

## Podcast Part 2: Literacy Development in Bilingual Settings

**Host:** Welcome to this two-part podcast hosted by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). We are here with Melissa Escalante, Lead Management and Program Analyst from OELA. Today we will be listening to a conversation about effective literacy instruction for multilingual learners.

In part I of the podcast Dr. Laurie Olsen from Sobrato Early Academic Language and Aloise Miller from Seidlitz Education discussed and answered questions about literacy development and literacy instruction in English only educational contexts.

In this part of the podcast Dr. Kathy Escamilla, Professor Emerita at the University of Colorado will discuss literacy development in bilingual settings. Her presentation will be followed by a brief Q&A moderated by Grace Delgado and featuring Dr. Ana DeGenna, Associate Superintendent of Educational Services at Oxnard School District.

Please note that in this podcast the terms “English learners” and “Multilingual learners” are used interchangeably and refer to the population of students defined as English learners in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act.

Let’s get the conversation started...

**Melissa Escalante:** Hello and welcome back! We enjoyed the discussion on literacy instruction for multilingual learners being served in English-only contexts in the first part of this podcast. In this part we are excited to hear about approaches to literacy instruction in dual language and bilingual instructional settings. Dr. Escamilla is going to talk about what is involved in developing literacy instruction in bilingual settings and how this benefits multilingual learners. So, I’m going to turn it over to Dr. Kathy Escamilla now.

**Dr. Escamilla:** I want to start by spending a few minutes talking about the need to develop a bilingual pedagogy, specifically a pedagogy that understands the anthology of bilingualism, especially in young learners, a pedagogy that understands how two languages interact, as Laurie said, and converges and challenges what we've been doing for years and years, which Jim Cummings calls the two solitudes assumptions in English constructed programs and programs of bilingual education. Effective teaching and biliteracy context requires a bilingual pedagogy. This is not an argument for a single program model, but all models need to understand that it involves the development of two or more languages and includes instructional practices that utilize two languages across the curriculum. Bilingual pedagogy, by definition, involves a dual language assessment system that examines academic outcomes, disaggregates data in meaningful ways, and is assets-based in its orientation. Finding out what kids know one can do in assessing what they have learned. Just as important, it examines the benefits of developing bilingualism and biliteracy using socio cultural and social emotional lenses for examining outcomes of biliteracy schooling. Biliteracy pedagogies include frameworks for language allocation and language of instruction. But they move beyond that. It doesn't do us any good to have a language allocation plan that says we're going to teach 30 minutes in English and 30 minutes in Spanish when we haven't defined the quality of instruction we're looking for in those two languages.

In other words, ineffective instruction in two languages, even if it's 30 or 45 minutes a day, is not going to help. Biliterate pedagogies also include instructional practices that teach for self-esteem, cultural pride and social justice, and that address language status and xenophobia. So what is involved in developing one of these pedagogies that is not involved in an English monolingual pedagogy?

Bilingual pedagogies go beyond teaching in two languages. They intentionally teach children how to connect their two languages by providing explicit opportunities for students to make cross-language connections. Importantly, bilingual pedagogies use methods that are specific and authentic to each of the target languages. They do not assume a universalist one size fits all pedagogy. If foundational skills are taught in Spanish, they should be authentic to Spanish. And the same with English. Biliterate pedagogies use, as I said, dual language assessments. And these are assessments that are done in two languages and look for what children can do. So now I'm going to give you an example of one research based and research tested biliteracy approach. I'm going to talk about Literacy Squared only because it's the model that I am most familiar with which we have implemented over the past two decades, and has involved about 4500 children, 500 teachers, and has been implemented in about ten states.

Okay. This is the holistic biliteracy framework with some of you have probably seen the framework puts Spanish and English side by side as a symbol to equalize the status of two languages side by side. The framework intends to promote a pedagogy that connects Spanish and English environments. There's no reason why we can't be reading bilingual books and talking about how they're different, using themes that incorporate both Spanish and English. It's a bilingual pedagogy which intentionally understands the convergence of two languages and uses them strategically and intentionally instruction. Researchers such as James Britton have posited that reading and writing flowed on a sea of talk. And yet our current educational system allows precious little time for oral language oracy development. Oracy in two languages is a critical part of a biliterate pedagogy.

How many of us have been in classrooms where teachers go “Shh, it's language time”? This developing literacy in both languages, using methods that are authentic and valid for each language. Many of you have asked, “so what is the role that phonics and foundational skills play”? Phonics has an important and strategic role in the development of biliteracy. But phonics is included and meant to be taught in all four of the quadrants, oracy, reading, writing, and meta language, and should be about 25% of the instructional time in Spanish and literacy based English language development. The beauty of a biliterate pedagogy is that many of the foundational skills taught in one language transfer to another, as in the case of Spanish and English, and therefore need not be taught. Teaching and assessing acquisition of kind of foundational skills should be authentic again to each language. I am saying that over and over and over again because we see too many programs that are translated from English into other language and we are disappointed at the results.

So now we're going to move from the framework to a biliterate teaching strategy. And the strategy I'm going to present is that one small part of literacy of the literacy squared biliteracy

framework, but an example that helps us to see how theory is translated into practice. The strategy is called The Dictado.

The Dictado is a culturally relevant strategy, and it was adapted from a strategy frequently used in Central and South America. The lessons are short, no longer than 20 minutes, and are done three times a week. One week in Spanish and one week in English. But I want to emphasize they are not the same Dictado they are developed according to what children need in Spanish and what children need in English. In a short, 20 minute lesson teachers can teach decoding skills, spelling, structural elements. They can reinforce content, and they can engage in metalinguistic development. As a reminder, meaning is at the center of this strategy, and this teaching is always contextualized around other things that children are learning. So in planning lessons, teachers identified their teaching points for each Dictado with regard to skills and content.

I want to say a final point about developing a biliterate pedagogy, and it's kind of a new way of thinking about cross language transfer of skills and strategies. That is the idea that language conversion is a better way of thinking about language integration rather than transfer. If we think about transfer, and I've done work in this area and I know it's a very popular and common term, but it implies moving something from one place to another one. For example, if you transfer money, you take it from one account in the bank and you transfer it to another, meaning it's no longer available to you in the account that you took it from. If you transfer from one bus to another one, the first bus is also no longer available to you. Contrast that with the idea of integration or synching, which means that you are adding on and not transferring. The example is your iPad, your iPhone, and your laptop. All your devices are available to you at one time biliterate pedagogies are about synching and integrating two languages. And this fits perfectly with the idea of a bilingual anthology. Just because we are on one device does not mean we cannot access information stored in another. And the theories of translanguaging also fit very well into this framework.

Now, it's important for us to know that Literacy Squared is not the only framework out there. I used that because it's the one that obviously I'm the most familiar with. But I would like to give a shout out to two colleagues around the country who are also doing this very important work. They include Dr. Jose Medina and his C Six Biliteracy Framework, Doctors Karen Beeman and Cheryl Uru in Illinois and their Center for Teaching Biliteracy, Dr. Alejandra Guillamo at Atajou Solutions, and of course, my dear friends and colleagues, Dr. Sue Hopewell and Jody Slavic at Literacy Squared. Collectively, they are doing social justice work within bilingual and biliterate frameworks, and we need to emphasize the potential of these programs for improving literacy and biliteracy as we move forward.

I want to say one thing. It's enough. I don't hear very many people who are saying, Gosh, gee, this is wonderful, but we can't possibly do it. We need to figure out how to do it. If we're losing generations of emerging bilingual kids who come to school speaking two languages, those ought to be our teachers who can implement our biliterate pedagogies of the future. If we just put our minds to it. So finally, I want to say — so why aren't monolingual pedagogies and theories sufficient?

We should be informed by monolingual English frameworks. They are helpful and we need to be informed by them. But they are insufficient in the development of biliterate pedagogy. Using the metaphor of a bicycle and a tandem bicycle helps us to understand the limitations of monolingual pedagogies. Learning to ride a bike means we have to learn to pedal, steer, balance. And this certainly overlaps with learning to write a tandem bike. However, the caveat is that learning to ride a tandem bike requires mounting, balancing, coordinating, and communication with another person in addition to learning to pedal, steer, and balance. The effect of two riders changes the experience in meaningful ways. We would argue that the effect of having two languages in one brain also changes language acquisition, academic learning, and literacy teaching and learning in ways that require biliterate and bilingual theories.

Monolingual theories help but are insufficient. We have never taken maximum advantage of children's native languages in schools. And biliteracy programs seek to change this. And in fact, all programs should seek to include native languages and cultures.

**Melissa Escalante:** A big thank you to Dr. Escamilla for this presentation on what effective practices in literacy instruction can look in bilingual settings and what benefits they can bring to multilingual learners! We will now turn it over to Grace Delgado, who will moderate a brief Q&A session on consistent approaches to literacy development among multiple models of bilingual programs with Dr. Ana DeGenna from Oxnard School District.

**Grace Delgado:** Good afternoon. My name is Grace Delgado. I'm the executive director of Multilingual Services in Alvin ISD. And this afternoon I will be facilitating our panel of practitioners on behalf of NELPA and Dr. Ana DeGenna, who is the Associate Superintendent of Educational Services for the Oxnard School District. She has served as the director of Dual Language programs and principal for the Oxnard School District. In her current role, she is committed to implementing a uniform framework for both literacy and biliteracy instruction.

We know you have adopted multiple models of bilingual programs in order to accommodate specific demographics and staff capacity. What structures are in place across the district to ensure a consistent approach to literacy development while allowing each school flexibility?

**Ana DeGenna:** Well, in our district, we have been very deliberate about the structures necessary to move our programs forward. The first step we needed to take was to develop and clearly articulate the vision and goals of our programs to all of our educational partners. About five years ago, our district's vision was to create a plan for converting our biliteracy program strands within schools into school wide programs. In order to support this work. We have established early release days to allow for common planning time for all of our teachers. We have also developed literacy and biliteracy pedagogies to guide the work. To carry this pedagogy forward, we have developed clear student outcomes by grade level. We have developed biliteracy report cards, which include parent and teacher guides, to ensure transparency about the goals of the program. We have developed instructional look-fors and non-negotiables to ensure all classrooms adhere to the district pedagogy.

Our district assessments are an important part of our structure, and we have summative informative assessments in both English and Spanish from kindergarten through eighth grade.

These assessments are monitored frequently with the goal of using them to impact instruction. We have created district-wide language and content allocation plans that explicitly address the scope and sequence of content and literacy across the grade levels in both languages.

Within this plan, metalinguistic skills are built in to support the needs of our emergent bilingual students. To support the implementation of our programs we have developed a multi-year staff development plan. This plan includes support for central staff, for central office staff, for teachers on special assignment across the content areas, for site leaders, for classroom teachers, and for support staff in both general education and special education classes. This plan is multi-layered to ensure differentiation for staff that are new to the program, as well as for continuing staff as they continue to develop in their practice. We realize we need to monitor our programs regularly and our focus currently is on the implementation of these models. Our implementation is ongoing work of continuous improvement and we will continue to adjust as we move forward.

The flexibility that is provided at the site level includes a selection of resources that are aligned to the units of instruction and the opportunities to provide experiences for students around enrichment and multicultural awareness.

**Host:** A big thank you to our panelists for discussing the recommendations for literacy development and instruction for multilingual learners in a variety of instructional settings. The information, reflections, and experiences that you shared today will certainly help educators support this population of students. You have given us many useful ideas to think about as we continue to serve multilingual learners across the country. For more information on this topic or other related topics, we encourage you to visit the NCELA website at [www.ncela.ed.gov](http://www.ncela.ed.gov) and check out the many educator resources available there.