students then generate the equivalent of those terms in English. The amount of teacher involvement in this first step of the Bridge depends on the students' level of knowledge in the other language. For students who are beginning to learn English, the teacher will provide the English terms; for students with an intermediate or advanced level of proficiency in English, the teacher will encourage the students to provide the English terms for many of the Spanish concepts. The second step of the Bridge is the contrastive analysis, during which students compare how their two languages work. The similarities and differences they explore and identify are captured in the Bridge anchor charts they create during the Bridge. These bilingual charts highlight the words and linguistic features studied during the Bridge, and they remain in the classroom so students can continue to refer to them. The formal, planned Bridge occurs only after students have learned the concepts and language that have been taught in a particular unit and are ready to engage in contrastive analysis. Bridging, in contrast, is informal and unplanned. It occurs every day whenever students, reading and writing in Spanish or in English, compare and contrast their two languages on their own and with the Bridge anchor charts they made in previous units.

### *Planning for Biliteracy at the Classroom Level from the Learner's Perspective*

All biliteracy programs should have a well-articulated language and content allocation plan that tells students and teachers what is expected. The allocation plan facilitates the tasks of designing schedules and making decisions about what literacy components are used and in which language, and it helps teachers determine when and how to Bridge. In instances where there is no allocation plan, teachers may find

## Biliteracy Unit Framework: Template

Content area:

Language in which this content area is taught:

Theme/Big idea:

Language allocation for this grade:

Standards:

\_\_\_% Spanish; \_\_\_% English

Content targets:

Language targets

- Spanish:
- English:
- Cross-linguistic:

Summative assessment:

**Building Oracy and Background Knowledge**

Language of instruction: \_\_\_\_\_ (This language is maintained until the Bridge; the other language is used in the Extension Activity.)

Language resources, linguistic creativity, and cultural funds of knowledge:

Building background knowledge:

Formative assessment

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**Reading comprehension**

**Formative assessment**

**Writing**

**Formative assessment**

**Word study and fluency**

**Formative assessment**

**Summative assessment**

**The Bridge: Strengthening Bridges between Languages**

**Formative assessment**

Language of instruction: Spanish and English

**Extension Activity**

**Formative assessment**

Language of instruction: \_\_\_\_\_ (the other language)

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**BOX 3.1. Sample Teacher Self-Reflection Survey**

	Strongly agree		Strongly disagree	
<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BACKGROUND</b>				
1. I know and understand the research that supports initial literacy instruction in Spanish for Spanish speakers in the United States.	4	3	2	1
2. I know and understand the factors that affect literacy development.	4	3	2	1
3. I have studied (been trained in) best practices for teaching literacy in Spanish.	4	3	2	1
4. I have studied (been trained in) best practices for teaching literacy in English.	4	3	2	1
5. I feel comfortable teaching literacy in Spanish.	4	3	2	1
6. I have the materials I need to teach literacy in Spanish.	4	3	2	1
7. I understand how differences in student cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds affect literacy development.	4	3	2	1
8. I understand how to differentiate literacy instruction to meet individual student needs.	4	3	2	1
9. I understand how oral language development influences literacy development.	4	3	2	1
10. I understand how children develop biliteracy and how the two languages intersect.	4	3	2	1
11. I know how to use formative and summative assessments to inform my teaching and for communication to other stakeholders.	4	3	2	1
<b>LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND</b>				
1. I am orally fluent and literate in Spanish.	4	3	2	1
2. I have a college-level command of oral and written academic Spanish.	4	3	2	1
3. I have the Spanish academic language required to teach the grades or subject matter for which I am currently responsible.	4	3	2	1
4. I have access to the resources necessary to develop the academic language required to teach the grades or subject matter for which I am currently responsible.	4	3	2	1
5. I feel most comfortable speaking and writing Spanish in academic situations.	4	3	2	1
<b>AWARENESS OF STUDENT BACKGROUND</b>				
1. I know the country of origin of each of my students or of his or her parents.	4	3	2	1
2. I have assessed the linguistic abilities of all my students in both English and Spanish.	4	3	2	1
3. I have assessed the academic achievement of all of my students in both English and Spanish.	4	3	2	1
4. I understand and respect my students' oral language use, even when they may differ from my own or from "conventional" Spanish.	4	3	2	1
5. I understand two-language learners.	4	3	2	1

teachers agree that they want to create a program that meets all their student needs, and after reading our student profiles and completing the survey in Box 3.1, they realize they have misunderstood students who are like Paulo and Hannah and that they must make a special effort to understand each of their students and avoid making assumptions. They agree that they want to create a program that accommodates their students rather than requiring the students to assimilate into the program. The