Spring 2011

Volume 2: Unpacking Writing and Channeling Change

New York State Association for Bilingual Education

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BOOK REVIEW:
Melissa Laracuenta & Maria Acevedo: Multicultural School Psychology: A Kaleidoscopic View
The *Journal of Multilingual Education Research (JMER)* is a publication of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education. Its distinct orientation reflects what is most important to researchers, specialists, and educators in the field of multilingual education. *JMER* is a vehicle to respond to the changes and growth of knowledge in a variety of national language education issues that have local and regional relevance. It responds to the emerging needs and interests of teachers, administrators, teacher educators, researchers, counselors, psychologists, advocates, and community leaders whose work focuses on the successful education of multilingual students.

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# Journal of Multilingual Education Research

## Volume 2, Spring 2011

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Unpacking Writing and Channeling Change

Aida A. Nevárez-La Torre
Editor

I am very pleased with the warm welcome that the first volume of JMER received from the NYSABE organization and its membership. Given the high need for, and interest in, participating in this type of scholarly forum, our efforts continue to be focused on producing a journal of intellectual and professional integrity.

A special note of gratitude is given to Dr. Giselle Esquivel for her illustrious contribution to JMER as the Associate Editor during the past three years. Her dedication to bilingual education and bilingualism is highlighted through her work as a researcher and scholar in the field of psychology. In the past she presented her research in several NYSABE annual conferences and, more recently, she was the Editor of the Book/Media Review section of this journal. Dr. Esquivel wants to pursue other professional interests, but has agreed to remain connected to NYSABE and JMER by serving as a member of the journal’s Editorial Advisory Board.

Different from the first volume, which had a focused theme; this second issue is structured around an open theme. That is, diverse issues of contemporary significance in the field of multilingual education are discussed in the articles. An additional modification is that the first section of articles has been renamed. The new name, Explorations, is indicative of the wide breadth of methodological and thematic research and conceptual discussions to be presented in this section.

This editorial has two purposes. In response to queries from potential authors, first I offer guidance as to some of the essential elements of a publishable manuscript. Potential authors are invited to read and use these guidelines in drafting quality manuscripts to submit to JMER. The second purpose is to provide an overview of the different articles included in the second volume.

It is my commitment as editor of JMER to expand the interest of potential authors in submitting manuscripts that contribute to the high quality of research intended for readers of this journal. Thus, an important goal for me is to facilitate the writing of manuscripts that are consistent with the standards of JMER. While as editor I am unable to assure acceptance of manuscripts prior to a thorough editorial review process, a description of guidelines will serve to enhance the understanding of authors as to what constitutes a strong manuscript submission. In essence, it is important to make transparent, for both experienced and novice researchers and authors, what are the general criteria that reviewers use in deciding what constitutes a high quality manuscript worthy of publication.

The guidelines included here focus on research studies manuscripts. Conceptual-
theoretical manuscripts often follow a different format and are usually solicited by the editors with specific criteria in mind. It should be noted that the guidelines provided here are general in describing different components of a manuscript, as these emerge from editorial experience and scholarly publication sources (see Journals Consulted below). Yet, these characteristics are specific to how JMER’s Editorial Advisory Board and Editors envision scholarly research and conceptual writings from various cross disciplinary interests.

The **Introduction** section of a manuscript should reflect a cohesive conceptual/theoretical framework. The majority of studies discussed should be current, except for those of a historical research nature and those that are considered classic research in the field. The studies chosen to be reviewed should have a direct relevance to the study. A helpful review of the literature should provide a critical perspective, and be focused and concise. The author should clarify the purpose of the study in light of what currently is known in the field and any knowledge gaps that might exist. The questions that are explored need to be specified and any variables defined in operational terms. It is also helpful to provide an explanation of the organization of the discussion for the reader.

The **Method** section of the manuscript needs to be guided by attention to detail and specificity of procedures and measures employed. The author should identify the research paradigm used in the study and a rationale for its use. All the methods for data collection and analyses need to be fully depicted. A clear and complete account of the study’s participants, setting, and steps for data collection and analysis should be included. Keep in mind that it is always useful to explain the process of obtaining access into the setting, the procedures followed to obtain informed consent, and the ways participants’ anonymity is protected. It is essential to carefully explain the rigor and appropriateness of the method used for data analysis.

The author should take care of clarifying for the reader that the **Results** are presented separate from the **Discussion**. The description of the results needs to be done in a clear and comprehensive manner. It is recommended that the section on Results be carefully planned and presented so that it is accessible to JMER’s readership.

The **Discussion** should evaluate and interpret the implications of the results. An important aspect of the discussion is to talk about how the results relate to the research questions and to the literature review done in the introduction. It is also helpful to discuss candidly the study’s delimitations and any limitations.

The last section of a manuscript is usually referred to as the **Conclusion**. Here the author should identify the big lessons that can be extracted from the research. It is also recommended that any implications for practice and ways to expand the research in the future are specified. Consider if this section offers significant insight (not just a summary of the study) and the ways that the investigation contributes to the scholarly literature.

Some general aspects of **Mechanics** need to be highlighted as well. The manuscript should be written in a style that responds to the readership of JMER; practitioners who work in multilingual schools and researchers who do investigations in these same settings. Be certain
that your manuscript has been written clearly and cohesively and that you have followed all submission guidelines of the journal. Consider if you consulted the latest edition of APA manual (*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th ed.) so that your manuscript can be read with ease and the reader may focus on the content rather than its style. The author’s identity should be masked in the manuscript by using the convention of (Author, date). It is helpful to avoid unnecessary and excessive self-citations and repeated citation of the same source. It is the author’s responsibility to make sure that every citation is included in the references section and that the format for quoting and referencing sources follows the APA manual. Remember to carefully edit your manuscript, making sure that is proofread and checked for spelling before submission.

The articles included in the second volume of JMER, loosely intersect with the idea of change from the bottom up. That is, they all identify areas in need of educational renovation facilitated by talented educators in multilingual settings. At the onset, Dr. Freeman Field considers the contemporary debate about educational accountability for ELLs and bilingual students illuminated by the findings from research done across three decades in three different geographical areas in the United States. She uses a sociocultural lens to suggest ways that dual language educators and researchers can help move this debate forward. Juxtaposing the national debate with educators’ professional endeavors at the local level, this author illustrates how narrow-minded policies imposed by federal and state mandates can be challenged and defused through practitioner-led reform and data inquiry efforts.

Drs. Eisenstein Ebsworth, Gottlieb, Gottlieb, Goldstein, and Bennett discuss an investigation about the reasons for referring emergent bilinguals to special education programs. Acknowledging the continued importance of the student referral process to Special Education, and the scarcity of studies in this area, they used a new inquiry lens to reexamine data collected from a multipurpose study conducted years earlier. Their current investigation focused on whether there was a significant difference between U.S. mainland-born and non-mainland-born Latino referrals for special education, based on either language or behavior. The unexpected results alert educators to the urgency in expanding both the research and practical understanding of this complex process to design innovative measures that produce advanced and valid referral procedures.

Drs. Lemberger and Carrasquillo write about the subject of teacher quality through a longitudinal qualitative study that considered the certification process, test-taking experiences, and instructional practices of a group of graduate bilingual education and English as a Second Language teachers. Study findings elucidate the resiliency of teacher candidates in achieving teacher certification and in working as educators of multilingual students. The researchers provide further insight into the efficacy of teacher certification tests and their relationship to teacher quality and the instructional practices teachers implement. They challenge teacher educators to carefully monitor and support their teacher candidates through the certification process. It is also proposed that teacher educators and educational researchers unite in demanding teacher quality assessments that are sensitive to the multidimensional teaching task.
and more aptly identify expertise in teachers who work with multilingual students.

Two articles are included under the Practitioners’ Explorations section of the journal. Drs. Mercuri and Ebe’s provocative analysis of one teacher’s science inquiry unit serves to actualize the sometimes-elusive link between theory and practice. Their synthesis of research on best practices for teaching EBs is structured into a set of Guidelines for Effective Practice, which they in turn use to dissect the planning and implementation of instruction in a dual language elementary classroom. The findings suggest that teachers may benefit from using the Guidelines developed by the authors, to design instruction that incorporates research-based practices. The authors invite more studies that explore the validity of the Guidelines to channel instruction across the curriculum in multilingual schools.

As a teacher researcher, Dr. Mykysey, investigates the writing development experienced by a group of EBs in first grade. Her role as a bilingual reading specialist in an urban school was characterized by colleagues who were entrenched in using teacher-centered practices and students who did not like or want to write in any language. Learning how to conduct inquiry in her own classroom, she pursued a greater understanding about her students’ writing attitudes and behaviors. What she learned goaded a change in her philosophy and instructional pedagogy with results that surpassed her expectations as well as her colleagues’ expectations of first graders’ writing capacities in a second language.

In the Scholarly Book and Multimedia Review section, Drs. Laracuenta and Acevedo critically appraise Esquivel, López, & Nahari’s seminal volume entitled, Handbook of multicultural school psychology: An interdisciplinary perspective. Their review highlights some of the scholarly contributions achieved in the book and identifies some areas that need to be considered in enhancing its content in future editions.

**Journals Consulted**

*Reading Research Quarterly*

*TESOL Quarterly*

Journal of Multilingual Education Research, Volume 2, Spring 2011
Competing Discourses About Education and Accountability for ELLs/Bilingual Learners: Dual Language Educators as Agents for Change

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This paper situates the contemporary debate about education and accountability for English language learners/bilingual learners within a sociocultural context and suggests ways that dual language educators and researchers can help move this debate forward. I begin with a brief review of competing discourses about bilingualism and education for diverse learners on the national level in the United States. The paper then provides an insider’s perspective on dual language education in three different contexts (Washington, D.C.; Schaumburg, Ill.; Philadelphia, Pa.) at different times (before and after NCLB was passed) to illustrate how these dual language educators hold themselves accountable for student achievement, program effectiveness, and professional learning on the local level. The paper highlights the potential of dual language educators as powerful agents for change.

I find considerable conflict and controversy about education and accountability for English language learners/bilingual learners throughout the United States today. Although dual language programs for students from two-language backgrounds (i.e., two way immersion or TWI programs) have increased in popularity and number over the last four decades, many dual language programs are threatened by the narrow notion of accountability imposed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Dual-language educators can and must respond. They can work together on the local level to strengthen their programs, broaden our notions of accountability, and promote equity and multilingualism through education for all learners.

Dual language programs have three main goals for their target populations: (a) academic achievement in two languages, (b) bilingualism and biliteracy, and (c) intercultural competence. To reach their goals, dual language programs must provide at least 50% of students’ content-area instruction through the partner language (e.g., Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, Japanese) for at least five years, ideally longer (Center for Applied Linguistics [CAL], 2011). These programs have become increasingly popular in the United States because of strong empirical longitudinal evidence demonstrating that well-implemented dual language programs can effectively close the achievement gap for Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) who are in the program for five years or longer. This evidence also demonstrates that well-implemented dual language programs enable English
speakers to reach or exceed state academic achievement standards while they acquire high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy and develop positive cultural understanding and intergroup relations (Collier & Thomas, 2004; 2009; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007; Lindholm-Leary, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Those not familiar with this body of research must understand from the outset that this empirical evidence includes but is not limited to results from standardized test scores of all students in reading and math in English. As seen in this article, relying exclusively on standardized test scores in English for accountability purposes is insufficient for dual language educators who need evidence of growth and achievement in both partner languages (i.e., English and Spanish) across content areas to guide their decision making. Furthermore, given that this research demonstrates that it takes at least five years for students in well-implemented dual language programs to reach all program goals, it is counterproductive to mandate that all students demonstrate proficiency on standardized tests in English sooner than that. Successful dual language education programs, like all effective educational approaches for diverse learners, are complex systems that require a broader notion of accountability.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is up for reauthorization, and the “four pillars of education reform” that are the foundation of the Obama administration’s Blueprint for Reform are likely to be a major part of any new legislation. These four pillars are:

1. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;

2. Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;

3. Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and


Through its educational initiatives and public addresses, the Obama administration emphasizes its assumption that there are many examples of successful innovative programs in public schools across the United States that they want to learn from as a strategy for turning around schools that are struggling. Data-driven decision making is central to all of their reform efforts. There are also calls from top administration officials for more dual language programs. Dual language educators and researchers need to respond to these calls strategically and systemically, with particular attention to what is meant by data and accountability.

This article is intended to contribute to the conversation about education and accountability for bilingual learners in the United States today by providing an ethnographic or insider’s perspective on dual language education with attention to the role of dual language educators as agents for change. I draw on three distinct cases that offer important lessons for educational policymakers and decision makers today: the successful TWI program at Oyster
Bilingual School in Washington, D.C., where I conducted ethnographic and discourse analytic research from 1989 to 1993 (Freeman, 1998); the successful dual language programs in School District 54 (SD 54) in Schaumburg, Illinois, where educators developed a balanced assessment and accountability system (i.e., data system) to drive their decision making (Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007); and the development of TWI programs in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) Title VII dual language initiative located in the predominantly Puerto Rican community in North Philadelphia where I had been conducting ethnographic and discourse analytic research from 2000 to 2004 (Freeman, 2004). The analysis is longitudinal and expansive because it studies programs implemented across two decades and in different geographical areas of the country.

The discussion is divided into three major parts that move between the national and local levels over time. First, I consider competing discourses about educating bilingual learners on the national level and focus on Oyster Bilingual School to understand how their successful dual language program was interpreted and implemented on the local level at the time of my research. Second, I review competing discourses about accountability for bilingual learners since NCLB on the national level and look locally at SD 54 to understand how their data system is structured to yield longitudinal evidence of student growth and achievement in two languages, with attention to how these educators use different kinds of data to drive their decision making (i.e., guide instruction, drive program and professional development, inform policy, and ground their advocacy efforts). Third, I look at the SDP dual language program development from 2000–2004 for an insider’s perspective on capacity building and professional learning within a dynamic period of educational reform and restructuring on the school, district, state, and federal levels. As a conclusion I present a call for action and suggest ways that dual language educators can promote equity and multilingualism in other local contexts today.

**Competing Discourses About Educating Bilingual Learners**

An important premise of my work is that (dual) language education is about much more than language. Identity and power relationships figure prominently, although the dynamics of these relationships vary across schools and communities over time. Language-in-education planners, policymakers, and practitioners have choices in how they respond to the kinds of challenges they face in their local contexts. The choices they make about language-in-education policies, programs, and practices reflect ideological discourses about languages, speakers of languages, and the roles of schools in society. These choices have important implications for students, their families, and the communities and societies in which they live (Freeman, 1998; Freeman Field, 2007).

In her book *Foundations for Multilingualism in Education: from Principles to Practice*, Ester de Jong (2011) reviews research on educating bilingual learners in the United States and internationally to make explicit defining features of two contrasting discourses, one she labels “pluralist” and the other “assimilationist.” These discourses can be understood as lenses, frames, or perspectives that shape the ways educators, policymakers, and community members...
understand educational policies, programs, and practices for bilingual learners and that in turn influence their decision making. It is important to remember that pluralist and assimilationist discourses, like all ideological discourses, are abstract, underlying, and systemic. Furthermore, the beliefs and practices that reflect particular discourse systems are generally not seen as ideological by those who hold them. Rather, specific beliefs and practices are generally seen as "common-sense" or "true" by those who see the world from a particular perspective (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1990).

Pluralist discourses provide an important lens or frame for viewing the education of bilingual learners and should be used in the education of all students. This perspective generally guides policies, programs, practices, and decision making not only in well-implemented dual language programs but in all effective programs for bilingual learners and it is a perspective I share. According to de Jong, pluralist discourses are characterized by the following assumptions and expectations:

- Linguistic and cultural diversity is assumed to be the norm: languages other than English are resources to draw on and develop, multilingualism is a means of promoting cross-linguistic and intercultural communication, multilingualism is associated with cognitive, educational, cultural, political benefits to individuals, their families, communities, and the broader society.
- Bilingualism is seen from a holistic perspective: a bilingual person is viewed as one individual with one developing bilingual multidialectal linguistic repertoire; languages and literacies are understood as sociocultural practices, assessment is done across two languages with a focus on communicative competence.
- Standardization of approaches is rejected: guiding principles and flexible frameworks that educators draw on and adapt to specific contexts, instruction in more than one language, constructivist model of teaching and learning, formative assessments that are tied to learning and teaching in two languages for accountability purposes.
- Programs, practices, and policies favor pluralism: generally have additive outcomes, leading to the development of bi/multilingual multidialectal linguistic repertoires.

De Jong articulates four principles that guide pluralist programs, practices and policies: (1) striving for educational equity, (2) affirming identities, (3) promoting additive bi/multilingualism, and (4) structuring for integration. As I argue in this article, these principles are reflected in effective dual language programs like those at Oyster Bilingual School and throughout SD 54, as well as in my work developing TWI programs in the SDP. These principles can also guide policymaker, administrator, and teacher language education choices in ways that promote multilingualism to the greatest degree possible in any context.

Assimilationist discourses provide another lens or frame for viewing the education of ELLs as well as that of all students. According to de Jong (2011), assimilationist discourses structure most policies, programs, practices, debates, and decisions about language in education...
today and are characterized by the following assumptions and expectations:

- Monolingualism is assumed to be the norm: languages other than the dominant societal language are problems for students and the school, one language is seen as necessary to support effective communication, efficiency, and national unity.

- Bilingualism is seen from a fractional perspective: a bilingual person is one individual with two separate and separable linguistic repertoires, language is an autonomous code, assessment is done in one language with a focus on separate skills or proficiencies.

- Standardization of approaches is favored: "one-size-fits-all" program models, transmission model of teaching and learning, standardized tests in English for accountability purposes.

- Programs, practices, and policies favor assimilation: English-only instruction or transitional bilingual education, generally with subtractive outcomes leading to the replacement of the bilingual learners’ “first” language with their “second” language.

As suggested in this paper, assimilationist discourses have dominated most discussions about accountability for bilingual learners since NCLB.

Because assimilationist discourses are generally the dominant, more powerful discourses in education debates today, dominant approaches to accountability for ELLs as well as all learners (i.e., results on standardized achievement tests in English) are often presented as the logical choice or the only feasible option while pluralist contributions are often discounted as ideological. Similarly, choices for educating ELLs/bilingual learners have generally been framed in terms of binary oppositions (e.g., English-only vs. bilingual education; heterogenous vs. homogenous student groupings; phonics vs. whole language), or in terms of a quest for the “best educational model” (e.g., dual language vs. transitional bilingual education; 90/10 vs. 50/50 TWI programs). However, from a pluralist view, these narrow notions tend to stifle the development of creative, context-responsive approaches to the very real challenge of educating an increasingly linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse student population in U.S. schools today (de Jong, 2011).

It is important to remember that whenever we look closely at what people say, write, and do about controversial issues in any linguistically and culturally diverse educational context (e.g., about how long it takes for students to develop oral and written academic English; about what language(s) to use for initial literacy instruction; about what form(s) of assessment is (are) appropriate for bilingual learners; about who is responsible for educating bilingual learners; about what kinds of professional development is appropriate for classroom teachers who work in diverse classroom settings), we are likely to find evidence of competing pluralist and assimilationist discourses. In fact, we often see traces of these competing discourses in our own speech or writing. As I argue throughout this paper, when we view specific conflicts and controversies in terms of competing discourses, we can often identify important negotiation opportunities or spaces for professional learning and development on the individual and
collective level that can move the conversation about education and accountability for bilingual learners forward in productive ways.

In the sections that follow I demonstrate how three bilingual education programs in different states confronted competing discourses while at the same time creating productive opportunities for professional growth and program development. The Oyster Bilingual School, SD 54, and SDP dual language educators work collaboratively, strategically, and systemically as agents for change to address the challenges that they face as they work to strengthen their dual language programs and provide evidence of student learning through two languages. These educators take responsibility for demonstrating how their program functions to all of their constituents including teachers, students, principals, parents, and community members on the local level as well as external administrators and policymakers on the district, state, and federal levels in ways that are relevant and useful to these diverse groups of decision makers. However, their efforts faced distinct challenges and met different outcomes.

Bilingual Education for Social Change at Oyster Bilingual School

The dual language program at Oyster Bilingual School in Washington, D.C., was established in 1971, and it is one of the first dual language programs in the United States. At the time of my study, during the early 1990s, about 50% of the students were from low-income Spanish-speaking households (primarily Salvadoran) and about 50% were from middle-income English-speaking households (approximately balanced numbers of African American and White students). My three-year ethnographic and discourse analytic study of dual language planning at this successful school investigated and documented how the Oyster educators interpreted their TWI policy and how they implemented it in practice throughout the school. Through my analyses of interviews with Oyster educators and students, a wide range of site documents (e.g., policy statements, the school handbook, home-school communication, samples of student work, scores on standardized tests), and transcriptions of audiotaped interactions in classrooms and other key contexts at school, I described, interpreted, and explained what made the dual language program successful from the perspective of the members of the Oyster community.

Because I was studying a dual language program I originally focused my research on language, specifically on the distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English in policy, program structure, classroom implementation, and unofficial classroom interactions. However, my discussion with Oyster educators about the discrepancies that I observed between ideal policy and actual implementation within and across classrooms made it clear to me that language was just a means to an end at Oyster, albeit an important one. The Oyster dual language educators’ overarching goal was equity for their linguistically and culturally diverse student population. Their 50/50 dual language policy, bilingual multicultural curriculum content, bilingual student-centered classroom interaction, bilingual performance-based assessments, and bilingual parental involvement all work together to make up one coherent discourse system. Using de Jong’s (2011) terms, the Oyster dual language educators created an alternative pluralist
discourse that challenges dominant assimilationist discourses about effective education for bilingual learners on the local level.

My analysis of discourse practices at Oyster revealed their assumptions and expectations that mainstream U.S. schools are discriminatory against, for example, Spanish-speaking students as well as Latino and African American students (students can belong to more than one identity group and so we find Black and White Spanish-speaking students as well as Latino students from monolingual Spanish-speaking, monolingual English-speaking, and bilingual households), and these identity groups make up a large part of the Oyster community. A primary goal of Oyster’s dual language education policy, program, and practices is therefore to elevate the status of Spanish and Spanish speakers and of Latino and African American students so that Spanish and English speakers and Latino, African American, and White students are positioned more or less equally at school. Students are socialized through this alternative educational discourse to see themselves and each other as having not only the ability but also the right to participate and achieve at school and in U.S. society. The dual language educators who developed Oyster’s dual language program work together as agents of change to challenge English-only discourses and promote equity on the local level. The students who attend Oyster achieve academically through two languages, develop high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, and learn to expect, tolerate, respect, and effectively negotiate linguistic and cultural diversity (see Freeman, 1998 for details).

Oyster Bilingual School is an example of a successful dual language program that was dealing seriously with issues of assessment and accountability, broadly defined, at the time of my research. Their focus at that time (before NCLB) was on collecting formative and summative evidence of student performance to respond to the broad accountability requirements of students, parents, teachers, and administrators on the local school and district levels. The Oyster educators used this evidence to drive their instruction, program, and professional development. For example, one of the Oyster principals showed me how she used teacher assessments of student writing in Spanish and English to support the need for focused and sustained biliteracy professional and program development. The Oyster assessment practices reflected a more or less authentic notion of accountability at the time in which teachers and administrators took responsibility for their students’ learning and achievement, and they held themselves accountable to students, parents, the district, and each other for dual language program effectiveness in ways that made sense to their different constituents.

Like all dual language programs in the United States, Oyster Bilingual School does not exist in a sociopolitical vacuum. Although the school was constituted by a relatively coherent pluralist discourse, I did identify discrepancies between ideal dual language policy of equal distribution and evaluation of Spanish and English throughout this 50/50 program and actual implementation in classrooms and other key contexts throughout the school. These discrepancies can be explained by the larger sociopolitical context in which Oyster was situated. For example, like all teachers in the district, Oyster teachers across grade levels had formal assessments in English, but they had fewer comparable assessments in Spanish. Furthermore, the English component of the dual language program emphasized the kinds of skills that were
included on district assessments more than the Spanish component of the program did. The principal and many of the teachers were aware of these (and other) discrepancies between ideal policy and actual implementation. Rather than passively accepting these discrepancies, they took action at the local level to resolve them. At the time of my research the teachers developed comparable assessments in Spanish and used them in their classes. To counter any outside threats to their comprehensive and pluralist approach to accountability, they made these comparable assessments a requirement across the English and Spanish curriculum.

My research at Oyster Bilingual School took place prior to the passage of NCLB in 2001. As I will explain in the next section, the accountability requirements under NCLB have dramatically narrowed our notions of accountability. Although the specifics have changed, we still see the same kinds of discrepancies between ideal dual language policies and actual implementation today that I observed at Oyster in the 1990s. And we still see dual language educators across contexts working on the local level to challenge English-only discourses, respond to the broad accountability requirements of all of their constituents, and promote equity and multilingualism for all of their students.

Competing Discourses About Accountability for Bilingual Learners Since NCLB on the National Level

NCLB is the latest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and it functions as a de facto language policy in the United States today (Menken, 2008). The accountability requirements of NCLB dominate educational discourses in the United States at this time, and they reflect features of assimilationist discourses outlined by de Jong (2011). Under NCLB, schools are held accountable for the academic achievement of all students as evidenced by their scores on state-mandated standardized reading and math tests. Schools are also held accountable for the English language proficiency (ELP) of every ELL as evidenced by their scores on state-mandated standardized ELP tests.

Under No Child Left Behind, administrators disaggregate the data (i.e., the results of standardized achievement test scores in English) so that they can make an increasingly broad range of data-based decisions. When they look at the disaggregated data, researchers, policymakers, and educators often see that the ELL subgroup is lagging behind. This observation often leads to a search for research-based interventions or programs, most of which call for more English, earlier interventions, phonics, or other one-size-fits-all programs that focus on basic skills. The outcomes of these programs or interventions, like student achievement in math and language arts, are generally measured by standardized test scores in English. To achieve the best results, these programs and interventions must be implemented with fidelity (i.e., in the same way by all teachers in all schools). The results of high-stakes tests are used to evaluate student achievement as well as teacher, program, and school effectiveness. Punitive measures follow when teachers and schools are deemed “failing.”

Wright (2010) describes problems with NCLB’s narrow notions of accountability for all
students, particularly ELLs. He explains that a test is like a snapshot that measures a sample of a students’ ability at one particular time. A test (like a snapshot) can be misleading because it cannot measure what took place before or after it was taken or the context in which it was taken, nor can it provide evidence of everything that a student knows or can do. Wright outlines many unresolved issues about how to test ELLs in a valid and reliable manner: (a) ELLs’ developing proficiency in English means that academic tests given in English cannot provide a fair and accurate measure of the students’ true academic ability and (b) language tests cannot fully measure a student’s proficiency because of the complexity of the construct of language proficiency and the multifaceted nature of bilingualism. Furthermore, the logic and requirements of NCLB set up unreasonable expectations for ELLs (e.g., beginning and intermediate ELLs are required to take academic achievement tests in English before they have had time to develop academic English language proficiency). Wright concludes that, given the many unresolved issues surrounding testing for ELLs, the mandates of NCLB to use ELLs’ high-stakes test results for school accountability purposes are problematic and that recent requirements to tie these scores to teacher evaluations are even more problematic.

Many national-level alternatives to the narrow accountability requirements of NCLB have been proposed that reflect features of more flexible, context-responsive pluralist discourses. Here I briefly review three approaches that have particular relevance for dual language educators: (1) guiding principles proposed by the Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) for all schools, (2) the Castañeda Standard for programs serving ELLs, and (3) guiding principles for dual language programs. As we see later in this section, the balanced assessment and accountability system that the SD 54 educators developed for their dual language programs reflects de Jong’s (2011) principles and meets the standards of all of these approaches, and can be used not only in other dual language programs but by educators working with linguistically and culturally diverse students in any educational context.

The FEA was formed in 2007 to expand on and advance the ideas in the “Joint Organizational Statement on No Child Left Behind” to improve federal education policy. The FEA outlines a set of recommendations developed by a broad array of education and assessment experts concerned about the reauthorization of the ESEA. The recommendations are grounded in six guiding principles.

Principle 1: Equity and capacity building for student learning
Principle 2: Comprehensive and local assessment systems
Principle 3: Assessment and accountability for diverse populations
Principle 4: Fair appraisal of academic performance
Principle 5: Fair accountability decisions
Principle 6: Use of assessment and accountability information to improve schools and student learning

The 151 organizations that have signed off on the report vowed to work for the adoption of these
recommendations as central structural changes to NCLB while they continue to advance their individual organization’s proposals (go to www.fairtest.org/node/30 for list of signers).

James Crawford, president of the Institute for Language and Education Policy (www.languagepolicy.net), supports the FEA’s recommendations and argues that a more promising framework for accountability for ELLs already exists. The Castañeda Standard, first outlined by a federal appeals court in response to the 1981 Castañeda v. Pickard case, is a three-prong test to gauge whether school districts are taking “affirmative steps to overcome language barriers” as required by the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974. The court ruled that schools are obligated to meet three standards:

1. Programs must be based on an educational theory recognized as sound by experts.
2. Resources, personnel, and practices must be reasonably calculated to implement the program effectively.
3. Programs must be evaluated and restructured, if necessary, to ensure that language barriers are overcome.

In contrast to NCLB’s exclusive reliance on test scores (i.e., outputs), Crawford (2009) maintains that the Castañeda Standard offers a comprehensive approach to accountability encompassing both inputs (e.g., program model, teacher qualifications, instructional quality, language assessment and placement, classroom materials) and outputs (e.g., student outcomes, broadly defined). Furthermore, in contrast to the punitive sanctions for failing to meet AYP targets, the Castañeda Standard emphasizes capacity building, flexibility in program model, and instructional reform.

Dual language educators working on the national level have also developed guiding principles for dual language programs that focus on assessment and accountability (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007). Grounded in evidence from research and best practices for diverse learners, these guiding principles address program issues in seven strands: assessment and accountability, curriculum, instruction, staff quality and professional development, program structure, family and community, and support and resources. The guiding principles for the first strand on assessment and accountability are:

Principle 1: The program creates and maintains an infrastructure that supports an accountability process.
Principle 2: Student assessment is aligned with state content and language standards, as well as with program goals, and is used for evaluation of the program and instruction.
Principle 3: The program collects a variety of data, using multiple measures, which are used for program accountability and evaluation.
Principle 4: Data are analyzed and interpreted in methodologically appropriate ways for program accountability and improvement.
Principle 5: Student progress toward program goals and NCLB achievement objectives is systematically measured and reported.
Principle 6: The program communicates with appropriate stakeholders about program outcomes. The dual language guiding principles are intended to provide a tool for dual language educators to help with program planning and ongoing implementation.

Although the specifics of the reauthorization of ESEA remain to be seen, the new ESEA is expected to include the four pillars of education reform listed in the introduction to this paper. Because of its relevance to this paper, I repeat the second pillar here:

- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;

Many critics reject the exclusive reliance on standardized test scores for accountability purposes under the Obama Administration (to date the only “data” that the Department of Education is using is standardized test scores in English, although we can find evidence of the U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s acknowledgement of problems with this practice, e.g., Duncan, 2009). I agree with this criticism for many reasons. What is important to highlight here is that this narrow approach to accountability reflects an assimilationist perspective that is not equitable for linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

However, in recent months, other voices from the Federal Government have started to articulate a more inclusive and broader conceptualization of accountability. If we listen closely we can also hear a federal commitment to the principles of flexibility, fairness, and focus as well as calls for more dual language programs in speeches made by Administration officials. These kinds of statements reflect pluralist discourses, and realizing these commitments demands broader notions of accountability than we have seen since NCLB was passed.

For example, Assistant Secretary of Education Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana and Director of the Office of English Language Acquisition Rosalinda Barrera both spoke at the March 2011 TESOL national convention. They articulated what the principles of “flexibility, fairness, and focus” would mean in practice: “no one-size-fits-all approach,” “give states and districts flexibility to improve student performance,” “reward states for high standards and expectations,” “fair accountability that measures student growth,” and “develop more dual language programs.” The Obama Administration’s focus, Meléndez de Santa Ana explained, would be on “growth and gain as opposed to AYP as we see it now.” Barrera highlighted the need for “breaking down the silos” that separate ELL education from general education, and making ELL education “an integral part” of all education discussions. She also pointed out the Administration focus on “collaboration” with a wide range of partners and emphasized the importance of “professional learning” about ELL education (Meléndez de Santa Ana, 2011; Barrera, 2011).

Meléndez de Santa Ana’s and Barrera’s pluralist statements and some of the language used to describe current department of education funding opportunities may indicate more ideological space on the national level—from the top not only for dual language education but also for more pluralist approaches to ELL education. Language educators, broadly defined, need to continue to respond to these kinds of calls with professional learning opportunities for mainstream pre-service and in-service educators so that all educators are prepared to meet the
needs of the linguistically and culturally diverse students in their districts, schools, and classrooms. Dual language educators working in well-implemented dual language programs can and must respond with innovative data systems that rely on multiple measures of growth and gain that are appropriate for all learners. In this way dual language educators can help broaden our notion of accountability from the bottom up.

**Broadening Notions of Assessment and Accountability on the Local Level**

The BASIC model, which is an acronym for balanced assessment and accountability system that is inclusive and comprehensive, provides a concrete example of a broader notion of accountability than we have seen on the national level to date. This assessment and accountability system was developed prior to the passage of NCLB by Diep Nguyen, then Director of Bilingual/Multicultural Education in School District 54 in Schaumburg, Illinois, in collaboration with SD 54 dual language teachers and administrators under the guidance of Margo Gottlieb, a nationally recognized assessment and evaluation expert on bilingual learners in PreK–12 settings. Although the BASIC model was originally developed for use within a dual language program, this flexible model can be readily adapted to serve assessment and accountability purposes by educators working with linguistically and culturally diverse student populations in any context. The BASIC model is research-based and field-tested, and it addresses all of the guiding principles and recommendations outlined by the Forum on Educational Accountability (for all students), the Castañeda Standard (for ELLs), the guiding principles for assessment and accountability (for dual language programs), and the Obama Administration calls for innovative dual language programs that improve student outcomes as evidenced by multiple measures of growth and gain. According to Gottlieb and Nguyen (2007),

The successes encountered in the language education programs of SD 54 are testimony to the fact that teachers and administrators can change the course of children’s education and futures in a positive way when we have the political will to do so. When we build an internal assessment and accountability system that focuses primarily on the improvement of teaching and learning, we indeed can provide quality education for all students while simultaneously helping them develop bilingually. As language educators, this vision of “bilingualism for all children” is ultimately what we hold dear to our hearts (p. xi).

This section describes the features and purposes of the BASIC model with attention to the role of teachers and administrators on the local level.

I first learned about Gottlieb and Nguyen’s balanced assessment and accountability system in January 2001 when Nguyen and several students presented quantitative and qualitative data on academic achievement and bilingual/biliteracy development in SD 54’s first dual language program at the Illinois Statewide Conference for Teachers of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse students in Chicago. The stories that students read aloud in Spanish and English from their K–8 bilingual portfolios provided compelling evidence of student engagement, bilingual and biliteracy development, and learning through two languages, and this data gave real
meaning to the quantitative data that Nguyen presented on program effectiveness. Gottlieb and Nguyen also presented the quantitative results of the SD 54 dual language program evaluation at the International Symposium for Bilingualism in the spring of 2002 in Phoenix (Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2002). The work of these educators has guided my understanding of authentic assessment and accountability for bilingual learners since that time.

According to Gottlieb and Nguyen (2007), a balanced assessment and accountability system that is inclusive and comprehensive has the following defining features. First, it is internal to the functioning of schools and school districts while responsive to external accountability mandates. Second, it is built on consensus from both teachers and administrators. Third, it is rigorous, comprehensive, and standards-based. Fourth, it is systemic and reflective of shared educational goals, vision, and commitment. Last and perhaps most important, it is directly related to teaching and learning. At SD 54 central office administrators, principals, and bilingual teachers work in teams at various levels to establish common goals and create and adopt a common pivotal assessment plan that yields data to guide their entire decision making.

Gottlieb and Nguyen (2007) stress that a comprehensive assessment and accountability system must fulfill a range of purposes for second language (L2) learners. In a Spanish-English dual language program, L2 learners include English speakers learning Spanish and Spanish speakers learning English. Teachers and administrators working on the classroom and school level need to be able to

- document students’ second language (L2) growth and proficiency, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
- document students’ native language (L1) growth and proficiency, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
- document students’ academic learning growth and achievement in core academic subjects;
- report student learning growth, proficiency, and achievement to parents and establish accountability;
- inform and guide classroom instruction on an ongoing basis, and shape the school improvement plan.

Administrators working on the program and district levels need assessment and accountability data in order to

- provide multiple sources of evidence of student growth, proficiency and achievement in language development, academic learning, and cross-cultural competence;
- monitor student and group progress to guide curricular and program decisions;
- document the effectiveness of instructional practices and program implementation for public reporting purposes;
- identify patterns of instructional challenges that shape the district improvement plan.
The BASIC model reflects pluralist discourses described by de Jong (2011), and is represented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The BASIC Model (Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007).](image)

This model balances formative and summative assessments in order to produce the range of data needed for decision making within language education programs at the classroom, program, district, and state levels of implementation. Grounded in contextual information, framed by learning goals, standards, and benchmarks, and tied to curriculum and instruction, these complimentary data sources offer teachers powerful tools to measure student performance throughout the year. Implementation of the model calls for extensive planning and the development of an assessment framework that delineates the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting, all of which takes time, leadership, and collaboration. Gottlieb and Nguyen (2007) lay out a step-by-step process that teachers and administrators can use to guide their work developing a balanced assessment and accountability system in any linguistically and culturally diverse school or district.

Central to their work is the *pivotal portfolio*, which Gottlieb and Nguyen define as a hybrid of the working portfolio (students’ work-in-progress) and the showcase portfolio (students’ best work) with three main distinctions. First, each teacher gathers what the teachers collectively consider evidence of essential student learning and achievement. Second, all teachers use common assessments of that essential student work. And third, the pivotal portfolio follows the student for the length of the students’ career in the language education program. Teachers and
administrators use their conversations around common assessments of student performance relative to all of their goals to guide everything they do.

I conclude this section with an excerpt from Ms. Danette Meyer, who was a dual language facilitator in SD 54 at the time of this writing. Here Ms. Meyer explains how she uses multiple measures of student performance in two languages organized in the students’ pivotal portfolios to address a difficult challenge we hear frequently from dual language educators under NCLB. That is, how can dual language educators respond to external pressures from mandated standardized testing in English beginning in the third grade when research demonstrates that it takes five to seven years for ELLs to develop academic language proficiency in well-implemented programs and Spanish-speaking students often score lower than grade level in third grade? Ms. Meyer writes:

[Comparing] the native English speakers and native Spanish speakers in the dual language program with the performance of students at the district and state level in English, we can advocate for the continuation or expansion of the program. Third-grade scores for our native Spanish-speaking students are historically lower since they have not had adequate time to develop enough English to be successful on an all-English test. This often leads teachers and principals as well as district personnel to doubt the efficacy of the program and begin discussing using more English with students.

[Our data] illustrates that once students have had the sufficient five to seven years necessary for their language abilities to develop in English, they are on par with their non-ELL peers. In fact, many exceed state standards. This longitudinal view of summative data demonstrates that, given adequate time for growth, ELLs from well-implemented dual language programs achieve high academic results in English.

At the local level, in addition to state achievement tests in English, we can use the formative assessments and sample student work to paint a balanced picture of both growth and achievement of students in Spanish or Japanese also. We need to be true to our goals of bilingualism and biliteracy rather than just English performance. We know that if we do not use and share assessments in other languages, our students, staff, and parents may begin to devalue that achievement. Similarly, the formative assessment adds to our program evaluation and provides us with another alternative means of gauging program effectiveness based on authentic student products (Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007, pp. 126–128).

Ms. Meyer describes one way that dual language educators can strategically use strong longitudinal evidence of student performance in two languages to address the narrow accountability requirements under NCLB. Specifically, SD 54 educators provided empirical evidence demonstrating that bilingual learners in their dual language programs do in fact reach all program goals when given adequate time for growth. According to this account, SD 54 educators are not asking that the district eliminate all standardized testing in English like some of the debates about accountability requirements today seem to suggest. Instead, these educators
request the opportunity to use a broad notion of accountability that includes expectations for student performance based on research into how long it takes for ELLs to develop academic language proficiency in English. Ms. Meyer’s writing also demonstrates the SD 54 assumption that formative assessments are an important complement to standardized testing in English, not a substitute. What is important to remember is that different constituents (i.e., students, parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers) need different information/data about student learning and program effectiveness at different times, and they need to use that information/data for different purposes. Any good data system must be able to respond to such diverse needs.

The specific common assessments that are included in any pivotal portfolio respond to state and local standards, goals, benchmarks, and to the particular sociocultural context surrounding the school and community. Because the pivotal portfolio is a flexible and dynamic construct, educators can make any necessary changes to their choice of common assessments to be included in the portfolio in response to changes in the larger sociopolitical or educational policy context. According to Nguyen, it was relatively easy for the dual language programs in SD 54 to respond to the narrow accountability requirements under NCLB because they already had collected the data that the state required as one part of their pivotal portfolio. If dual language educators across the country respond to the Obama administration’s calls for effective dual language programs with data systems that yield evidence of student growth and gain using assessments that are appropriate for diverse learners, dual language educators can help move the conversation about education and accountability for bilingual learners forward in productive ways from the bottom up.

**Building on Community Bilingualism in North Philadelphia**

Both Oyster Bilingual School and SD 54 have well-established, successful dual language programs that are structured by relatively coherent multilingual pluralist discourses and supported by balanced assessment and accountability systems. However, many dual language programs in the United States are in earlier stages of development, and we will likely see more new dual language programs in the future. This section explores the early stages of dual language planning (with a focus on assessment planning) in schools serving the low-income predominantly Puerto Rican community in North Philadelphia where I had been conducting action-oriented ethnographic and discourse analytic research since 1995. The dual language initiative was funded by a 2000–2005 Title VII Bilingual Education System–wide grant that the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) was awarded, and I was hired as lead consultant. This example provides an insider’s perspective on capacity building for educators who embrace the challenge to develop dual language programs, and the approach provides an insider’s perspective on the functioning of an effective professional learning community. This approach to professional development is appropriate not only for dual language educators, but for educators working in any context (Hamayan & Freeman Field, in press).

We saw strong ideological and financial support for dual language education at the federal
level with the 1994 reauthorization of the ESEA. In a March 2000 speech, then Secretary of Education Richard Riley challenged the nation to increase the number of dual language programs to 1,000 over the next five years. Top-down ideological and financial support was complemented by bottom-up dual language program development across the country, with the number of TWI programs growing steadily. In November 2000, for example, the SDP Office of Language Equity Issues (OLEI) was awarded a five year Title VII bilingual education system–wide grant to stimulate the development of 10 dual language programs in the dominant language communities (Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Khmer) in Philadelphia.

Funding for the Bilingual Education Expansion Project that the SDP was granted is an example of top-down language planning for the schools because the federal government provided the school districts across the country with financial incentives for this type of bilingual program through Title VII of ESEA. Mary Ramirez, then OLEI Director, and Cynthia Gross Alvarez, then ESOL and Bilingual Programs Director and the Title VII grant writer, wanted to complement this top-down language planning initiative with language planning on the local school and community levels and I worked closely with OLEI to coordinate this effort. My work as a consultant reflects a sociocultural orientation as a researcher and is based on the assumption that the teachers, principals, and community members who work together every day on the local level create their educational context, and these constituents have the potential to collaborate and change that context.

We began by developing Spanish-English dual language programs in several schools in the Puerto Rican community because we had more resources to draw on (e.g., bilingual teachers and materials, professional development in and experience with bilingual education, insider’s understanding of community beliefs and practices, we all spoke Spanish) in this community than in the communities serving the less commonly taught languages (Khmer, Mandarin, Russian, Vietnamese) in Philadelphia. However, these schools were all located in North Philadelphia, the region of the SDP that included the lowest-performing schools and that has undergone the most dramatic restructuring as part of the SDP’s ongoing reform efforts. We developed school-based language planning teams made up of administrators and teachers, and I invited the teams to use the following set of guiding questions to structure their work during the planning year:

1. Who are our target populations?
   (ELLs, heritage language speakers\textsuperscript{7}, English speakers)

2. What are our goals?
   (academic achievement, bilingual and biliteracy development, intercultural competence; i.e., the goals of the dual language grant; other goals)

3. How is our school currently addressing the language education needs of our target populations?
   (TBE, one-way DBE, ESOL; i.e., the program models currently implemented in their school)

4. How are our students performing relative to all of our goals? What evidence do we collect and
how do we use that evidence?

5. What type of dual language program is appropriate for our school and community?
   (dual language programs, broadly defined including TWI, DBE; i.e., the kinds of programs
   funded by the grant)

The language planning teams collected information about their students, goals, programs, and
outcomes to address the first four questions. To answer the fifth question, team members read
the literature on dual language education, visited dual language programs, and attended
conferences on bilingual education. We organized monthly planning meetings with concrete
tasks that would help them move their dual language program development forward. Like all
complex learning situations, this was not a perfectly linear, neat process. These educators argued
passionately about the need to challenge the loss of Spanish within their student and community
populations, and they embraced the goals of bilingualism, biliteracy, cross-cultural
understanding, and positive intergroup relations. They developed and debated dual language
education plans that they believed would be appropriate for their contexts with attention to the
SDP’s K–3 balanced literacy initiative that had been mandated in the SDP since 1999. My role as
consultant was to help them consider the pros and cons of the various options as they considered
them, and to consider the implications of those choices.

Educators in three schools decided to develop TWI programs for their emergent bilingual
learners (including ELLs from monolingual Spanish-speaking households, heritage language
speakers from bilingual households with a wide range of expertise in oral and written Spanish
and English, and English-speakers from monolingual English-speaking households). Two of the
schools developed plans for 50/50 programs that provided formal literacy instruction
simultaneously in Spanish and English for all students beginning in kindergarten, and one school
developed plans for an 80/20 program that provided initial literacy instruction to all students in
Spanish in kindergarten and first grade, with formal literacy instruction in English introduced at
second grade. After the initial planning year all three programs began in kindergarten as strands
in the school, and each grew one grade level per year with the goal of having a K–5 TWI program
in one strand of each school in five years.

From the beginning, these TWI educators had serious questions about biliteracy
development, assessment, and accountability. They requested ongoing professional development
to support their early implementation efforts, and we launched a monthly professional
development series that we called “dual language teachers talking,” a name that highlights the
importance of dialogue. Following Fullan (2001), our work was informed by the assumption that
school improvement occurs when

- teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete talk about teaching
  practice;
- teachers and administrators frequently observe and provide feedback to each other,
  developing a shared language to describe their practices; and

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• teachers and administrators plan, design, and evaluate teaching materials and practices together (pp. 84–85).

Our monthly meetings provided a space for the dual language teachers to become a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). As a professional learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), we reflected on classroom practices and research findings, shared successes, identified common ideological and implementation challenges, and collaborated to meet those challenges.

In the first dual language teachers talking meeting in September 2001, the teachers and I agreed to focus our attention during Year 1 on the following questions:

1. How does your TWI program encourage English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students to become bilingual and to develop literacies in Spanish and English?
2. What evidence do you have of students’ bilingual and biliteracy development over time?

The meetings over the fall 2001 semester covered a range of topics that the teachers selected and facilitated based on their work in their classes (e.g., how to use the SDP mandated K-3 assessments in two languages to guide literacy instruction within and across languages; how to use centers as contexts for second language/bilingual acquisition, biliteracy development, and content area learning through two languages in their classes; how to read big books in Spanish to a heterogeneous group of students in ways that involve the English speakers and challenge the Spanish speakers; how to promote students’ negotiation of meaning in Spanish within cooperative learning groups). The teachers embraced the opportunity to look closely at their own and each others’ practice, and they drew on each others’ expertise and on the literature to answer their questions and to help them make sense of their observations.

Two professional learning opportunities in the spring of 2002 strongly influenced the TWI teachers’ beliefs about biliteracy development and assessment. First, the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) held its 2002 annual meeting in Philadelphia, and many of the TWI teachers attended sessions that broadened their thinking about some of the challenges they faced. For example, many of the TWI teachers realized that although they had initially been more concerned with English speakers and English language and literacy development, the national-level concern in the TWI field was with Spanish and Spanish speakers. Elizabeth Howard shared findings from the joint Center for Applied Linguistics/Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CAL/CREDE) longitudinal study on biliteracy development in TWI programs that highlighted this concern (Howard, 2000). Her analysis demonstrated that although English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students in TWI programs were consistently performing at or above grade level in Spanish and English, Spanish-speaking students’ performance was generally lower than English-speaking students’ performance on writing tasks in both Spanish and English (note that this important finding would be missed under an accountability system that relied exclusively on the results of standardized test scores in English). This finding echoed Valdés’s (1997) cautionary note about power relations in dual language education, where she warned that if TWI educators do not provide high-quality Spanish components of their programs, and if they do not closely monitor their Spanish-speaking
students’ performance in English and in Spanish, TWI programs may actually end up perpetuating the kinds of inequities between Spanish and English speakers that these programs are intended to address.

The second professional learning opportunity was offered by the SDP and it addresses Valdés’s concern. The Title VII grant funded a Temple University graduate course on Spanish literacy development in the spring of 2002 that Aída Nevárez-La Torre (now at Fordham University) taught. Although I did not attend the course, the teachers informed me that it was taught entirely in Spanish, the majority of the readings were in Spanish, all of the students’ oral and written presentations were in Spanish, and the teachers looked critically at a range of approaches used to promote literacy development in Spanish. Unlike many of their earlier professional development experiences, this course did not see Spanish in relation to English or as subordinate to English. This course had a pluralist perspective, and looked at Spanish literacy development as the primary focus. Many of the TWI teachers who took this class became concerned that the frameworks and assessment tools that the SDP used were biased toward English (reflecting a monolingual perspective on literacy that we see reflected in most research, policy, and practice today). These teachers began to question whether the SDP assessment tools allow for an accurate assessment of literacy development in Spanish, and they began to demand the development of more valid assessments.

The dual language educators and I decided to develop a balanced assessment and accountability system that would yield the evidence they needed to answer their questions and drive their decision-making. With the expert advice of Gottlieb and Nguyen and the assistance of several graduate students from the University of Pennsylvania where I was teaching, the dual language educators and I developed a TWI assessment system that would yield (a) formative evidence (e.g., oral language and writing samples in Spanish and English) of every student’s bilingual and biliteracy development (i.e., student learning and outcomes) to inform instruction and drive program and professional development; (b) formative and summative evidence of reading development, including reading scores in English (to respond to program and district accountability requirements) and in Spanish (to answer teacher questions and respond to program accountability requirements); (c) standardized test scores on state-mandated tests of every child’s proficiency in reading and math (i.e., academic achievement) and every ELL’s English language proficiency (to respond to federal and state accountability requirements).

We created an Excel database that included every child who had participated in the dual language program by grade-level cohort, and we began by keeping track of every student’s reading scores in both languages over time. Because we assumed there may be important differences in students’ trajectory of biliteracy development (Luis Moll and his graduate students, personal communication) that might be related to language use patterns at home, we noted which students came from monolingual English-speaking households, monolingual Spanish-speaking households, and bilingual households. Each student also had a pivotal portfolio that followed him/her over time in the program in which we kept samples of student writing in two languages that we collected before each report period. We also began to develop writing
rubrics that would be appropriate assessment tools for these bilingual learners, and we planned to keep track of writing scores in both languages over time.

Since student mobility is regularly cited as a challenge in this low-income, predominantly Puerto Rican community, we kept track of which students started the program in kindergarten, which students left the program, and which students joined the program late. We kept track of every student’s growth and achievement because teachers need that information to guide their instruction and professional development. However, we knew that we could only use data from students who had begun the program in kindergarten and continued to fifth grade to make claims about program effectiveness (you cannot say a program is not effective if a student has not participated in the entire program). We also never took a student off of the cohort list because many students in this highly mobile neighborhood who leave a school may return to the same school at a later date.

Our dual language program development efforts faced many challenges, which most of the dual language educators in the School District of Philadelphia that I was working with embraced. With respect to the accountability demands imposed by NCLB, dual language educators confronted two major challenges related to the issue of time: (a) the time it takes for educators to develop a comprehensive and effective dual language program and (b) the time it takes for students to develop bilingual proficiency and learn academic content through two languages.

First, it takes time for teachers and administrators to work together and develop coherent pluralist dual language programs. It takes time for educators to develop balanced assessment and accountability systems for their language education programs. Educators need to determine whether their program is pedagogically sound, well-implemented, and delivers results, which means they need to understand the research on different types of programs for bilingual learners and they need to develop assessment literacy (e.g., understanding what formative and summative assessments are, why teachers need common assessments to show evidence of student growth, what kinds of data can legitimately be used to make what kinds of decisions). Dual language educators need to review and critique the assessments that they currently use in their district or program, and identify gaps and redundancies in their system. They also need to identify appropriate common assessments that are aligned with their program goals and structure, which means that they need to learn about different types of formative and summative assessments in English and the partner language. The Title VII grant allowed SDP to support the development of dual language programs for five years. The initial four years of the grant were used to begin to create programs, become informed of best practices that are research-based, pilot test some of the assessment practices, and align practices to standards and curriculum. However, more time was needed to document students’ growth in language and content learning.

As we saw in our discussion of SD 54, time presents another kind of challenge for dual language programs under current accountability requirements. Dual language educators often argue that they do not have enough time to ensure that their ELLs demonstrate proficiency on standardized academic achievement tests that are given in English. Although research suggests that children in dual language programs may need five to seven years to reach grade level norms
for English speakers in English (Lindholm-Leary, 2000), local interpretations of the accountability requirements of NCLB often mandate standardized testing of all students exclusively in English beginning in Grade 3. This narrow notion of accountability challenges the integrity of dual language programs, and we see educators across the country respond to this pressure by increasing the quantity of English in the early years of their dual language program, or by ending their dual language programs altogether.

Ms. Meyer from SD 54, mentioned above, was able to respond effectively to this time-related challenge with longitudinal evidence of student learning in their dual language program. This type of evidence allowed SD 54 dual language educators to maintain the integrity of their dual language programs and expand this program option district wide. When dual language educators choose to respond to accountability demands by increasing the amount of time dedicated to English and decreasing the amount of time dedicated to Spanish to the point that students receive less than 50% of their instruction through Spanish, programs become dual language in name only. These programs cannot be expected to deliver the same results as well-implemented dual language programs, and they threaten our collective understanding of what dual language education means in practice. Dual language educators must be mindful of this challenge.

Unfortunately, in the case of the SDP, the TWI programs were eliminated by new district leadership after four years of program development, before they had enough time to develop a longitudinal database of student learning through two languages. With just four years into program development, these educators did not have the evidence they needed to pose a viable challenge to new district administrators with different beliefs about educating bilingual learners in a newly restructured SDP under the narrow accountability requirements of NCLB.

Interestingly, this did not stop the development of other dual language programs in this North Philadelphia community. ASPIRA, a Puerto Rican community-based activist program, opened one dual language charter school around this time and I worked with them on the early years of program and professional development with attention to assessment and accountability. Many of the dual language teachers and administrators who had participated in the Title VII dual language initiative in the SDP public schools took jobs at the charter school as an alternative means of providing dual language education to students and the community. Since that time, ASPIRA has opened several other dual language charter schools in the area.

My experience with SDP teachers and administrators illustrates possibilities and challenges that are faced by educators working with ELLs/bilingual learners on the local level in any language education context. When teachers and administrators work collaboratively through the process to develop educational programs for diverse learners with balanced assessment and accountability systems to drive their decision making, they do not see accountability as a top-down, one-size-fits-all process that relies exclusively on the results of standardized test scores. Furthermore, they do not see accountability as something that they are not involved in themselves. Instead, when teachers and administrators participate in the development of their programs and accountability systems with attention to the implications of their choices for
ELLs/bilingual learners, they take ownership of and responsibility for student learning as well as for their own program and professional development. This bottom-up educators’ response provides authentic accountability for all students, particularly bilingual learners. An approach that emerges from and is led by informed educators who are invested in quality dual language education, is also consistent with the U.S. Department of Education calls for collaborative professional learning opportunities, and the use of data to drive decision making.

**Striving for Equity for Bilingual Learners From the Bottom Up**

We need to get beyond polarizing debates that are framed in terms of simple binary oppositions. When we step back and analyze how education and accountability for ELLs/bilingual learners are framed in national and local debates, we often find evidence of competing discourses. On one hand, we find strong evidence of an assimilationist perspective in which linguistic and cultural diversity is seen as a problem to overcome, particularly among students from low-income households or who have had interrupted prior schooling. Even within the bilingual education and English-as-a-second-language fields, the debate has most commonly been framed in either/or terms with a primary focus on the best or most effective model of bilingual education without paying close attention to how the sociocultural context influences teaching and learning on the local level. However, educating an increasingly linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse PreK–12 student population in U.S. public schools in rural, suburban, and urban communities in states across the United States is too complex a challenge to realistically believe that this narrow approach will work.

On the other hand, when we analyze the spoken and written texts/discourses of policymakers, administrators, teachers, parents, community members, we also can find evidence of more pluralist discourses at every level of decision making. For example, the Obama administration emphasizes that education is the civil rights issue of our time. As previously stated, the U.S. Department of Education articulated calls for more dual language programs, flexibility and fairness, data systems that provide evidence of student growth and gain, using data to inform instruction, and using data to drive a wide range of decision making. When we look locally, we also find numerous examples of successful programs in which students from linguistically and culturally diverse programs are demonstrating the kinds of growth and gain that research leads us to expect, not only in dual language programs but in all types of programs for bilingual learners. In order for these kinds of innovative programs to thrive and spread, we desperately need to adopt a broader notion of accountability than what we currently see under NCLB and in the meaning of “data-driven decision making” evidenced under Secretary of Education Arne Duncan today.

I have argued in this paper that dual language educators can be important agents of change from the bottom up. Dual language educators who work in pedagogically sound, well-implemented dual language programs that deliver results, broadly defined, may find openings in these kinds of federal calls from the top. Established dual language programs should have the
evidence they need to demonstrate that all of their students achieve academically at or above grade level on standardized tests in English after five or more years. Many, if not most, of these programs also use multiple measures of student growth and gain in English and Spanish to guide their bilingual instruction and drive dual language program and professional development. Following the example of Ms. Meyer in SD 54 and numerous other knowledgeable program coordinators, dual language educators can use their multiple measures to (1) demonstrate program effectiveness to external district, state, and federal officials using the results of standardized academic achievement tests in English; and (2) demonstrate different pathways to biliteracy using strong longitudinal data in two languages. If dual language educators across the country take up this call, we may see the emergence of a powerful empirical argument for the need to relax standardized testing requirements in earlier years of program implementation not only in dual language programs but in all programs for bilingual learners.

As Gottlieb & Nguyen (2007) also demonstrate, dual language educators can use their multiple measures of quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate their programs and show how ELLs and English speakers perform in TWI programs in comparison with their peers in other types of district programs. This is a research-based approach to understanding biliteracy development and program effectiveness for students from diverse backgrounds, and can contribute to the spread of dual language programs as the federal government seems to be advocating.

I conclude with a cautionary note. Although dual language educators may find ideological space under the Obama administration, this space is not likely to remain open forever. Dual language educators who are working in new dual language programs, or in struggling dual language programs, or who plan to start new dual language programs in the future all need to take steps to build capacity, strengthen their programs, and develop balanced data systems that yield strong longitudinal evidence of student learning in two languages and demonstrate program effectiveness. The guiding questions, principles and frameworks presented throughout this paper are intended to help in these efforts.

We educators and researchers have choices in the ways that we respond to accountability requirements under NCLB. We can react to enormous pressure of NCLB by increasing attention to English, decreasing attention to languages other than English, and paying attention only to the state-mandated standardized test scores. Or we can take action by developing pedagogically sound, well-implemented dual language programs with authentic accountability systems that rely on multiple measures of student learning. Equipped with such systems, we can use data, broadly defined, to improve our programs, practices, and policies, and get involved in the larger conversation about promoting equity and multilingualism to the greatest degree possible for all learners.

References


**Notes**

1 I use the term *bilingual learner* to refer to any student who is learning through two languages regardless of program type, including English language learners (ELLs), heritage language learners, and English speakers learning a language other than English. I use the term *ELL* when referring exclusively to students designated as ELLs at school. I also use the term ELL at times to facilitate communication with those who use the term ELL and are not yet aware of the implications of these different labeling practices. See García (2009) for discussion of implications of this important point.

2 Go to www.cal.org/twi/directory for updated numbers of two-way immersion (TWI) programs in the United States and a searchable database.

3 Following the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), I use the term *dual language program* as an umbrella term that refers to three types of programs: (1) *two-way immersion* (TWI) programs for integrated groups of English speakers and speakers of a partner language (e.g., for students from Japanese and English speaking homes); (2) *one-way developmental bilingual education* (DBE) programs for students who speak a language other than English at home (e.g., Spanish and English for Spanish speakers; and (3) foreign or second language *immersion* programs for students from English-speaking homes (e.g. French and English for students from English speaking homes).

4 There were three Oyster principals during the course of my study, and there have been several others since then.

5 SD 54 also implements a Japanese-English dual language program.

6 I use these same guiding questions and approach with leadership teams in any linguistically and diverse school context. However, we do not focus narrowly on dual language program goal or dual language program options. When I work with most schools, we focus more broadly on critical features of effective programs for ELLs/bilingual learners and with a range of options that would be appropriate for their contexts given consideration of local resources and constraints. See Hamayan & Freeman Field (in press) for details.

7 Heritage language speakers are individuals who have some expertise in their home or heritage language. A heritage language is not the dominant societal language and is part of the individual’s linguistic repertoire.
In this study, we compared the referrals for special education evaluation of U.S. mainland-born children with those of mostly Latino non-mainland-born children in two school systems in the Northeastern United States. The investigation focused on whether there was a significant difference between referrals for special education from each group, based on either language or behavior. According to the literature, nonnatives are both overrepresented and underrepresented in special education, with reasons for referral including problematic use of language and inappropriate behavior. The researchers found that referrals for behavior in our sample were more frequent among natives compared with nonnatives, while referral for language use did not differ significantly between the groups. We discuss variables that could account for these findings including nonnative acculturation, the availability of alternative curricula for these learners, and the fact that many native children in inner-city schools speak alternative English varieties that contrast with the standard language used in school settings.

Latino children and other English language learners, most recently referred to as emergent bilinguals (EBs; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010) are often mistakenly referred for special education or bypassed for referral due to misunderstandings regarding their language and behavior (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004; Baca, Baca, & de Valenzuela, 2004; Samson & Lesaux, 2009). Christina (1993) notes the importance of distinguishing the normal sociocultural and linguistic development of nonnatives from possible language and culture differences due to special education needs. She reports that, unfortunately, even when evaluators have been alerted to this issue, assessment of nonnatives for special education is sometimes inappropriate. At the same time, Latino children and other EBs may fail to receive proper attention because their developmental and behavioral deficits are mistakenly attributed to their nonnative status (Chamberlain, 2006; Zetlin, Beltran, Salcido, González, & Reyes, 2011). However,
while there is ample evidence for over-referrals in the literature, under-referrals of nonnative speakers are not as well documented.

United States Census data for the past two decades reflect significant growth in the population of individuals who were not born on the U.S. mainland, particularly among those who share the Spanish language. Partial reports from the 2010 census continue this trend (Passel, 2011). Not surprisingly, there has been concurrent growth in the number of non-mainland-born, immigrant children (in the case of children from Puerto Rico, migrant children) attending U.S. schools, children for whom the schools are expected to provide relevant and appropriate instruction. EBs in the United States in PreK–12 education settings rose to 57.17% compared with an increase in the general learner population of only 3.66% (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & McLaughlin, 2008; National Clearing House for English Language Acquisition, 2006). A significant proportion of non-mainland-born children grow up in poor economic circumstances and live in depressed neighborhoods consistent with low socioeconomic status and limited long term prospects (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). These socioeconomic factors are also true of mainland-born children who live in the same communities and/or who participate in shared networks including schools (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004; RAND, 2005). This study considers how the language and behavior of EBs and their native peers impact referrals for special education.

In this article, we review the literature on variables relevant to our study, including social and educational acculturation, socioeconomic status, interlanguage and academic language development, referrals based on behavior as well as language, and educating school personnel to accurately differentiate sociocultural, linguistic, and behavioral factors when making referrals for special education. Our method involved integrating a range of data sources taken from school records in two urban school districts differing in size. The discussion analyzes the patterns of over- and underrepresentation of nonnative students in special education classes in light of findings from our data and the literature review. New directions of research to expand the exploration of these issues are also suggested.

**Background**

**Socioeconomic Status and Acculturation for Nonnative Children**

Researchers seeking an understanding of diverse populations have attempted to address, or at least acknowledge, differences in acculturation based on the amount of time individuals have lived in the United States. Ortega (2009) highlights the fact that the degree to which an individual participates in the norms and values of the mainstream culture as the second language (L2) is acquired is highly complex and that “affective and social-psychological variables that arise from non-linguistic dimensions of the environment remain important when explaining L2 learning.” (p. 59). In their study of support groups for Latino families of children with Down syndrome, Shapiro and Simonsen (1994) recognized that members of an ethnic group might be
at different points along the acculturation continuum (the degree to which an individual has internalized the norms and values of a particular society). They targeted families of Mexican origin who had lived in the United States for five years or fewer as particularly in need of support. When discussing the acculturation of nonnatives, it is also important to consider how the target group is situated in the larger community. Acculturation will be based to some degree on contact with particular communities and subcultures. Latino children and other immigrant EBs are likely to interact with natives who come from poor or working-class environments and whose subcultures contrast with that of the mainstream U.S. culture represented in school (Dzidzienyo & Obler, 2005).

Latino children, particularly those from rural or agrarian backgrounds, may arrive with limited exposure to school culture (Nieto, 2002; Salend & Reynolds, 1991). Additional issues of relevance for referral to special education include a focus on group rather than individual achievement, indicating a mismatch between traditional Latino and U.S. values (McEachern & Kenny, 2002). For example, Eisenstein Ebsworth and Ebsworth (2000) found that Latinos enculturated in Puerto Rico judged behavior as appropriate only when its impact on the community was favorable. In contrast, continental North Americans allowed for the possibility of a behavior that could be judged favorably when it benefitted the individual irrespective of its community impact. Pérez and Torres-Guzman (2002) report that Mexican-American children experienced dissonance between approaches to performing collectively organized tasks at home and more teacher-directed tasks at school. That is, eliciting help from other children was encouraged at home but not equally supported at school. In addition, as learners go through the acculturation process, making meaning of different norms and expectations, their behavior may reflect their anxiety and stress. “There is a clear need to help educators understand that many potentially troubling behaviors of culturally and linguistically different children are normal and should be anticipated given their cultural, linguistic, and acculturational backgrounds” (Collier & Hoover, 1987, p. 3).

The extent to which immigrant families’ experiences with mainstream U.S. society relate to their inclination to internalize particular U.S. mores and act on them has implications for their children’s classroom behaviors and, therefore, their children’s susceptibility to referral for special education. Chamberlain (2006) notes: “Institutions encode and prescribe distinctive vantage points that the people who inhabit those institutions adopt as part of the process of fitting in their institutional roles” (p. 229). In a study of referrals for special education in a largely Latino community (Gottlieb & Weinberg, 1999), several teachers commented that children who recently came to the United States were better behaved than children who were born here. According to these teachers, immigrant children seemed more respectful and were more inclined to obey class rules. Also, if being respectful and well-behaved are more valued traits in traditional Latino cultures, it would explain, in part, findings from prior research suggesting that Latino parents tend to be more likely than African American or Caucasian parents to initiate referral for special education in order to address their children’s behavioral problems (Gottlieb, Gottlieb, & Trongone, 1991). However, the same study indicated that teachers referred African American
children more often than Latinos on this basis. Furthermore, both groups were referred for evaluation more frequently than children classified as Caucasians, irrespective of whether the referral was initiated by parents or teachers.

Interlanguage Development

Interlanguage is a construct that refers to the nature of an individual’s systematic mental representation of an L2 at a particular point in time (Cheatham & Ro, 2010; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Proper assessment of a nonnative speaker’s interlanguage proficiency remains difficult, especially with regard to assessment for special education eligibility (Baca & Cervantes, 2004). It is crucial to separate issues of second-language development from possible signs of disability (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002). Accurately characterizing the L2 competence of learners is difficult in and of itself. Learners going through the early stage of preproduction, also known as the silent period, are focused on understanding and processing L2 input and may be reluctant to produce speech, relying largely on nonverbal communication (Diaz-Rico, 2007; Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

Even at the advanced fluency stage of development (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999, 2001), Lakshmanan and Selinker (2001) indicate that confusion in determining L2 development in interlanguage is common, and it is not unusual to either underestimate or overestimate learners’ L2 proficiency. An additional dimension that is relevant is the variation of language needed to function in casual versus academic settings. Cummins (2000) has drawn the distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive academic language proficiency and focuses on the range of literacies needed in today’s world (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007). As a result, nonnative children who are able to function adequately in informal settings with peers may continue to experience challenges in the use of academic language in the classroom. Matching interventions to stages of L2 acquisition is also extremely complicated (Hearne, 2000). The reality of EBs usage of translanguage, the use of more than one language in a specific context (Garcia, Bartlett, & Kleifgen, 2007) can further complicate the perceptions of monolinguals regarding these children. Guidelines and resources are offered in the literature but involve a synergy of linguistic and performance factors in order for the practitioner to identify learners’ stages of language development (Education Evaluation Center, 2007).

It can also be difficult to separate the appropriate use of language to match the situation in which it is used and the learner’s stage in the acquisition process. Agar (1994) uses the term language culture to indicate that language use and cultural knowledge are inextricably entwined (p. 60). The connection between sociocultural context and appropriate language use is explored by Fetzer (2007), and the difficulty of using one’s second language to send a message to others that correctly encodes the speaker’s intention is well documented in the research on intercultural pragmatics (Eisenstein Ebsworth & Ebsworth, 2000; House, Kasper, & Ross, 2003). Finally, in part due to the difficulties noted above, overdependence on language tests for educational decisions regarding bilingual special education students has been noted and
criticized (Roseberry-McKibbin & O’Hanlon, 2005). The use of natural language samples to assess bilingual learners has been found to yield greater validity than language elicited and evaluated through formal testing and analysis (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2006).

An additional dimension of second language acquisition for Latino students in inner cities is that their target for second language learning may include African American vernacular English (AAVE) or a Latino variety that incorporates its influence (Gutiérrez-Cieben & Simon-Cereijido, 2007; Eisenstein & Berkowitz, 1981). The fact that AAVE differs from standard U.S. English linguistic and rhetorical patterns, and that this disconnect can result in difficulties for communication and success in school, is well established (Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Smitherman, 1977). This factor may have consequences for referral to special education both for Latino nonnatives and for natives who speak AAVE or a local Latino variety of English (Zhang & Cho, 2010).

**Referrals Based on Behavior**

Despite its importance, language is not the sole reason why many students are referred for special education. The role of behavior in the referral of nonnative children in general and Latino children in particular has also received attention in the research literature, though the data are inconsistent. Indeed, research conducted in urban schools with high concentrations of minority students has indicated that these students tend to be over-referred relative to their numbers in the population at large (Fruchter, Berne, Marcus, Alter, & Gottlieb, 1996), often for inappropriate behavior (Gottlieb & Alter, 1994). A meta-analysis comparing referral of Hispanics and African Americans (Hosp & Reschly, 2003) noted that African American students appeared to be disproportionately referred for behavior compared with Caucasian students while contrary to some other research, referral rates of Hispanic students were not significantly different from those of Caucasians. The authors suggested that a “mismatch of expectations might affect the referral rates of non-Caucasian students” (p. 68). This demonstrates that study in additional contexts and considering additional variables is needed to understand why the literature reveals conflicting information regarding whether Latinos are or are not over-referred for special education and to identify variables that may mediate differential outcomes.

Disruptiveness and inattention are among the behaviors associated with emotional disturbance in children (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Inappropriate behavior on the part of EBs may be the result of the traumatic experiences and dislocation that immigrant children have gone through (Christina, 1993). The researcher points out, however, that inappropriate behavior by nonnatives is often more likely to require counseling and understanding than placement in special education, except for cases of serious mental or emotional disorders. The research clearly demonstrates that over-referral of nonnatives for perceived behavioral problems is pervasive (Kastner & Gottlieb, 1991; Gottlieb & Weinberg, 1999; Harry & Klingner, 2007). However, while recent research such as the national study of Samson and Lesaux (2009) has found over-referral of bilingual learners in kindergarten and Grade 1, changing to under-referral in Grade 3, the possibility that the behavior of immigrant children might actually make them less likely to be
referred than their native peers is rarely reported.

Educating School Personnel

The majority of research about making EB referrals more accurate, especially of Latino students, has been concerned with educating school personnel about the nuances of normal bilingual development and the factors that distinguish such development from language and social behavior characteristic of a learning disability (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Schiff-Myers, Djukic, McGovern-Lawler, & Perez, 1994). The intent of such work is to avoid inappropriate teacher referrals to special education and the subsequent inappropriate eligibility determinations by child study teams. Our study, which considers the potential roles of language and behavior in both over-referrals and under-referrals, will add to the existing literature by expanding the understanding of researchers and practitioners of how to make special education decisions more accurate for nonnative populations.

Research Questions

This research had two purposes: to determine (a) whether misbehavior as a reason for referral occurs more or less often for non-mainland-born children than for mainland-born children; and (b) whether non-mainland-born and mainland-born students are perceived by teachers to exhibit language issues that are differentially cited as reasons for referral.

Method

Participants

Our samples were drawn over a period of three years from two urban school systems located in neighboring states in the Northeast United States¹. These data were obtained and analyzed at the request of one of the school districts at a point in time when the district believed it was overwhelmed with referrals for special education and it wanted to gain a better understanding of why the volume of referrals, and their accompanying costs, had been so large. Special education cost has been a recurring concern to school districts over the years and continues to be so, as is most recently evident from New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s testimony before the New York State legislature (Fertig, 2011).

The first school system where we collected data was large, while the second was considerably smaller. Latino students represented the largest subgroup in both school systems. In fact, the smaller school system was recruited primarily because its student population was heavily Latino, as it was in the larger school district. Our rationale for studying the research questions in two separate school districts was that we wished to determine whether the same relationships existed in separate school districts of different sizes located in different states so as to increase the generalizability of the findings. Recent research shows contrasting approaches in
alternate school districts, even within the same system (Sánchez, Parker, Abkayan, McTigue, 2010). We were particularly interested in studying the sensitive nature of special education referrals in districts that differed substantially in size where, presumably, students and families may have been known in greater or lesser depth as a function of school and district size.

**Large urban school system (>250,000).** As part of a larger study of assessment practices in the larger school system that was requested by the school administration, a random sample of 336 school records was selected. Sample size was limited by the available manpower and time as provided by the school district. Our original target sample was 350; however, errors and inconsistencies in school records required us to drop 14 records from the sample. All students attended one of six districts that comprised one region of this urban school system. The 336 students included children referred for initial evaluation \( (n = 194) \) and children referred for re-evaluation \( (n = 142) \). In this sample, 59% was Latino, 32% was African American, and 4% was Caucasian. Age of arrival on the U.S. mainland was as follows: 22% age 2 or younger, 18% ages 2–5, 16% ages 5–11, 38% ages 11–14, and 2% ages 14–18. Although our current focus is on referrals for special education and not determinations of eligibility and eventual service recommendations, other data culled from this data set, from the larger study, indicated that close to 90% of students referred by classroom teachers were subsequently found eligible for special education services by their respective multidisciplinary assessment teams.

The remaining 5% of the sample were divided among Asians (2%), offspring of interracial marriages (1%), and the missing data on race and/or ethnicity accounted for the remainder. Fourteen percent of the school population was enrolled in special education, about 1% higher than the average for the urban school system as a whole. Eighty-eight percent of the special education children in this sample participated in the district’s free lunch program. Finally, 52% of the entire teaching staff was either African American or Latino.

Of the 336 students whose records were sampled, data on place of birth were available for 271 students (80.7%); of the 271 students 49 (18.1%) were immigrants and 222 were born on the mainland. Forty-six of the 49 immigrant or migrant students came from Spanish-speaking areas, with the largest subgroups representing Puerto Rico \( (n = 18) \) and the Dominican Republic \( (n = 12) \). On average, the immigrant or migrant children attending the larger school system entered the mainland United States at 7.1 years of age.

**Small urban school system (<1500).** The second school system, located in a contiguous state and selected to provide a contrast to the larger school system, but with a much smaller population of students similar in ethnic and racial backgrounds, enrolled approximately 1,200 students. In this district, we obtained child study team records for the entire population of 49 children referred for evaluation for special education during a single school year.

At the time of data collection, 5.65% of the student population was enrolled in special education programs. Of the total student population, 63% was Latino, 28% was Caucasian, 7.7% was Asian, and 1.5% was African American. Almost 39% of the families whose children attended this school district participated in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program.
Data on place of birth were available for 35 of the 49 (71.4%) students. Seven (20%) of the 35 students for whom data were available were not born on the mainland; all were born in Spanish-speaking countries, primarily in Puerto Rico ($n = 4$), and one each from Mexico, Dominican Republic, El Salvador. On average, the non-mainland-born children in the smaller school district entered the mainland United States at 6 years of age.

**Limitations**

We must acknowledge that our background information was limited by the current practices of the schools in reporting demographics. These reports conflate ethnicity and race. We also note that Latinos represent a range of racial backgrounds including mixed African descent, Indigenous and mixed Indigenous descent, and Caucasian (typically Spanish ancestry) and mixtures of these groups. The categories for native English speakers are equally problematic. Nevertheless, the data reflect the associations of the participants from their own perspectives and/or those of their families.

**Procedures**

Procedures for data collection were similar in both school systems in that the data were obtained from school records. To retrieve the data in the larger school system, a team of seven experienced members of the district’s multidisciplinary assessment teams participated in the development of a records-review form. Seven individuals collected all data on the 336 students. Six of the seven data collectors were bilingual, of Latino origin, and had been employed in various roles on multidisciplinary assessment teams for an average of seven years. The chief data collector, who was not Latino, was involved in training multidisciplinary team members in state regulations pertaining to the assessment process. All seven were doctoral students in either special education or school psychology.

We collected demographic and reason-for-referral data, among other variables, from both subgroups (students initially referred and those referred for reevaluation). These particular data points were a subset of a larger data set consisting of over 100 variables that required three months of training for seven bilingual graduate students to establish inter-rater agreement. When all seven data collectors reached a minimum of 80% agreement on each of the variables on the data collection form, training was suspended and data collection began. For approximately 90% of the variables, reliability was easily established since data were transferred verbatim from the students’ records.

An abbreviated version of the data collection form was developed for the current study and appears the Appendix. The variables of concern to this study included (a) the child’s place of birth, (b) reasons why the child was initially referred for special education, and (c) general education teachers’ ratings of children’s language ability at the time of the referral. Scoring of the reason for referral required data collectors to interpret teachers’ written narratives in the school records. Major categories of referral reasons were identified through a recursive review of narrative statements. For the purposes of this study, referral for behavioral reasons was
operationally defined as referral when behavior was a primary reason as opposed to both behavioral and academic reasons. Inter-rater reliability for reason for referral was .92. It is possible that academic reasons may incorporate elements of language-based skills including oral and literate, receptive, and productive language. However, in these cases, teachers’ comments focused primarily on content issues rather than on students’ language.

Data on the role of language facility in the referral decision were obtained from teachers’ responses to a referral form developed by the larger school district, which all teachers were required to complete when referring a student. Teachers checked “yes” or “no” to indicate whether the student could successfully (a) express him/her orally, (b) use age-appropriate language, (c) understand what is said, or (d) produce grammatically accurate language. If any one of these categories were identified as a contributing factor, this was counted as referral for language. (A more fine-tuned view of degree of perceived language challenge is beyond the scope of the current paper.) Sufficient data were available in the student records of the smaller district to allow same questions to be answered.

Results

Comparisons on Place of Birth and Reason for Referral

In the larger school system, data on place of birth and reason for referral were available for 271 children, aggregated across all ethnic groups in the sample. Of these, 222 were born on the mainland and 49 were born in non-mainland regions, including Puerto Rico. One hundred and seven of the 222 native-born students (48.2%) were referred for misbehavior. Sixteen of the 49 (32.7%) non-mainland students were referred for misbehavior. This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3.91$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) and moderately powerful ($\alpha = .52$).

In the smaller school system, data on place of birth and reason for referral were available for 35 children. Eleven of the 28 (39.3%) native-born students and one of the seven (14.3%) non-mainland-born students were referred for misbehavior. This difference was not statistically significant.

When the data for the two school systems were combined, 118 of 250 (47.2%) mainland-born students and 17 of 56 (30.4%) non-mainland-born students were referred for misbehavior. This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.26$, $df = 1$, $p < .02$) and moderately powerful ($\alpha = .65$).

Comparisons of Latino Students

The previous analyses compared reasons for referral of all mainland-born and non-mainland born students in our samples. These analyses most often involved non-mainland-born Latino children who were being compared with a combined group consisting primarily of mainland-born Latino and African American students. We replicated the preceding analyses, but...
this time included only the subsample of 179 Latino students (of 336 total) in the larger school system. We conducted these sub-analyses to control for the variable of ethnicity in our mainland population. In the Latino subsample, 49.6% of the native Latinos and 33.3% of the immigrant Latinos were referred for behavioral reasons. The chi-square analysis for this difference did not reach significance. This demonstrated that place of birth in itself did not significantly discriminate between the Latinos in the sample born within or outside continental United States.

**Teachers’ Perceptions of Language Competence and Referrals**

In the larger school system, we compared teachers’ responses to the four language-related items for mainland-born and non-mainland-born students on the schools’ referral form. None of the comparisons was statistically significant. That is, teachers did not indicate more language difficulty for non-mainland born students compared with their mainland-born peers. A summary of these data appears in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant difficulty with</th>
<th>Mainland-born ( (N = 222) )</th>
<th>Non-mainland-born ( (N = 49) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>language usage</td>
<td>45 (20.3)</td>
<td>11 (22.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grammatical accuracy</td>
<td>50 (22.5)</td>
<td>13 (26.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>49 (22.1)</td>
<td>13 (26.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oral expression</td>
<td>67 (30.2)</td>
<td>14 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 1 of the 49 students in the smaller district was referred primarily for language difficulties, a nonnative Latino. We did not have data on the specific place of birth for that student. Finally, we compared the narrative comments appearing in the students’ school records that teachers in the larger school system provided when they indicated that speech/language difficulties were the primary reason for referral. Teachers reported that 37 of the 222 (16.7%) mainland-born students were referred primarily because they had difficulties with language. Ten of 47 (21.3%) of the non-mainland-born students were cited by their teachers as being referred primarily for language-related difficulties. A chi-square analysis showed that this variable did not significantly differentiate the two groups.

**Discussion**

Our findings contrast with the trends of over-referral of nonnatives reported in the literature. Non-mainland-born students in our samples were less likely than mainland-born students to be referred by classroom teachers for behavior problems. Furthermore, the data also
showed that teachers’ perceptions of children’s language facility did not significantly differentiate referrals between the two groups.

The fact that non-mainland-born students in our study tend to be referred less frequently for behavior problems than their native-born peers illustrates the complexities in interpreting teachers’ referrals. One possible explanation is that the behavior of non-mainland-born and mainland-born children actually differs. Non-mainland-born children, striving for acceptance in their new country, may be more likely to behave in accordance with standards that parents and teachers expect and reward. Further, teachers in students’ countries of origin may enjoy a higher social status, a status that makes it less acceptable to be disrespectful to teachers (Eisenstein Ebsworth & Ebsworth, 2000).

An additional or alternative explanation for the data is that it is possible that children’s actual behavior does not differ, but that teachers use different standards to evaluate the appropriateness of behavior displayed by the two groups of students. To illustrate, Harry (1992) described teachers’ prejudices, racial biases, and the inconsistent expectations they hold for students of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds that differ from their own and discussed how these factors influence the referral of minority students. Our data, dealing primarily with Latino students, could suggest that teacher biases and prejudices may surface primarily when children seem similar to mainstream peers. By contrast, when they are clearly different, as when the children are immigrants or migrants, teachers may judge children by alternative standards.

The role played by the interaction of place of birth and ethnicity was also of interest. When the comparison was confined to Latino children, more mainland-born Latino than non-mainland-born Latino students were referred for misbehavior, the ratio being approximately 3:2 although this difference did not attain statistical significance. While observed differences did not reach significance, in part perhaps due to sample size, the present data are provocative. The descriptive difference in referrals of mainland-born to non-mainland-born students was observed in two separate school districts, suggesting that we should not dismiss the overall conclusion regarding the relationship between immigrant or migrant status and behavioral reasons for referral of Latino children. The findings that emerged from our data suggest that the relationship may exist. Replication on a larger sample is clearly warranted.

The fact that mainland-born and non-mainland-born students were not referred at different rates for perceived language problems is somewhat, although not totally, surprising. One explanation is that non-mainland-born mostly Latino children who exhibit language difficulties are entitled to bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) if they score below the 40th percentile on the Language Assessment Battery. In the larger school district from which the present data were sampled, the bilingual population receiving services for language development is at least as large as the special education population, each containing more than 130,000 students. It is possible that were it not for the existence of targeted programs for EB students, more English learners might have been referred for special education. Thus, because many children whose native language is not English are filtered out by the bilingual/ESL
program alternatives, the children remaining for referral for special education tend to have educational difficulties and needs similar to those of other children whose native language is English.

That the availability of programs for EBs reduces the number of referrals for special education may be observed from a comparison of our sample with the population from which it was derived. In our sample of 336 children referred for special education, 16.4% received some form of ESL or bilingual education, being enrolled either in a full or partial bilingual program or in a program for ESL. By contrast, 21.3% of the 133,896 elementary and middle school general education students in the six school districts were recorded as students with limited English proficiency. Thus, the rate of referrals for children participating in the EB education system is about three-fourths that of children not receiving special ESL or bilingual services.

Two additional reasons why teachers in mainstream classes may be less aware of potential language disabilities among immigrant or migrant children are that children whose native language is not English may be embarrassed by their lack of linguistic skills and choose not to speak much in class, thus providing teachers with limited language samples on which to render judgment. Indeed, Duff (2002) reported that nonnative speakers in mainstream classes have difficulty participating fully due to conflicting expectations of peers and teachers, as well as a lack of community-based knowledge about classroom behaviors and cultural literacy.

Another possible explanation for our data is that alternative language varieties and limited control of academic language may be pervasive in inner-city schools so that teachers do not identify any single population as being in particular need. In fact, our native population included many students who were likely to be speakers of alternative varieties of English such as AAVE. This population is also at risk for over-referral, as their language, discourse, and learning styles contrast with those of the mainstream (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Seymour, Champion, & Jackson, 1995). This explanation is supported by information we obtained in another portion of the data set for the current research which indicated that teachers rated African American and Latino children who were referred for special education as exhibiting similar degrees of language difficulties. To illustrate, 25.8% of African American children as compared with 22.3% of Latino children were reported by classroom teachers to have difficulties with articulation. Additionally, 23.7% of African American children as compared with 22.9% of Latino children were reported to have difficulty producing grammatically accurate speech. Perhaps in urban environments where many children who attend public schools come from at-risk circumstances, African American children, as reported by Coulter (1996), are likewise overrepresented in every category of special education. In such a population, EBs may not stand out as having especially severe language difficulties. The educational challenges faced by speakers of AAVE are well documented, although the best educational practices to address them remain controversial. Clearly, the composition of the district may be relevant for outcomes.

Of interest is also the fact that the English spoken by Latino children who grow up in a
large metropolitan area has often been observed to include many of the same nonstandard features as AAVE, due to the proximity and interaction of members of both speech communities (Adger et al., 2007; Eisenstein & Jimenez, 1983). Further, both communities reflect not only linguistic differences as compared with Standard English, but also contrasting styles and patterns of discourse (Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 1995). Michaels and Cazden (1986) found that misunderstandings of AAVE by Standard English–speaking educators often involved contrasting discourse patterns. Children who spoke AAVE during show-and-tell (referred to as sharing time in Michaels’s study) were believed by teachers to lack coherence in their discourse when in fact they were simply displaying a different discourse style (Morgan, 2002; Smitherman, 1977).

Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research

Our findings show that for the population sampled, language was not a significant factor differentiating the referral of native v. nonnative students for special education, whereas behavior was. Whether nonnative speakers such as Latino immigrants are overrepresented in special education as indicated in much of the literature, or underrepresented as indicated by our data, more work must be done with educators and evaluators to ensure more accurate assessment and placement.

In this respect, Christina (1992, 1993) reports on a project intended to educate in-service teachers on how to differentiate between the normal language or interlanguage and the culture-based behavior of EBs that might be different from native usage. It was hoped that an understanding of how linguistic and sociolinguistic differences in the language use of Latino children or other EBs were distinct from usage indicating a language disability would help to reduce inappropriate referrals of Latino and other EB children to special education.

Current research indicates that accurately referring EBs for special education remains a continuing challenge. In an exploratory study of eligibility decisions for native Spanish speakers, Liu et al. (2008) reported that many students were misplaced. They concluded that “this study’s results suggest a lack of clear policies, procedures, and practices for early intervention, referral, assessment, and eligibility determinations involving ELLs at the school district level” (p. 185).

More recent changes in federal law (IDEA, 2004) opened the way for a response to intervention model for identifying children with a variety of educational challenges, including language challenges, prior to referring those children for special education assessment. This three-tiered approach would monitor students’ response to increasingly targeted instruction and support (Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006) and would culminate in evaluation for special education rather than start there (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). However, administrators are among those who express concern over implementation (Wiener & Soodak, 2008). Orosco and Klingner (2010), using a qualitative case study approach, presented the difficulties that arose when response to intervention was applied in an urban elementary school with a large EB population including Latinos. The authors concluded that “everything that was developed, implemented, and practiced by the majority of participants was based on a deficits-based

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Teachers did not have a good knowledge of L2 pedagogy, nor did they understand the impact of the L2 acquisition process on learners’ evaluation and performance.

An additional dimension is suggested by recent research (Garcia et al., 2007; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010) indicating that bilingual students often integrate both of their languages in single conversations (translanguaging), obscuring their ability to use one of the languages exclusively when called upon. While such usage is normal in bilingual populations, this intertwined use of both languages may make it difficult for a teacher to accurately assess a learner’s ability to function in either language. It is also possible that teachers simply do not have the depth of expertise in language development to tease apart a child’s level of skill or delay.

In fact, the current state of the art requires an assessment that takes into consideration both first and second languages, so that a learner’s linguistic development can be accurately evaluated. As translanguage is common in such children (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010), both languages should be considered in assessment (Umbell, Pearson, Fernandez, & Oller, 1992). Bedore and Peña (2008) recommend “consideration of the way that two languages might interact or influence each other” (p. 20).

Parental involvement is also key in appreciating the context in which nonnative students are growing up. A study by Marshall (2000) found that while IQ was the most important factor correlated with placement in special education classes, when at least one parent or caretaker was present at the educational planning committee conference the likelihood that a student would be placed in an integrated setting was significantly increased.

Another interesting issue that emerged from this study involves the acculturation of immigrant and migrant children to the values and behaviors of their mainstream peers. When nonnatives live and study among other at-risk students, their integration into the local subculture, where behaviors contrast from middle class expectations (Hosp & Reschly, 2003), may actually result in less acceptable school behaviors thus making them more vulnerable to inaccurate referral for special education. Of relevance to this question, the movement toward critical pedagogy (Norton & Toohey, 2004; Wink, 2000) urges us to problematize issues of potential injustice to culturally and linguistically diverse students. Our study highlights the importance of context, culture, language, and behavior in formulating an accurate assessment of potential special needs children based not on a deficit model, but rather on a contextualized understanding and appreciation of language and culture.

Future research should consider that referral and placement in special education requires a nuanced evaluation of each learner, weighing a range of linguistic, social, and contextual variables that impact perceptions of learners’ knowledge, skills, and performance. Alternative approaches such as the response to intervention model suggest a multilevel, recursive, process-oriented approach that engages teachers and support personnel in a collaborative endeavor (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Professionals must accurately evaluate learners for placement and understand that even when students do need special support, actual placement might still be inappropriate. Students are legally entitled to placement in the least restrictive environment (Yeb, 1995).
Also, further research should incorporate a longitudinal approach to how nonnatives in such communities develop language and culture over time. Of particular interest is the group referred to as “generation 1.5” (Oudenhoven, 2006) who, while native born, retain sociolinguistic elements from their families and communities of origin. Finally, as our nonnative sample was overwhelmingly Latino, it is important to replicate this work with other immigrant communities.

References


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Notes

1. Original data for this study were collected over a period of three years during the 1990s in two contrasting school systems. This paper represents a review of previously unpublished data which we believe continue to be relevant in the current time and context.

Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Form (Short Version)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ID __________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many years of schooling prior to referral ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in monolingual classes ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in bilingual program ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in ESL program ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If reason for referral either academic, behavioral, or both, indicate which, if any, specific reasons were cited by the teacher in the written narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ general academic problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ language problem(see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ reading problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ arithmetic problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From reason for referral form, check if student was indicated to have significant difficulty with:

- _____ expressing self orally
- _____ using age-appropriate language
- _____ understanding what is said
- _____ speaking with grammatical accuracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s date of birth</th>
<th>_________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth</td>
<td>_________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child lives with</th>
<th>Mother and father</th>
<th>Mother only</th>
<th>Father only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandparent(s)</td>
<td>Foster parent</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| If appropriate, age of entry into United States | __________ |
| How many years has family been in United States | __________ |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where were parents born?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In what language did mother receive most of her education</th>
<th>_________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what language did father receive most of his education</td>
<td>_________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What language is spoken most of the time at home</td>
<td>_________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what language does child usually speak to his parents</td>
<td>_________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what language does child usually speak to his friends</td>
<td>_________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was the student found to be handicapped</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perspectives on Teacher Quality: Bilingual Education and ESL Teacher Certification, Test-Taking Experiences, and Instructional Practices

Nancy Lemberger
Long Island University

Angela Reyes-Carrasquillo
Fordham University

This descriptive exploratory study looked at the certification process, test-taking experiences, and instructional practices of a group of graduate bilingual education (BE) and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers to understand why some had problems passing teacher certification tests after completing their degrees. The study surveyed 63 BE and ESL teachers on their certification and test-taking experiences and their perceived instructional strengths. From this group of 63 participants, 15 volunteer teachers were interviewed and observed in their classrooms. Findings reveal most teachers passed certification tests on the first or second attempt. However, several failed tests due to language, content, and time difficulties, which had frustrating consequences for their teaching careers. Teachers’ perceived and observed instructional strengths reflected to varying degrees effective research-based practices for English Language Learners. Despite test challenges, teachers persisted, were passionate and committed to students. Study findings call for further research on teacher certification tests and their relationship to teacher quality and the instructional practices teachers implement.

Education research shows that of all the school-related factors that affect student achievement, teacher quality is one of the most important (Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Federal educational policies, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top, place great emphasis on teacher quality and effectiveness. For example, with NCLB, states are required to define “highly qualified teachers” and report their numbers to the federal government to maintain federal funding. NCLB still requires “all public school teachers in core academic areas be highly qualified by 2012” (Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, 2010, p. 9). Though each state’s certification requirements differ, most teachers must hold a bachelor’s degree, have pedagogical and subject area training at the level they teach, and some field and student teaching experience. To work in public schools, teachers typically also must pass background checks and state-mandated certification tests (Goldhaber, 2002, 2007; Rotherham & Mead, 2004). As a result, there is great interest in understanding teacher quality and how certification requirements, in particular the certification tests relate to it. This study explores and describes the certification process and test experiences.
of a group of bilingual Education (BE) and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) teachers in becoming certified. As teacher educators and researchers from two private New York City (NYC) universities, for years we heard frustrating stories from some BE and ESL graduate teacher candidates about their difficulties passing certification exams. We knew many were high achieving students and seemingly caring and capable educators. Their frustrations prompted us to want to better understand their certification and test experiences and how these echoed their teaching strengths.

Our perspectives on certification tests and effective teaching of English Language Learners (ELLs) are informed by the more than 30-year careers in the education field and by the scholarly literature. Both influences shaped the three research questions of this exploratory qualitative study: (a) What were participating BE and ESL teachers’ certification and test-taking experiences? (b) What were participating BE and ESL teachers’ perceived instructional strengths? (c) How were selected BE and ESL teachers’ perceived classroom instructional strengths implemented in their own classrooms? This study draws on literature on effective instructional practices for ELLs and teacher certification, principally the certification tests.

Review of the Literature

Effective Instructional Practices for ELLs

Research has consistently documented that qualified teachers and effective classroom instruction are central to improve the education of ELLs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Echevarria & Short, 2009; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Samway & McKeon, 2007; Slavin & Calderón, 2001; Waxman & Padrón, 2003). The following discussion identifies some essential characteristics of effective instruction for ELLs. Committed and well-trained teachers significantly impact student learning through understanding and focusing on language and academic development, using cultural and experiential resources, and creating classroom contexts where learners are actively engaged and guided to take risks in the new language (Echevarria & Short, 2009; Kamil et al., 2008). Pertinent to this study are the practices that effectively increase ELLs’ language proficiency, literacy development (oral language, vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing development), and content knowledge (Genesee, et al., 2006; Kamil et al., 2008; Waxman & Padrón, 2003).

Teachers of ELLs demonstrate commitment to teaching and care and empathy for students and their families. These behaviors often stem from personal experiences as an immigrant or second language learner (Clark, Jackson, & Prieto, 2011; Nieto, 2004). Such teacher behaviors are reflected in the culturally and linguistically congruent ways teachers interact with students and their families and show their belief in and expectations for children to succeed (Lemberger, 1997; Nevárez-La Torre, 2010).

Language and culture are inextricably linked and central to teaching. Teachers respect and use children’s and families’ language and cultural “funds of knowledge” resources to create
curriculum and foster learning communities (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2004; Tharp, 1999). Cultural content in curriculum goes beyond the usual “foods, flags, and fiestas” focusing on students’ experiences and extend to a deeper understanding of their own and other cultures.

First language is nurtured and used to develop literacy, content, and skills and as a bridge to academic English. With purposeful exposure, students see their first and second languages as one system and become aware of how both interact and function (Adler & Rougle, 2005; August & Shanahan, 2006; Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Goldenberg, 2008). Effective use of first and second languages provides students with opportunities to try out, produce, and extend oral and written language individually and collaboratively. Teachers are cognizant of second-language acquisition stages and how to match instruction to different language proficiency levels through a variety of curriculum (August & Shanahan, 2006; Peregoy & Boyle, 2009; Slavin & Calderón, 2001).

Literacy is at the heart of learning, and its development involves a continuum of teaching strategies enabling individuals to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their community and wider society. Developmentally appropriate reading instruction explicitly addresses the components identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension in context of meaningful content (August & Shanahan, 2006; Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation, 2010). Oral language proficiency, leading to advanced vocabulary knowledge, is essential to building reading comprehension (Kamil, et al., 2008; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). To develop academic literacy, teachers guide students to recognize and understand the language demands of academic texts, through talking about texts, analyzing language, vocabulary and text structure, and applying these components to writing (Chamot, 2009; Echevarria & Short, 2009; Schleppegrell, Greer, & Taylor, 2008).

Teachers rely on an arsenal of strategies to meet ELLs’ learning needs, among them: scaffolding, sheltering and contextualizing language and content; using different groupings that allow for meaningful interaction; and providing appropriate materials that make content come alive through: texts, visuals, pictures, charts, real objects, and graphic organizers (Chamot, 2009; Echevarria & Short, 2009). Teachers model and use a variety of language: asking and answering all types of questions, rephrasing, paraphrasing, repeating and clarifying material, simplifying complex tasks, and monitoring comprehension (Echevarria & Short, 2009; Nelson & Stage, 2007). Teachers guide students to solve problems, carry out tasks, practice them, and then apply them to other tasks or contexts (Carraquillo & Rodríguez, 2002). Teachers give comprehensible feedback, which promotes new learning and allows students to connect the known with new information. Teachers also infuse lessons with metacognitive skills so students become aware of their learning process by questioning themselves and one another; and by summarizing and using imagery and memory techniques, and social strategies (Chamot, 2009; Echevarria & Short, 2009; Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer & Rivera, 2006; Nelson & Stage, 2007).

Given the wealth of information on what constitutes effective teaching qualities, we
decided to explore if and how teachers who experienced problems passing the certification tests, exhibited these practices in their teaching. In other words, we wanted to investigate if their problems passing the certification tests suggested a lack of use of research-based teaching practices. Also important was to examine if these teachers, contrary to what their difficulties in obtaining certification might suggest, used effective practices in teaching ELLs.

**Teacher Certification and Tests**

Currently, 47 states require some combination of teacher certification tests (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). States use tests to signal or identify minimum quality for beginning teachers and to screen out those not qualified. Two companies dominate the lucrative testing industry: (a) Educational Testing Services, designer of the former National Teacher Examination (NTE) and the present Praxis Series and (b) Pearson Education, formerly National Evaluation Systems (NES), that custom-designs test for states. Most certification tests are designed to be taken during undergraduate studies, with content testing beginning teachers’ general knowledge (from the liberal arts and sciences or basic skills), pedagogical knowledge and skills, subject area knowledge, and in a few, but increasing number of states (Darling-Hammond, 2010), teaching performance. Except for performance assessments, tests are timed, with multiple-choice questions and written (and sometimes oral) responses. Each state requires its own battery of tests and sets the cut-off scores for each. Interestingly, scores for the same Praxis test vary across states (Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation, 2010).

Large-scale studies have been conducted to determine if teacher quality as measured by certification exams correlates with student achievement (Angrist & Gurayan, 2008; Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Goldhaber, 2007; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Hanushek, Kain, O’Brien, & Rivkin, 2005). Evidence has been inconclusive in connecting certification tests as a quality indicator with student achievement, except for a slight correlation in the secondary subject area of math (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010; Harrell, 2009). Another key finding is that tests do not predict teachers’ effectiveness well, especially those in the middle score ranges (Goldhaber, 2007). Some researchers have advocated for the design and use of multiple measures to better capture the intangible teaching attributes not measurable by certification tests (Brown, 2005; Goldhaber, 2002; Mitchell, Robinson, Plake, & Knowles, 2001). Other factors, such as the accumulation of more than four years of teaching experience, may influence student achievement (Hanushek et al., 2005). Racial/ethnic congruence among teachers and students also shows potential for higher student achievement, especially in minority schools (Brown, 2005; Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010).

Differentiated certification test performance patterns across racial and ethnic lines have been noted. For instance, Angrist and Gurayan (2008) documented an alarming finding that Latino teacher candidates have “marked lower licensure scores than Whites or Blacks” (p. 483), which results in disproportionately fewer Latino teachers becoming certified. Since many Latino teacher candidates aspire to work in diverse multilingual schools, this finding has serious implications for the shortage of BE teachers in high-needs schools. It also calls into question the
way these tests define teacher quality and if they integrate into the operational definition the scholarly findings cited above that highlight effective teaching for ELLs.

Black and Latino test-takers have filed lawsuits claiming tests were discriminatory and biased and thus excluded them temporarily or permanently from entry into the profession (Walsh, 2007). In addition, minority candidates who fail the exams must retake them, often repeatedly, which is financially expensive and personally damaging (Bennett, McWhorter, & Kuykendall, 2006; Brown, 2005; Mitchell, et al., 2001). Tests may be retaken unlimited times, which calls into question their validity and use as a signal of teacher quality (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). Test failure has caused Black teachers to lose “a bit of the spirit and drive that inspired them to pursue teaching” (Albers, 2002, p. 119). For BE and ESL teachers, test failure has resulted in delays in beginning teaching or dismissal from provisional teaching positions (Flores & Clark, 1997; Lemberger, 2001). Failing the Praxis II, one BE teacher candidate said, “cost her dearly in time and money, and [has] shaken her confidence” (Hones, Aguilar, & Thao, 2009, p. 20). In a study of Oregon’s teacher testing, Brown (2005) found that many highly qualified BE and minority teachers had been unfairly weeded out by tests. She piloted an alternate assessment policy where the minority candidate had to fail the Praxis test twice to be able to submit a portfolio of teaching artifacts, which better showed their teaching capabilities. Flores and Clark (1997) wonder “how many . . . [prospective BE teachers] do not seek assistance or support and simply disappear from the bilingual teaching ranks” (p. 350). Ramírez’s study (2000) of 101 provisionally licensed BE elementary teachers found the New York State Teacher Certification Exams (NYSTCE) not relevant to their work and a major barrier to permanent certification. BE and ESL teacher test difficulties include test anxiety; unfamiliar test formats; liberal arts and science content rather than pedagogy; content not aligned with linguistic, cultural, or educational backgrounds; and distractions during the actual test administration (Hones et al., 2009; Lemberger, 2001).

Despite the documented problems with certification tests, states continue to rely on them and accept their validity in measuring beginning teacher quality. To further examine certification tests and their definition of teacher quality, we shift attention to the certification context of one state, New York, where the study was conducted.

**Teacher Certification and Testing in New York State**

New York’s teaching certification has evolved in response to teacher shortages and demands for quality. Prior to 1998, NYC Public Schools and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) had separate licensing agencies, requirements, and test policies. The NYSED required teachers to pass the NTE and NYC’s Board of Examiners administered its own certification tests. NYC teachers were allowed to teach without taking the NTE (Tapper, 1995).

With the intent to centralize and standardize licensure policies for all teachers, the NYSED eliminated NYC’s Board of Examiners and contracted NES to design the NYSTCE, which were phased in to replace the NTE. The NYSTCEs are criterion reference tests, designed in accordance...
with New York State laws and regulations and informed by educators, administrators, and psychometricians (Pearson Education, Inc., 2006). NYSED requires three tests: the Liberal Arts and Science Test (LAST), Assessment of Teaching Skills–Written (ATS–W) for elementary or secondary levels, and a Content Specialty Test (CST). CSTs are grade-level or subject specific such as, Early Childhood, Elementary, or a Secondary subject (e.g., Social Studies), or the K–12 English for Speakers of Other Languages. BE teachers must also pass another CST: the Bilingual Education Assessment (BEA), which includes assessment of oral and written English, native language literacy skills, and BE theories and practices. Prior to February 2, 2004, certification applicants also had to submit the Assessment of Teaching Skills–Performance (ATS–P), a videotaped lesson (Pearson Education, Inc., 2006).

There are various fees attached to taking the tests (NYSTCE, 2010). For instance, LAST, ATS–W, and CSTs are available in hard copy for $79 each; LAST and ATS–W are now also administered by computer for $149 each; the ATS–P costs $140; and late fees are $30. Test accommodations, such as time extensions, are provided in only special needs cases and are not available to speakers of languages other than English.

The NYSED Regents’ Task Force on Teaching (1998) policy implemented sweeping reforms to raise teacher education standards and established the current certification and testing structure still in effect (Grossman, 2008, cited in Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation, 2010). Initial certification requires candidates to complete a bachelor’s degree and pass the three NYSTCE. BE teachers must also take the BEA, adding to the financial burden imposed on those teachers. Permanent certification requires teachers to complete a state-accredited teacher education master’s program, and teach successfully for three years. Teachers have five years to complete all requirements. The Regents’ policy also holds university teacher education programs accountable to meet an 80% pass rate for their candidates on the LAST and ATS–W or face loss of state accreditation. Graduate schools of education now commonly use test scores as an entrance gate for their programs, an unseen measure that may exclude minority applicants from applying to graduate education programs (Bennett et al., 2006; García & Trubek, 1999). In effort to upgrade teacher quality, NYSED eliminated all provisional licenses in 2004.

In 2008, the state reported a 90% certification test pass rate, which, according to Education Commissioner Steiner, indicates that the “bar is set too low” (Medina, 2009, p. A32). This rate tells little about the test takers, how many times it took them to pass each test, or those candidates who have ceased trying to pass the tests. No one argues against the need for teacher quality, but as can be seen, using certification tests to measure teacher effectiveness is complex and possibly obscures the thorny certification process experienced by teacher candidates, particularly those who want to work in high needs areas, like BE and ESL programs. The literature discussed above suggests that such testing processes may be deterring willing and qualified candidates from teaching. To gain a deeper understanding about the reality of the certification process, the researchers proceeded to explore their BE and ESL teacher graduates’ experiences with certification tests and the effective teaching practices in their classrooms.
**Research Methods**

The exploratory study used descriptive survey research methods within a qualitative research paradigm. In this section, the participant selection, data collection and analysis procedures, and limitations are described.

**Participant Selection**

An invitation letter and the *Bilingual/ESL Teacher Certification and Instructional Practice Questionnaire* were sent to 250 graduates from the researchers’ private universities’ BE and ESL teacher education programs. Of the 250 questionnaires mailed, 63 (25%) were completed and sent back. All 63 participants had completed their master’s degrees within one to six years before we began the study in 2003. Of the teachers who responded to the questionnaires, 18 (29%) were willing to be interviewed and observed. After a phone screening, a subgroup of 15 (24%) were selected. In the following discussion, we identify the teachers according to their level of participation in the study. *Participants* (63) are teachers who returned the questionnaire. Within the participants, we refer to two subgroups: the *respondents*, the 48 teachers who answered the questionnaire only, and *volunteers*, the 15 teachers who participated in all three data sources (questionnaires, interviews, and observations). Table 1 shows the 63 participants’ background characteristics on certification and teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Respondents (48)</th>
<th>Teacher Volunteers (15)</th>
<th>Teacher Participants (63)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certification Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Certification Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertified*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Levels</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary K–5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary 6–12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Also termed Provisional

All the participants completed their master’s degrees in BE (34/54%) or ESL (29/46%). The majority (52/83%) were certified and a few (11/17%) were not yet fully certified when they answered the questionnaire. However, all participants were quite experienced with only 12 (19%) teaching 1–3 years, 23 (37%) for 4–6 years, and 28 (44%) teaching more than 7 years. Six
of the most experienced respondents also taught in their home countries prior to immigration. The participants’ linguistic, cultural, and racial backgrounds mirrored NYC’s student diversity with 33 (52%) Spanish speakers (both U.S.-born and immigrants from Caribbean, South and Central America); 18 (9%) European Americans; 5 (0.08%) African Americans; two (0.03%) each from Russia and Korea; and one (0.01%) each from China, West Africa, and a U.S.-born East Indian.

Data Collection Sources

The initial data were collected during the 2003–2004 academic year. We continued to follow up with 4 uncertified volunteers’ certification status via e-mail until 2010. The extended period of data collection was the result of the long time it took some teachers to complete their certification process. The researchers used three data collection sources reflective of the descriptive survey research method: an open-ended questionnaire, interview, and a classroom observation checklist. The development of the instruments was grounded on the scholarly literature discussed above. Three BE/ESL experts provided feedback on the content, language, and format of the data collection sources, which was incorporated in the final versions. The three sources were piloted on 12 teachers from another university, who shared similar demographic characteristics with the participants of this study and yielded meaningful data.

The open-ended Bilingual/ESL Teacher Certification and Instructional Practice Questionnaire consisted of five questions on participants’ backgrounds and teaching information; four questions on certification and test taking-experiences; and three questions about their teaching effectiveness. To demonstrate the open-ended nature of the questions asked, a question on teaching reads: “Briefly describe one past classroom experience you encountered while teaching that provides evidence of your teaching strengths.”

The researchers conducted interviews with the 15 teacher volunteers (all referred to by Mr. or Ms. and the first letter of their last name). The Bilingual/ESL Teacher Certification and Instructional Practice Interview, which asked open-ended questions, was used to further probe the questionnaire responses. For example, Ms. D., a BE teacher, indicated on the questionnaire that one of her strengths was using the native language to activate prior knowledge. In the interview, she was asked to provide an example of how she did this and how she knew that it was an effective strategy. Volunteers provided specific examples about their testing experiences and teaching strengths. Interviews lasted about an hour, were conducted before or after the observations, and usually took place in volunteer’s classrooms. Both researchers wrote detailed notes during the interviews that were later discussed during the post-session debriefings.

The Bilingual/ESL Classroom Observation Checklist was designed according to Anderson and Burns’s (1989) work in naturalistic settings, as a tool to observe the volunteers’ instructional practices and confirm the teaching perceptions expressed in the questionnaires and interviews. The checklist included five areas: (a) classroom environment (i.e., tone, classroom materials, and student work displayed); (b) delivery of instruction (i.e. lesson goals, tasks assigned, strategies used, grouping, and student engagement); (c) use of native language (L1) and/or English (L2) to
develop literacy (i.e., use of L2 in context and L1 to bridge L2); (d) attention to diversity (i.e.,
respect for diversity, inclusion in curriculum, and classroom as a community); and (e) the
teacher’s personal qualities (i.e., mastery of curriculum and empathy for students). As both
researchers were on sabbatical, they were able to be present in all 15 volunteers’ classroom
observations, which lasted 1–2 class periods. Besides filling out the checklist, they wrote notes
describing the classroom environment and interactions. Immediately after each session, the
researchers met to debrief and discuss the observations, compare them to the results of the
interviews, and to come to a consensus on the volunteers’ teaching practices.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was divided into three stages. In the first stage, the researchers
reviewed all 63 respondent questionnaires and organized responses by background information
and certification test-taking experiences and preparation strategies. Tables 1 and 2 were created,
which summarized the data in the form of percentages. The literature on certification testing
guided the coding of categories on testing challenges, which emerged from several readings of
participants’ responses to the questionnaire.

Stages 2 and 3 focused on the 15 volunteers’ teaching from all data sources. In Stage 2, the
researchers culled volunteers’ questionnaire, interview responses, and debriefing notes to code
the data focusing on teaching themes. The scholarly literature on effective teaching was used to
guide the coding process. As Table 3 shows, the data was organized into three categories:
teaching commitment, role in working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students,
and delivery of instruction. Evidence of each volunteer’s perceived instructional practices, which
corresponded to one of the categories, was tallied by frequency and percentage.

Stage 3 focused on a deeper exploration of the volunteers’ practices based on the
observations. The researchers reviewed the checklists, observation notes, and post-session
debriefing notes several times to identify indicators of effective teaching. The data was scored by
frequency and percentages. Then these indicators were compared to the categories of effective
teaching analyzed in Stage 2.

The qualitative analysis of the data for the 15 volunteers allowed for data triangulation.
Rich comparisons were done across data sources and to the scholarly literature. Each data source
informed the other. In the first stage, questionnaire answers were compared to the interviews
responses. In Stages 2 and 3, we verified what volunteers said with what we observed and was
discussed during the post-session debriefings.

Study Limitations

Given the 25% response rate of the questionnaire, this exploratory study is not meant to
be representative of all the BE and ESL graduates of the two participating universities. Rather it
represents the general certification process of 63 participants and the voices of a smaller group
of 15 volunteers, who provided detailed accounts of their certification experiences and
classroom practice. To be clear, the purpose of the exploratory research was not to generalize findings, but to uncover more specific information about difficulties experienced by BE and ESL in completing the process of certification. We wanted to determine if these difficulties carried over into their teaching and affected their use of effective teaching practices supported by the scholarly literature.

We acknowledge that the sample may be biased in favor of those participants who had more positive experiences with certification and teaching. That is, while most participants were certified, those from whom we most wanted to hear, who had repeatedly failed the tests or those who had been dismissed from teaching for their test failure, we assume, may have been reluctant or ashamed to respond and to invite us to their classrooms and/or were no longer teaching. Nevertheless, as shown in the analysis, the sample did include some teachers whose trajectory through certification and into teaching was very lengthy and challenging.

Using the observation checklist, we soon found how difficult it was to capture the essence of teaching and classroom interactions. Since observations focus on the reality at a particular time, a higher number of observations could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the classroom instructional practices. However, since in addition to the observations, there were interviews and questionnaires that also explored the issue of practice (used to triangulate the data), we found that the data reflected a useful description of practice for the purposes of our study.

Although willing to participate, the volunteers had limited time for interviews due to busy and demanding schedules. This could have affected the depth of their responses.

**Results**

Results from the three research questions are organized in two areas: certification testing and instructional practices. The quantitative results are presented in Tables 2 and 3. We discuss these results and expand on the exploration of participants’ experiences by including illustrative quotes from respondents and volunteers. The relevant scholarly literature provided a research framework for the analysis.

**Participants’ Certification Test-Taking Experiences**

Table 2 and the discussion below focus on the participants’ test histories (frequency of attempts to pass the tests), test-taking challenges, and test preparation strategies.

**Number of Times Tests Were Taken in Order to Pass.** In Table 2, out of 63 participants, 24 (38%) passed all tests the first time. Nearly half (27/43%) passed in two to three attempts. Please note, of the three (or four) required tests, some participants may have just failed one test, while others may have failed three tests or more repeatedly. For example, 10 (16%) participants took the NTE, of which 7 passed the first time. Twelve (19%) participants (4 who were volunteers) had extreme difficulties in passing the three tests and had to retake one or more
tests 4–8 times. The negative consequences of not passing the tests multiple times were revealed through the volunteers’ interviews. For instance, Ms. C., a BE volunteer, was relieved when she passed the ATS–W on her sixth try, fearing she would not be rehired to teach first grade in September. Ms. C. felt that “the NYSTCEs are all about money, because with the NTE, you didn’t have to retake the whole test, just the section you failed.” The greatest negative consequence of test failure was losing the provisional license to teach, which happened to three respondents and one volunteer. Ms. A., BE volunteer and a native of Peru, successfully taught kindergarten for six years (according to the school administrator’s evaluations). After failing the ATS–W five times, she lost her provisional license and began teaching in a Catholic school (where she taught for two years) while she studied and retook the test. After the eighth attempt, she passed and finally secured her certification. She was rehired as a BE kindergarten teacher at another public school, losing seniority at beginning teacher pay scale. One respondent, a BE special education teacher who worked with the severely handicapped children for five years, had to find another job, due to test failure. Without permanent certification, she substituted at another school (also losing seniority and benefits).

Test-Taking Challenges. Some participants (23/37%) expressed various difficulties related to time. First, due to the limited time given to complete the standardized tests and long reading passages, participants felt extreme pressure to finish the entire test. Second, since certification tests require mostly reading comprehension, it is understandable that nonnative speakers of English might need more time to process content in their second language. Third, test preparation took away valuable time that could be better spent in classroom planning or in other professional development more related to teaching.

Thirty-three participants (52%) expressed problems with language and/or content of the test: reading, writing, and language processing issues (related to time issue above). Two teacher volunteers (Mr. G. and Ms. F.) said the lengthy reading passages were irrelevant to teaching. Writing was difficult for many, even for participants who passed the tests the first time. Other
writing-related problems mentioned included needing additional time to write in a second language and lack of familiarity with the type of essay writing required for the tests. In terms of content, some participants’ problems were due to lack of subject area knowledge or familiarity with the American school system. Ms. B., a high school ESL volunteer, from Ukraine, where she taught for 20 years, failed the LAST seven times due to math and science content difficulties. “Those subjects I studied long ago in my country,” she explained. She eventually passed after taking an undergraduate math and science course, unrelated to her ESL teaching. One respondent stated that test items were confusing; with two close tricky answers to choose from.

Participants (35/56%) expressed many emotional stressors in the entire test-taking experience, from test registration to preparation to the actual test context, not to mention retaking them, which produced heightened anxiety. Tests required stamina and were mentally draining. Volunteers’ comments included: “I am not a good test taker, so I get nervous” (Ms. F.), “I couldn’t sleep for months” (Mr. E.), and “Too many tests to pass” (Mr. J.). A European American ESL respondent who lost her provisional certification lamented: “I miss passing by two or three points. This has taken its toll mentally and emotionally. I felt humiliated by colleagues and husband every time another failure came in. I felt a failure and wanted to kill myself.” Four respondents mentioned financial burdens with costs to retake and prepare for tests. Ms. A.’s testing nightmare incurred a heavy financial burden. She estimated paying more than $600 in registration fees to pass the ATS–W, not counting costs of other tests, preparation workshops and materials, and lowered salaries at the Catholic and new public school.

All but five participants (8%) reported doing some kind of preparation. Self-study (33/52%) and test preparation courses (22/35%) ranked the highest. Test preparation uncovered two important issues. On the one hand, the fact that failing participants used many or all of the test preparation strategies showed their persistence and resourcefulness. For instance, Mr. J.’s approach was to review study guide test objectives and practice sample questions, which helped him pass the tests. Ms. D., a 13-year-BE middle school teacher, shares with students the many valuable test-taking strategies she learned in test preparation workshops (e.g., scanning test questions, pacing/time management, and pre-reading the questions). However, on the other hand, it puts into question the effectiveness of these types of strategies for preparing students to take these tests. Data suggested that more than 27 (43%+) participants had to retake tests more than once. This finding calls into question the usefulness of these strategies to study for these tests (Harrell, 2009).

**Instructional Practices: Volunteers’ Perceptions and Researchers’ Observations**

To contextualize the analysis, the volunteers’ background information is provided. As shown in Table 1, of the 15 teacher volunteers (9 ESL and 6 BE), 8 worked at the elementary level; 12 were certified; and all had taught more than four years. All 6 BE volunteers were Spanish speakers and taught different grades (kindergarten, first, elementary special education, middle and high school) and varied subjects (native language arts, social studies, science, and math). Elementary ESL teachers conducted pull-out and/or push-in instruction to multilingual
### Table 3

**Volunteers’ Perceived and Observed Instructional Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Perceived(^a)</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Observed(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Commitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy teaching</td>
<td>15 100</td>
<td>Encouraging statements towards students, use of personal anecdotes and</td>
<td>15 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>experiences, display of rich and a variety of materials in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring professional</td>
<td>7 47</td>
<td>Use of humor, personal examples, keep attention/engagement of students</td>
<td>15 100</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Role in Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>11 73</td>
<td>Encouraging statements towards students, well planned/organized lessons,</td>
<td>15 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>interactive classroom management, student engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build on students’ linguistic strengths</td>
<td>14 93</td>
<td>Classroom as learning community, use maps, family stories, work on group</td>
<td>11 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>task, students helping one another, time for students to respond,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>questioning, translation from one student to the other.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Delivery of Instruction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of curriculum</td>
<td>8 53</td>
<td>Well developed lessons, (math, language arts, ESL, social studies, science),</td>
<td>15 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>appropriate use of content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create &amp; provide relevant materials</td>
<td>6 40</td>
<td>Charts, dictionaries, L1 books, large quantity of experience charts,</td>
<td>15 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>graphs, charts, texts, commercial charts, multilingual texts, teaching</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>educational materials</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Scaffolding strategies</td>
<td>13 87</td>
<td>Brainstorming, questioning, drawings to demonstrate concepts, guidance</td>
<td>13 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and focus on the task, check for understanding, clarifying questions, role</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>playing, modeling, repetition, rephrasing, environmental materials, use</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pictures, visuals, early childhood content, sheltered science content,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>translating, visual charts, oral scaffolding, modeled reading, story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pictures, open-ended questions, realia, hands-on activity, modeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge students’ languages and cultures</td>
<td>8 53</td>
<td>Questioning, audiovisuales, repetition, paraphrasing, L1 work groups,</td>
<td>13 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>discussion and L1 explanations, use of cognates, students asked questions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and wrote in two languages, sheltered content, use peer translation, L1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>text and discussion, sharing cultural customs (i.e.; food), L1/L2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cognates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop literacy</td>
<td>7 47</td>
<td>Strategies and tasks addressing vocabulary development, writing process,</td>
<td>15 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>oral language, reading comprehension, questioning for comprehension and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>critical thinking, oral discussion, L1/L2 cognates, grammar and spelling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>strategies, literacy centers, listening center, word and language games,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>language experience approach, balanced literacy, choral reading, modeling,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>shared reading, theme based projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make connections across content, language,</td>
<td>8 53</td>
<td>Use of learners’ background knowledge, reading/writing across subjects,</td>
<td>10 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>spoken to written language connections, text strategies, integrating</td>
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<td>language content, content literature connections, connected sequence</td>
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<td>across content, start with familiar and extend beyond</td>
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*Note. N = 15 teachers.*

\(^a\)Data from questionnaire and interview.  \(^b\)Data from classroom observation.
students from mixed grades and proficiency levels. The secondary ESL teachers were assigned to teach regular ESL classes organized by language proficiency levels and/or subject.

According to the data, teacher quality, as defined by the certification process, presents a partial picture of the participants’ true abilities. Given the complexities of the certification process, their talents as teachers may be obscured. Thus, the researchers wanted to explore the perceptions of the volunteers’ teaching effectiveness and as compared to observations of practice done by the researchers. We wanted to see if the interviews and observations revealed different or additional information about their effectiveness than that suggested by their performance on certification tests. Table 3 compares the 15 volunteers teachers’ perceptions of their instructional strengths with the researchers’ observations in these areas: teachers’ commitment, their role in working with CLD students, and the delivery of instruction.

**Teachers’ Care and Commitment.** All the volunteers were seen as enjoying working with ELLs, although only 7 (47%) specifically mentioned this in the interviews. Classroom tone was light and friendly, with supportive smiles, while at the same time serious about the instructional work being done. Volunteers expressed and demonstrated high expectations for their students and had a positive rapport with them. Mr. P., BE volunteer, teaches high school science, stated, “I am very happy in my position helping kids. I see myself in the students.” This teacher’s connection with his students echoes the importance of teachers’ identity connections with their students as a requirement for a positive learning environment as mentioned by Nieto (2004) and Clark et al. (2011). Volunteers’ strong teaching commitment was observed in their use of varied and appropriate classroom management strategies, which in turn kept students on-task and attentive.

Observations (15/100%) confirmed a high level of care for and commitment to students through encouraging and culturally endearing statements; reference to students’ backgrounds and personal anecdotes; and classroom environments displaying student work, cultural artifacts, and appropriate curriculum materials. These culturally relevant practices are in line with effective practices discussed by Lemberger (1997).

**Teachers’ Roles in Working with CLD Students.** All teachers saw their role as important in building their students’ self-esteem as learners and in building their ethnic identity. Teachers implemented lessons that reflected high expectations for students, and used culturally relevant teaching methods. Although 11 (73%) volunteers mentioned high expectations for students in the questionnaire or interviews, the observations of classroom practice suggested that all 15 (100%) volunteers believe in their students’ high-level capabilities. All of the teachers observed used frequent encouraging phrases in English or the native language, such as: “Yes, you can do it.” “You are getting there, try it one more time.” They showed profound respect for diversity and made reference to students’ ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Ms. K, in her food lesson, welcomed the sharing of culturally familiar Caribbean foods.

Teachers also indicated their responsibility for expanding students’ ability in their first language using it as a tool for learning content. However, observations suggested mixed results in
this category. Fourteen (93%) teachers said that they built on students’ linguistic strengths, but only 11 (73%) volunteers were observed using specific strategies for building these strengths (such as, cognates for language transfer, and peer translations).

Another conflicting finding was in the area of the teacher’s role in building community and collaborative skills among the students. Eleven volunteers used different groupings that built a sense of community where students learned together through class discussions, small groups, and collaborative projects. The literature supports these practices as an important component of effective teaching (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; González et al., 2004). However, in the other four classrooms observed, whole-group teaching dominated the instruction. In these cases, the teachers saw their role as that of director rather than a facilitator of learning. This is problematic for the language-learning classroom, because whole-class instruction provides less opportunity for comprehensible output (Waxman, Padrón, Franco-Fuentemayor, & Huang, 2009). Their findings are congruent with ours in that they identified a predominance of teacher-directed lessons and passive student engagement.

**Delivery of Instruction.** The active engagement of students in learning content, concepts, and process enhance their acquisition of knowledge and their participation as a community of learners (Chamot, 2009). Delivery of instruction, as shown in Table 3, is comprised of six areas: (a) knowledge of the curriculum, (b) use of relevant materials, (c) scaffolding strategies, (d) bridging of students’ languages and cultures, (e) literacy development, and (f) connections across content, language, and culture. When analyzing the data, we found that bridging students’ language and cultures coincided with scaffolding strategies in BE/ESL classrooms, therefore, we combined those categories.

**Knowledge of the Curriculum.** More than half the volunteers (8/53%) spoke about their subjects as a teaching strength. However, our observations of lessons in science, math, language arts, ESL, and social studies content areas revealed varied degrees of mastery in the subject grade-level content. They used different instructional approaches to engage students in acquiring new knowledge and content-related skills. To exemplify the range of differences in knowledge of the subject and instructional approaches, we discuss below the instruction of two observed teachers. Mr. K., high school ESL educator, stated that knowledge of his subject makes him an effective teacher. Yet, this fully certified, experienced (12 years) teacher conducted a grammar-based lesson straight from the textbook. While students did the assigned tasks, they seemed less than engaged with the teacher and with each other. His overdependence on the textbook suggested to us a lack of planning, which obscured his subject area mastery. In contrast, Mr. H., a BE high school math teacher, spoke of implementing the literature-based Interactive Math Program (IMP), in which students read fiction and apply mathematical problem-solving related to the text content. Mr. H. had learned the innovative IMP over three years of voluntary intensive professional development. He expressed strong subject mastery, “I have the capacity to communicate a subject which I not only know, but have working experience [formerly as an engineer].” Our observations confirmed that he facilitated instruction in two languages to develop concepts and the language of geometry (e.g., using cognates: vertex and vértice).
modeled and encouraged the use of appropriate academic discourse where students practiced solving problems, explained the solutions, and critiqued each other’s performance. This type of constructivist-based instruction in content areas has been supported by the work of Schleppegrell and her colleagues (2008).

**Teachers’ Use of Relevant Materials.** Related to teachers’ curricular knowledge is the use of appropriate teaching aids, materials, and resources to make content relevant and meaningful for students (Chamot, 2009). These resources include texts, supplementary materials, manipulatives, technology, print materials such as maps, and dictionaries as well as other materials for students’ research activities. As indicated in Table 3, there is a mismatch between volunteers’ perceptions (6/40%) of their use of relevant materials and the classroom observations (15/100%). BE and ESL classrooms were equipped with current and relevant materials. In BE classrooms, materials were in English and Spanish and usually located in two different classroom areas; they included maps, dictionaries, charts, and commercial and teacher-made materials. All classrooms had student work displayed showing the varied class projects and activities. For example, in Ms. L.’s high school ESL humanities class, groups of students used different textbooks and internet sources in English and Spanish to construct a newspaper on the ancient civilization of their choice. In this category, our observations of the classroom environment did not match the teachers’ perceptions of their ability in using different instructional materials and resources.

**Teachers’ Language and Scaffolding Strategies.** Scaffolding instruction describes specialized teaching strategies geared to support learning, especially when students are first introduced to new content or concepts. Scaffolding gives students a context, motivation, or foundation from which to understand the new information introduced in the lesson (Echevarria & Short, 2009). Scaffolding techniques are considered fundamental to good, solid teaching for all students. Table 3 shows that 13 (87%) volunteers expressed and demonstrated varied scaffolding approaches through the use of visuals, demonstrations, role-playing, hands-on activities, graphic organizers, and semantic/story maps. Teachers carefully modeled language by orally rephrasing, repeating and building vocabulary. Further, instruction was scaffolded through use of students’ background knowledge and experiences, content adaptation for different language proficiency levels, and grouping strategies (Echevarria & Short, 2009). Teachers modeled oral discourse and promoted students’ oral language use. The first language served as a bridge to English, as seen in Mr. H’s math lesson. Similar to August and Shanahan (2006), this not only occurred in BE classrooms, but also three ESL teachers encouraged peers to work in the native language or translate to English. Three other teachers spoke of creating environments aimed at keeping students’ “affective filters” low and allowing “wait time” for students to process their responses in English. Both demonstrate teachers’ implementation of language acquisition principles in action (Peregoy & Boyle, 2009). Ms. S., a BE special education volunteer, mentioned “scaffolding” content for her students and was observed providing real materials and shared experiences, exemplifying an integration of language and content (Echevarria & Short, 2009).
**Emphasis on Literacy Development.** While only 7 (47%) teachers referred to literacy as a teaching strength, all 15 (100%) engaged students in some type of grade-level appropriate literacy activity through the use of research-supported practices such as centers, games, language experience approach, shared and guided reading, internet research, and math-related literature. Lessons on important components of language learning were observed including vocabulary development, writing process, oral language, reading comprehension, and grammar. Questioning for comprehension and critical thinking were frequently emphasized, as seen in Ms. L.’s Ancient Civilization project, when she prodded students to question the social structures that enabled advanced developments of each civilization. Yet, two teachers observed, who employed some of the activities mentioned above, relied on teacher-centered tasks for most of their literacy instruction. For instance, Mr. K. and Ms. C. presented literacy lessons directed by them with students passively engaged for most of the lesson (Waxman et al., 2009).

**Connections Across Content, Language, and Culture.** As teaching is a holistic endeavor, many aspects are interrelated in multiple ways. In classrooms with a strong culture for learning, both teachers and students are actively and cognitively involved, and they connect content, language and culture (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Teachers interviewed referred to making connections across culture, language and content. Approaches mentioned (8/53%) and observed (10/67%) included the use of learners’ background knowledge, reading and writing activities across subjects, integrating language and content, use of literature to clarify content, and sheltered content lessons. Similar to Nelson and Stage (2007), these teachers used varied questioning, graphic organizers, and think-aloud explanations to contextualize information and concepts. They also provided opportunities for students to engage in high quality discussions to expand meaning and interpretation of content, text or new information. For example, Ms. B., high school ESL teacher, explained how she made American culture visible by discussing idioms, sayings, and cultural differences. This was observed when in the lesson, students made sense of idioms through native language discussion and acting them out. Ms. L. expressed joy and pride at seeing newcomer students’ faces light up in connecting to new words in English and experiences in the United States. “I try to consider how course material relates to my students and use real content and examples to make it more interesting to them.” She continued, “I pay attention to their responses to make sure they understand.” Several teachers explained how they gauged instruction based on comprehension checks. Ms. C., a first-grade BE teacher, makes a mental note of difficulties children have and “won’t move on until all the children show they understand the concept.” In her healthy foods lesson, Ms. K., an elementary ESL teacher, used real objects to introduce new foods and their names (e.g., asparagus, croissant). Students then described and classified them and shared foods from their cultures (e.g., beef patty).

To summarize, results from this exploratory study showed that teachers, to varying degrees, had a strong teaching commitment, positive rapport with students, respect for language and culture, and used students’ home languages and cultures as resources in their teaching. Many observed lessons demonstrated knowledge of the curriculum and engaged students in appropriate instructional activities.
In was interesting to uncover that on occasion the teachers’ perceptions, as recorded in the questionnaires and interviews, did not align with our observations. This may have resulted for a variety of reasons. First, because of the open nature of the interviews, volunteers may have not focused on areas that were highlighted in the literature. Due to scheduling, some interviews were conducted prior to the lesson, which did not allow us to delve deeper into practices we saw. Volunteers may have been humble about speaking about their accomplishments, which were better observed, such as the classroom tone, the careful planning, and their understanding of students (Flores & Clark, 1997; Hones et al., 2009). More time in the classrooms and more focused interviews following the observations might have resulted in showing even greater effectiveness.

**Discussion and Implications**

We began this descriptive exploratory study hoping to better understand the BE and ESL teachers’ certification and test-taking experiences and challenges. We also wanted to prompt teachers to identify their instructional strengths and confirm them in their classrooms. The purpose of the interviews and observation was to explore if the volunteer’s practices revealed any ineffectiveness, as was suggested by the fact that many had difficulties passing the tests and completing their certification immediately after graduation. Our findings suggest multiple elements that color perspectives on teacher quality.

We did not find that certification, and especially testing, was a barrier to BE and ESL teachers’ continuation in their jobs, since most of them persisted until achieving their teaching certification. At the conclusion of the study only 4 out of 63 (6%) participants did not attain certification due to multiple test failures. However, this led us to consider that many other caring, qualified, and diverse teachers beyond our study may also have left the profession or were too ashamed to respond. Similar to Lemberger, (2001) and Hones, et al. (2009), our data suggested that certification test-taking was challenging and stressful for participants, and some BE and ESL teachers may take longer to complete certification because of failure to pass the tests. Our data confirms that the numerous required tests seemed to prolong the certification process and caused needless discouragement and frustration to teachers (Albers, 2002; Bennett et al., 2006; Brown, 2005; Flores & Clark, 1997). Some foreign-born participants in our sample seemed to be at greater disadvantage in passing the tests due to language differences, unfamiliar test content and formats, and test anxiety (Hones, et al., 2009; Lemberger, 2001). The fact that most of the teachers took the tests multiple times until they achieved their professional goals is a testament to their resiliency and commitment to becoming teachers. Yet, it also alerts us to the weak validity of these tests in signaling teacher quality.

In terms of observed teachers’ instructional strengths and practices, their perceptions of instructional practices generally matched those observed in the classroom and to varying degrees reflect research-based ELL practices (August & Shanahan, 2006; Echevarria & Short, 2009; Francis et al., 2006; Genesee, et al., 2006; Samway & McKeon, 2007; Slavin & Calderón,
Our data suggested that these teachers do indeed possess many of the intangible teaching qualities (Goldhaber, 2002, Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010), not measurable by tests. The passion and persistence that observed teachers exhibited in becoming certified was admirable and showed considerable dedication to students and professional commitment. We were pleased to hear them talk about and see them use research-based practices that had been introduced in our university’s teacher preparation programs. Through the observations, we got a sense of their competence. This finding echoes Goldhaber’s (2007) finding that licensure does not guarantee quality service and that some people, even those who score well on the tests, end up being quite ineffective teachers.

Nonetheless, we found a small number of teachers exhibiting instructional practices that are not fully supported by the scholarly literature. Some still use whole class instruction as the main vehicle of instruction. This finding alerts us that, despite the strong research base presented in teacher education programs and professional development activities that identify clear and specific strategies to teach ELL students in BE and ESL classrooms, whole class instruction still prevails (Waxman et al., 2009), with students working passively on teacher-assigned activities (i.e., watching or listening). This finding suggests that it is important to consider other ways, beyond certification tests, to gauge how effective a teacher candidate might be once he or she is certified. These less-supported practices may exist regardless and have little to do with certification testing.

This study also revealed the need to reconsider the entire certification process. Given the dire need of an increasing number of districts nation-wide for hiring highly qualified BE and ESL teachers, more strategic attention should be given to the certification process to prevent it from delaying their entry into the classroom.

Our study also underscores the advantages of gathering larger-scale more-accurate data on teachers’ test histories. Such research could explore how many teachers fail to become certified because of tests, which tests they fail, how many times they fail, why they fail, and how many and which tests really are needed to ensure teaching quality. Interestingly, some of this information already exists in state departments of education and test companies, but are not available for researcher evaluation (Committee on Teacher Preparation, 2010). Such data could point toward other alternatives (Brown, 2005), which could better ensure a qualified culturally and linguistically congruent teacher force. Perhaps time extensions for certain tests could be given to foreign-born teachers (Hones, et al. 2009) who pass the BEA at a certain score, under the premise that their competence in the native language would transfer to English provided they have more processing time. The industry is reticent to make such changes so as not to compromise test validity and financial profits.

Teacher licensure is just the first gate, and new policies such as Race to the Top portend raising the stakes on teacher quality and evaluation through using student test scores (Buddin, & Zamarro, 2009). The current test frenzy indicates that it is unlikely that states will loosen teacher certification exam policies and may even further raise the bar (Medina, 2009). We recommend
that teacher educators be attentive to their teacher candidates’ test-taking experiences, shepherd
them more closely through certification (Flores & Clark, 1997; Hones et al., 2009), and advocate
for alternatives (Brown, 2005). We agree with Mitchell, et al. (2001), who call for research on and
development of tests that better reflect the complex nature of teaching and use multiple school-
based assessments to certify and signal qualified teachers.

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Developing Academic Language and Content for Emergent Bilinguals Through a Science Inquiry Unit

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There is growing evidence that schools are not meeting the needs of emergent bilinguals who are falling behind in both academic language development and content knowledge learning. In response to this concern, this article proposes five research-based guidelines for promoting effective instruction for emergent bilinguals. In order to connect theory to practice, implementation of these guidelines is explored through a descriptive study, within a qualitative paradigm, involving Jessica, a Spanish/English bilingual third-grade teacher. Through a description of her science inquiry unit on water, the authors outline how Jessica’s instruction reflected the five guidelines. The analysis of her instruction revealed that Jessica developed a standards-based, challenging and enriching inquiry-based curriculum; had high expectations for all of her students and capitalized on their background knowledge and experiences; used a variety of strategies to foster the development of both language and content; created an environment that valued and supported primary language development; and focused on teaching academic language in both English and Spanish.

Jessica’s third-grade class of Spanish and English bilingual students is humming with activity. At the front of the room, a bright poster with the question “How Does Water Affect our Earth, ¿Cómo afecta el agua a nuestra tierra/nuestro planeta?” welcomes students and visitors to a world of explorations. The class has just finished watching a video on evaporation and now small groups of students are gathered around tables exploring water vapor in English. Jessica (all names are pseudonyms), known as Miss. M to her students, pours hot water into individual plastic bins and asks the students to cover them with lids. She invites the students to predict what they think will happen:

S1: I think water vapor will go up, will rise.
S2: It will evaporate.
S3: I predict that when we take the lid off it will have water on it.
S2: Why?
S1: Water vapor will condense and stick to the lid.
S3: Yes, it will be liquid again.
S2: Okay, let’s write this on the graphic organizer for Miss. M.
Jessica engages her emergent bilingual students in activities that not only help them develop their language skills but also support their acquisition of essential content area knowledge. We borrow the term emergent bilinguals from García, Kleifgen, and Falchi (2008), who explain that English language learners are in fact emergent bilinguals. That is, through school and through acquiring English, these children become bilingual, able to continue to function in their home language as well as in English, their new language and that of school. When officials and educators ignore the bilingualism that these students can and often must develop through schooling in the United States, they perpetuate inequities in the education of these children. (p. 6)

The Need for Inquiry-Based Curriculum

According to current research (Collier & Thomas, 2009; Echevarria & Short, 2010; Gibbons, 2009) there are several reasons for organizing curriculum for emerging bilinguals in a way that emphasizes teaching language through content around units of inquiry. First, inquiry-based curriculum moves away from the traditional, regimented, teacher-centered instruction, or “pedagogy of poverty,” that Haberman (1991) warns against. Second, it promotes hands-on experiences that provide a natural teaching-ground for building vocabulary and background knowledge for students (Fisher & Frey, 2009; Huerta & Jackson, 2010). In addition, because students can “see the big picture, the English language instruction is more comprehensible” (Freeman & Freeman, 2007, p. 70).

However, not all teachers who work with linguistically and culturally diverse students understand how to successfully support their needs (García, et al., 2008). Moreover, while the teacher’s primary goal is to help emergent bilinguals achieve academically in the different content areas of the curriculum, many do not have the academic preparation to support their students’ language and content development to succeed in school (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). In fact, the achievement gap between emergent bilinguals and native English speakers across the nation presents a challenge for our schools. As Olsen (2010) points out, “English learners face a double challenge of learning a new language, while mastering all the same academic content as their English fluent peers” (p. iii). Unfortunately, too many emergent bilinguals experience difficulty overcoming this challenge. Results from several large-scale assessments suggest that emergent bilinguals fall behind their native English-speaking counterparts in all grades and in all content areas (Kieffer, Lesaux, Rivera, & Francis, 2009; Wolf & Leon, 2009). As a result, a disproportionately high number of language minority students drop out of school (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Increasing Population

The growing number of emergent bilingual students in schools makes the goal of helping them develop language and content knowledge across the curriculum even more urgent today. In the last 20 years in the United States, the population of students who are learning English as an
additional language has grown 169% while the general enrollment of students in Grades Kindergarten through 12 has grown only 12% (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2010) the increasing numbers of emergent bilinguals are moving and becoming concentrated in different areas of the United States. The largest emergent bilingual population growth has occurred in states that historically have not had many English learners. For example, from 1996 to 2006, the growth rate of emergent bilinguals in Nebraska was over 200%. Because of this, teachers from all states benefit from being prepared to work with this growing population of students.

The purpose of this article is to introduce a set of research-based guidelines that teachers may use to design and evaluate instruction for emergent bilinguals in mainstream or bilingual classrooms. We explore how the research-based guidelines can be used to identify effective instruction through an analysis of one teacher’s implementation of a science inquiry unit in a dual-language school. We open the discussion with a description of the research-based guidelines for effective instruction. The methods for data collection and analysis are then presented. We use the guidelines for effective instruction as an analytical framework to dissect Jessica’s science inquiry unit on water. Conclusions are drawn about the benefits of using the guidelines and need to expand the investigation of constructing instructional practice with them.

Development of the Guidelines for Promoting Effective Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals

In 2006, the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth completed a four-year process of identifying, assessing, and synthesizing research on the literacy attainment of emergent bilinguals. The panel found that while emergent bilinguals achieved adequate performance on measures of word recognition and spelling, they fell behind their native English-speaking peers on measures of reading comprehension and vocabulary (August & Shanahan, 2006). From our work with teachers of emergent bilinguals across the country, we know that they often see this firsthand in their classrooms. Their students do well reading the words in passages they are assigned, but often have difficulty understanding what they have read. These researchers explain that when students have difficulty with comprehension, their development of language, literacy, and content suffers.

Inspired by the panel’s work (August & Shanahan, 2006), and its alarming findings, several national and international organizations have done other syntheses of current research in the field. Based on their results, they have also published position statements regarding instruction that supports the development of content and language for emergent bilinguals (International Reading Association, 2001; National Center for Education Evaluation, 2007; National Council of Teachers of English, 2008; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2010). These statements provide research-based findings that can guide teachers as they plan meaningful instruction for emergent bilinguals. Our review of these policy statements reveals that across the sources there were research-based recommendations that were the same,
or similar. For this study, we clustered those like recommendations into a set of guidelines. The guidelines, explained below, were used to frame our analysis of Jessica’s unit. Our guidelines for promoting effective instruction for emergent bilingual students are:
1. Develop a standards-based, challenging, and enriching inquiry-based curriculum.
2. Have high expectations for all students, capitalizing on their background knowledge and experiences.
3. Use a variety of strategies to foster the development of both language and content.
4. Create an environment that values and supports primary language development.
5. Focus on students’ academic language development in both languages.

*Develop a standards-based, challenging, and enriching inquiry-based curriculum.* An enriching inquiry-based curriculum focuses on teaching language through content. Also, literacy is embedded in all content areas taught (Freeman & Freeman, 2007). Merino & Hammond (2002) explain that when teachers integrate one content area, such as science, with art, math, and language arts they promote authentic reading and writing experiences across the curriculum. This facilitates grade-level language, literacy, and content development (Freeman & Freeman, 2007). For example, if the students are learning about plants in a science unit they could (a) read fiction and nonfiction books about plants; (b) sing songs about the topic to learn and practice new vocabulary; (c) do hands-on projects including drawings and write about them, fostering literacy development; and (d) do math by measuring root and stem growth using millimeters and centimeters as their measurement unit. Moreover, units of study that include content and language standards are designed to ensure that every student will learn at high levels. Teachers plan these units by identifying the desired results of the unit in terms of student learning according to the grade-level core standards and language proficiency levels of their students, determining the acceptable evidence of learning, and designing purposeful lessons (Gottlieb, Katz, & Ernst-Slavit, 2009).

*Have high expectations for all students, capitalizing on their background knowledge and experiences.* The second guideline encourages teachers to have high expectations for all of their students. Students rise to expectations and are more engaged when placed in challenging classes with quality standard-based instruction that addresses their linguistic and literacy strengths and needs (Callahan, 2005). Students, in the previous example of a science unit on plants, are guided by the teacher to engage in meaningful and academically challenging activities while learning content and developing language as they read, write, and discuss plants. High expectations also involve using sociocultural factors such as background knowledge and experiences students bring to the learning task. When curriculum connects to students’ lives and makes sense to them, they become more fully invested in the lesson (Pang & Kamil, 2004; Walqui, 2000). If we consider the example unit of inquiry described above, we could say that most students may have some prior knowledge or personal experiences with plants that teachers should activate to facilitate their comprehension of reading materials and their participation in the hands-on projects.

*Use a variety of strategies to foster the development of both language and content.* The third guideline proposes the use of a variety of strategies to make the language input comprehensible.
and foster growth in both language and content (Rhea & Mercuri, 2006). Multiple teaching techniques are at the core of good instruction. When teachers consistently use strategies to make the language input comprehensible and to develop literacy skills for emergent bilinguals, students can later apply those skills across the curriculum (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Hansen-Thomas, 2008). Using the previous example about plants, teachers can model through interactive writing how to summarize the students’ observation about plant growth using a germinated seed. They can also show videos or use pictures to help students better understand academic content.

Create an environment that values and supports primary language development. The fourth guideline emphasizes the use of primary language as a tool for learning in the classroom (Cummins, 1991; Proctor, Carlo, August, & Snow, 2006). Under this guideline teachers and administrators are encouraged to create a warm and caring community where primary language is supported and further developed. If students are learning about plants, some of the readings they are doing could be done in the students’ primary language to build understanding of concepts and to develop the academic language of the discipline in that language.

Focus on students’ academic language development in both languages. The fifth guideline focuses on teaching academic language. Schleppegrell (2009) defines academic language as “a set of linguistic registers that construe multiple and complex meanings at all levels and in all subjects of schooling” (p.1). She explains that “the challenges of academic registers extend far beyond learning vocabulary, . . . [and that] meaning is presented in the grammatical as well as lexical features of texts at different levels” (p. 1). In other words, to develop academic language, teachers need to teach the vocabulary of the disciplines, address the complexity of the syntax and grammatical levels of the texts, and encourage students to read from a variety of texts and write for different purposes across the curriculum (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2009). For instance, through interactive read alouds, emergent bilinguals could develop listening vocabulary of academic content, reading skills, understanding of the features of informational texts, and knowledge of the academic terms about plant growth.

These principles were used as a framework to analyze content-based instruction in a dual-language bilingual classroom. In the following section we will briefly introduce the participant of the study, the data collection methods, and the process we used to analyze the data.

Methodology

The Participant

Jessica, a native of Argentina, has been teaching emergent bilinguals for seven years. She has a bilingual teaching credential and is finishing her master’s in Bilingual Education with an emphasis on reading. She teaches third grade in a dual-language school in a rural area of California. The school serves mostly low socioeconomic students, most of whom speak a
language other than English. Jessica teaches in a 90/10 dual-language model program where, in kindergarten and first grade, 90% of the instruction takes place in Spanish and 10% in English. Gradually, the level of English-language instruction increases so that by third grade 30% of the instruction is in English and 70% is in Spanish. By fifth grade, half of the instruction is in English and half is delivered in Spanish. Her classroom is comprised of 21 vivacious young children of which one-third are native English speakers and two-thirds are native Spanish speakers. While it is recommended that this type of program should have a one-to-one ratio of each language group, research shows (Lindholm-Leary, 2002) that a two to one ratio is also acceptable when some of the Spanish-speaking kids are also bilingual, as they are in Jessica’s classroom. Because Jessica’s students are now in third grade, all of them have developed at least intermediate to advanced proficiency in both languages.

Data Collection

Descriptive qualitative studies are considered to be “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit” (Stake, 1995, p.65). This study consists of an explanation of Jessica’s instruction of a science unit in a dual-language school. For the data collection portion of the study, the three principles of data collection presented by Yin (2003) were used: using multiple sources of data, creating a database, and maintaining a chain of evidence to increase the reliability of the information. Data analysis was based on the interpretational analysis presented by Gall, Gall, & Borg (1999). This interpretational analysis “involves a systematic set of procedures to code and classify qualitative data to ensure that important constructs of themes and patterns emerge” (p. 298).

Research Question and Subquestions

The main research question framing the study is: In what ways does Jessica’s instruction align with the guidelines for effective instruction for emergent bilinguals? To address this question, the first author collected multiple sources of data in Jessica’s classroom, including classroom observations, audio recordings of classroom interactions, teacher interviews, student work samples, and photographs. Observations were done of instructional activities during all types of classroom instruction: whole class, small group, and one-on-one. Freeman and Johnson (2005) define an instructional activity as an “interplay among the actions of participants that creates a meta-level of activity that is a language class in itself” (p. 75). It represents a conglomerate of participants’ actions, what teacher and students do; physical, concrete objects used, and conceptual tools; what teachers

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Site:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation #:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and Time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Area Observed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective notes:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
know from courses and from students’ feedback; and how they use that knowledge to inform practice. Twelve field observations of instructional activities were recorded as field notes using an observation protocol, audio and half of those were also audiotaped and transcribed to triangulate the data. Table 1 shows the observation protocol used.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Analysis Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In what ways is Jessica’s instruction organized around a challenging and enriching inquiry-based curriculum?</td>
<td>• Observation notes • Weekly planner • Audiotaped instruction • Long-term plans for units of study • Informal interview</td>
<td>• Coded responses from interviews on unit planning • Traced patterns of unit delivery through the analysis of weekly planners • Coded examples of teacher understanding of interdisciplinary planning • Coded examples of unit components from audiotaped instruction and field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does Jessica capitalize on her emergent bilinguals’ background knowledge and experiences?</td>
<td>• Observation notes • Weekly planner • Audiotaped instruction • Long-term plans for units of study • Informal interview</td>
<td>• Coded responses from interviews on how to use students’ background knowledge (SBK) for instruction • Coded examples of the use of SBK and experiences from audiotaped instruction and field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What strategies does Jessica use to foster her emergent bilinguals’ development of both language and content?</td>
<td>• Observation notes • Audiotaped instruction • Informal interview</td>
<td>• Coded examples of strategies used during instruction • Tracked and analyzed teacher use of strategies during instruction and feedback from observation notes and audiotaped instruction • Coded patterns of teacher’s responses to interview questions regarding strategies used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In what ways does Jessica support the primary language of her students in her classroom?</td>
<td>• Observation notes • Audiotaped instruction • Informal interview</td>
<td>• Coded examples of language use in each language from field notes and audiotaped instruction • Identified instructional events taught in each language from classroom observations and audiotaped lessons • Identified strategies for language development use for each language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does Jessica foster students’ academic language development of the content areas in both languages?</td>
<td>• Observation notes • Weekly planner • Audiotaped instruction • Informal interview</td>
<td>• Coded examples of academic language use from field notes and audiotaped instruction • Identified teacher’s strategic teaching of the components</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by both the first and second author after data collection from observation and other information sources had concluded. Using the Guidelines for Promoting Effective Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals as our framework, we initially read through the data to explore if connections between Jessica’s classroom practice and the guidelines existed. From the research question a set of subquestions were also developed and used to organize the data analysis as shown in Table 2. Any connections found were analyzed in light of the research subquestions. A code was assigned to each of the five subquestions that aligned with each guideline. We then read through the data a second time, as well as through the coded examples of the unit of analysis and the instructional activity. Each activity was categorized under each guideline. As we continued with the analysis, we realized that each instructional activity involved more than one guideline, so some codes were aligned with all the guidelines that applied.

We proceeded to analyze a second time all the segments that had been coded to confirm the connections between Jessica's instruction and the guidelines. This analysis of the data from the observation notes and other information sources helped us conduct informal interviews with Jessica to further understand her classroom practice. All three interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. For this analysis we also used the Guidelines for Promoting Effective Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals as our framework. We created Table 3 to assess the ways that Jessica’s unit of inquiry on water met the guidelines for promoting effective instruction for emergent bilinguals.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Activity</th>
<th>Guidelines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop standards-based challenging and enriching inquiry-based curriculum</td>
<td>Have high expectations for all students capitalizing on their background knowledge and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a variety of strategies to foster the development of both language and content</td>
<td>Create an environment that values and supports primary language development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on students’ academic language development in both languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the following section we discuss the findings of the study by exploring the ways in which Jessica’s unit of inquiry into water aligns with the research-based guidelines for effective instruction for emergent bilinguals.

Jessica’s Unit of Inquiry: An Actualization of the Concepts

Jessica’s water unit shows how the development of both language and content could be integrated in teaching. In her third-grade dual-language classroom, 70% of the instructional time is in Spanish and 30% is in English. In this case, the 30% of English instruction is covered during
English literacy time and during half of science instructional time. The rest of the day is in Spanish. Her unit reflects this time allocation and the value and support she has for the students’ first languages.

**Overview of the Unit on Water**

In order to address the state of California’s grade-level standards, one of the concepts that the third-grade teachers at Jessica’s school selected to explore was water. Through a unit on water titled *Water, Water, Everywhere*, Jessica’s third grade students explored the following science standards (California Department of Education, 2003) shown in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Science content standards</strong></th>
<th><strong>Science investigation and experimentation standard</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Energy and matter have multiple forms and can be changed from one form to another” (p. 1).</td>
<td>“Scientific progress is made by asking meaningful questions and conducting careful investigations” (p. 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Adaptations in physical structure or behavior may improve an organism’s chance for survival” (p. 3).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This unit can be considered *interdisciplinary* because it integrates the disciplines of science, language, and, as will be discussed later, mathematics. It was also organized around an essential question: *How does water affect our Earth?* This type of open-ended question stimulates discussion among children and promotes higher-level thinking, which is important for building content knowledge for emergent bilinguals (Carin, Bass, & Contant, 2005; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). In addition, by answering this essential question across content areas, Jessica’s emergent bilinguals have opportunities to use academic language and develop academic literacy and content knowledge in meaningful and interconnected ways (Their, 2002).

Jessica began planning the unit considering her emergent bilinguals different language proficiency levels in both Spanish and English. She identified the knowledge and skills students would need to develop in each language while studying the *Water, Water, Everywhere* unit. Three interconnected clusters of ideas were organized around the essential question *How does water affect our Earth?* The interconnected clusters were: *Wondering about Water*, *Properties of Water*, and *Water in Our Life*. During the first cluster, *Wondering about Water*, the students explored concepts that included where water comes from, bodies of water, water habitats, and water resources. The second cluster, *Properties of Water*, had a strong emphasis on hands-on learning. Throughout this cluster, students read and wrote, and did observations and interactive explorations about physical and chemical properties of water. For the duration of the last cluster, *Water in Our Life*, the students explored the water cycle, types of clouds and their formations, and water conservation. The culminating activity for the unit was a celebration of Earth Day.
Jessica carefully planned ways to assess her emergent bilinguals throughout the unit of study. Table 5 outlines some of the assessments Jessica implemented.

### Table 5

**Classroom Assessments for the Unit of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anecdotal Notes That Focus on Oral Language</th>
<th>Selected Group Projects to Demonstrate Content and Language Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Contributions in whole class discussions</td>
<td>• Poster presentation of properties of water/states of water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contributions during small group tasks that focused on vocabulary</td>
<td>• Graphic organizers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Written reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This unit of inquiry focused on increasing emergent bilinguals’ understanding about water and helping them appreciate the importance of conserving water in their houses and communities. Jessica also considered ways of enhancing students’ academic language growth and expanding their linguistic repertoires in Spanish and English. She strategically planned her unit to engage her students in a variety of reading and writing activities related to water, the exploration of different concepts about water through hands-on-activities, and documentation of learning using various assessment tools. Through thoughtful planning, this comprehensive unit connects to Guideline 1. All three clusters are guided by the academic standards, and as the activities planned are research supported, they have the potential to enrich and challenge students’ understandings about the topic of study.

In the following section we discuss in detail the last cluster of Jessica’s science inquiry unit, and show how the different guidelines come together in Jessica’s classroom through a description of the cluster titled *Water in our Life*.

**Tapping into Students’ Background Knowledge and Experiences**

At this point in the unit, the students had learned that water has been around since before life existed on Earth; that water takes many forms, including water vapor, liquid water, and ice; and that there are different bodies of water on Earth and all are part of the water cycle. Through this last cluster, Jessica wanted her students to explore, first, the continuous movement of water in the environment through the process of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation and, second, the different ways in which water is used daily and how it can be conserved as the demand for water grows worldwide.

Jessica starts this part of the unit by gathering her students at the rug and by asking them questions in Spanish to engage them in an academic discussion: ¿Dónde encontramos agua? (Where do we find water?), ¿De dónde viene la lluvia? (Where does rain come from?), ¿Qué pasa con la lluvia después que cae? (What happens to rain after it falls?), ¿Has visto vapor de agua? (Have you seen water vapor?), ¿Dónde? (Where?). Through this introductory instructional activity, Jessica taps into what students already know about the topic through previous learning or real life experiences, connecting her instruction to Guideline 2. The class discussion that emerges from these questions provides students with the opportunity to review concepts.
learned, to clarify complex ideas, and to use academic language in meaningful and constructive ways. It is connected to Guideline 4 because it values the students’ primary language, Spanish, and to Guideline 5 because it focuses on the academic language of science.

Teaching the Academic Language of Science in Two Languages

While the instructional activities focused on developing students’ understanding of the different stages of the water cycle, they also provided students an opportunity to develop academic language. After the initial class discussion, Jessica read aloud the Spanish book, El autobús mágico se salpica todo (The Magic School Bus Wet All Over, publisher’s translation) by Cole and Degen (1996), focusing on key content-specific vocabulary words such as evaporación, precipitación, condensación, acumulación, vapor, and evaporar. Through this activity, Jessica also connected to Guideline 2 by building background knowledge through a read-aloud. She then introduced the cognates of these words: evaporation, precipitation, condensation, and accumulation. For this unit, Jessica emphasized the study of cognates as a tool for developing text comprehension and word study. For example, she taught students that cognates that end in -tion in English will end in -ción in Spanish. They also discussed words that have the same spelling in English and Spanish, such as the word vapor. In this way, students developed metalinguistic awareness and expanded their vocabularies both in English and Spanish. As Jessica’s activities focused on the development of academic language and content in both languages through the use of cognates, a clear connection to Guideline 5 was found. More important, through the read aloud, by teaching language through science content, and guiding the analysis of key academic terms Jessica addressed Guideline 3 as well.

Using Multiple Strategies for Language and Content Development in Spanish and English

During English literacy time, the students built on the read-aloud and vocabulary discussion that had been done previously in Spanish. As suggested by Guideline 5, this sequential language use allowed the teacher to enhance academic language development in two languages. Jessica called her students to the front of the classroom to participate in a Water Cycle Dance. She began by organizing the class into four groups and giving each group a sign with one of the key vocabulary words introduced through the reading. The vocabulary words on each sign corresponded to stages of the water cycle: evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and accumulation. Next, the groups were given musical instruments to represent each stage; for example, a rain stick was given to the precipitation group. Jessica then displayed “The Rain Song” (See Figure 1.) on the overhead projector, and played a YouTube video for students to watch and sing along with.

Using their musical instruments, the groups sang the song which included their vocabulary words. This multilayer activity offered a range of instructional paths to foster the development of both language and content, thus addressing Guideline 3. The fact that language and content development was done through multisensory activities in diverse languages, rather
than repeating activities in a different language, signaled the meaning of Guideline 1. That is, rich inquiry-based curriculum was being implemented to build, rather than just translate, students understanding of content.

To help students review what they had learned the previous day and to emphasize the acquisition of academic terms, Jessica began her second day with a read-aloud from the book *El Ciclo del Agua* by Helen Frost (2004). After the reading, Jessica reviewed the academic terms condensación, evaporación, precipitación, and acumulación and their cognates in English condensation, evaporation, precipitation, and accumulation. Through modeling, Jessica introduced the next activity. The students would create individual “pizza” charts (adapted from Montaño-Harmon, 1991) to show their understanding of the water cycle and the academic vocabulary terms in Spanish. Jessica showed the students a large tagboard circle that had been divided in fourths. On one-quarter of her pizza chart she drew a picture of water rising from a lake. On the back of that section of tagboard she wrote the word evaporación and a brief definition in Spanish. Next, she asked students to create their own pizza charts that would include pictures, labels, and definitions of all four stages of the water cycle. Figure 2 shows two pizza charts created by Jessica’s students.

Once the charts were completed, students described the stages of the water cycle using sentence frames provided by the teacher to explain their pizza charts to the class. They summarized what they knew about the water cycle using sentence frames such as: Yo aprendí _______ acerca del ciclo del agua. (I learned _______ about the water cycle). Las fases del ciclo del agua son: , , , y (The different stages of the water cycle are , , , and ). This layering of instructional events focused on the development of academic language and knowledge through the integration of literacy (reading and writing) with oracy (listening and speaking). First, the students listened to the story that Jessica read to them and to the modeling instructions of the pizza chart. Second, they wrote the different stages of the water cycle on their charts, and, finally, they shared orally what they learned through the different steps of the instructional activity. We identified multiple connections to the guidelines in this task. The teacher addressed Guideline 2 by making connections with students’ prior knowledge about the

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At this point in the unit, the students had studied the water cycle in depth. Now, Jessica introduced the concept of water in the air or clouds. It is important to note that Jessica did not repeat lessons in each language but moved across languages by building on the previous lesson. This lesson about clouds was done in English. Jessica began the lesson by reading two books aloud: *Clouds* (Vaughan, 1997) and *Looking at Clouds* (Ring, 1999). These books discussed how clouds are made, what happens inside a cloud and how temperature affects clouds, different types of clouds, and the role of meteorologists in determining weather conditions. Through questions and answers and connections to life experiences used during these read-alouds, students discussed their new conceptual understanding of clouds.

After the read-alouds, Jessica took her students on an observation of the sky outside the classroom. With the background knowledge she had built through the readings the students were able to recognize and discuss the different types of clouds, to explain how the clouds could have been formed according to the weather conditions of the day, and to use descriptive vocabulary that they had learned to describe what they saw in the sky. Even though the lesson was done in English, the students were allowed to use their primary language during the student-student interactions outside the classroom. This scaffolding strategy was meant to help them negotiate meaning as they constructed ideas to share with others. However, the oral contributions to the whole class as well as the journal writing they did in this lesson were done in the language of instruction: English. As the students interacted in this discussion outside the classroom, they took notes in their journals about what they observed.

Back in the classroom, Jessica asked the students to the rug area to debrief them concerning what they had experienced outside. She drew a web on the whiteboard and wrote *clouds* in the center. Then, she asked the students to share with their partner one thing that they had learned, or confirmed, from their readings during the observation on the playground. After the students shared with one another, they began sharing with the rest of the class. As students shared, Jessica compiled their answers on the web. The web required students to identify different types of clouds and to

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*Figure 2. Water Cycle Pizza Chart.*
provide a description of their characteristics. This web was then displayed on the classroom wall, serving as a scaffold for future writing. The activities in this lesson illustrate Guideline 1 by showing how students are challenged cognitively and linguistically and are reflective of the required standard-based curriculum. To clarify, this unit of study addressed the California science standard for third grade that matter has “multiple forms and can be changed from one form to another” (California Department of Education, 2003, p. 1). In addition, Guidelines 3 and 5 are evident. A combination of literacy and oracy instructional strategies were used to foster the development of both language and content. There was also a focus on students’ academic language development in both languages, by allowing students to process academic knowledge through interactions using either English or Spanish.

Jessica consistently embedded literacy into the content areas or brought the topics of the content areas into the literacy time. During Spanish literacy time, Jessica expanded the knowledge students had developed about clouds in the previous lesson done in English. In the Spanish lesson, Jessica wanted to focus on word study, where students would continue to internalize and use the academic terms they had been exploring through this unit. Using a large chart, Jessica engaged the class in a shared writing activity and think-aloud as she modeled how to complete a vocabulary card. During the think-aloud she exhibited the associations she made to help her remember the meaning of a word. After the students understood the assignment, she distributed the terms nube, estrato, cirro, cúmulo, nimbo, and cumulonimbo written on big cards to each table. Students worked in pairs to complete their vocabulary cards by providing a definition, drawing a picture to represent the meaning of the word, and using the word in a sentence. Figure 3 shows a sample vocabulary card produced by one of Jessica’s students.

This is Javier’s vocabulary card for the content-specific academic vocabulary word cloud (nube) in Spanish. Javier found a picture on the computer and pasted it onto his card. Next, he wrote out a definition. In this example, Javier’s definition was: Son pequeñas gotas de agua flotando juntas en el aire (They are small drops of water floating together in the air). This was not a formal dictionary definition, but rather accurate information taken from the books they were reading or from discussions the class had about the word. Finally, in order to make personal connections that would further help him remember the word, Javier wrote a sentence about the word. Here Javier wrote: Cuando vamos afuera y miramos al cielo vemos nubes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Picture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nube</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Cloud Picture" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Son pequeñas gotas de agua flotando juntas en el aire.</td>
<td>Cuando vamos afuera y miramos al cielo vemos nubes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Academic Vocabulary Development Card.*

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outside and we look at the sky we see clouds). Once all of the students completed their cards, they punched a hole in the corner and added it to their individual vocabulary card decks which were secured with metal rings. Through this instructional activity Jessica addressed Guideline 4, by using Spanish as the language of instruction, and Guideline 5 by focusing on the development of academic vocabulary such as nube, estrato, cirro, cúmulo, nimbo, etc.

The last part of the third cluster was on saving water. She organized her emergent bilinguals’ inquiries about saving water into a science fair, which engaged them in critical thinking about a social issue like water conservation through instructional activities both in Spanish and English. To do this, she had students conduct research to find out about the ways that people use water for drinking, bathing, and manufacturing. As part of her Spanish instructional time and to begin this research, Jessica started by asking about students’ prior knowledge and personal experiences. She wrote the question ¿Cuáles son algunas formas en que usas el agua? (What are some ways you use water?) on the board to start the discussion. As the students shared their responses she recorded them in Spanish on the board. This part of the instructional event connected with Guidelines 2 and 4 by bridging student’s background knowledge and personal experiences about water usage in Spanish. At the end of the oral discussion students came to the conclusion that there was not enough access to clean water for the overpopulated Earth and that people do not take good care of natural resources like water.

Next, Jessica guided the students in coming up with research questions for the classroom science fair project. The students came up with two research questions: ¿Cómo desperdiciamos el agua en la escuela y en la casa? (How do we waste water at school and at home?), and Qué podemos hacer para evitar el desperdicio de este valioso recurso natural? (What could we do to avoid the waste of this valuable natural resource?). Jessica challenged her students to become aware of the problem, analyze it in critical ways, and come up with a solution demonstrating the high expectations she has for her students’ academic performance in the areas of critical thinking and problem solving (Guidelines 1 and 2).

During English literacy time and to get her students started on the exploration of their questions, Jessica read the book Water Detectives (Alexander, 2004). The book is written in a journal format and has pictures and graphs to support the important points the writer makes. Jessica’s students explored their everyday use of water, evaluated their uses of this valuable natural resource, and came up with solutions to conserve water. As an illustration of Guideline 3, this project provided students with a real-life application of science and mathematical concepts and a meaningful way to use academic language in English for real purposes. Additionally, the lesson used academic language across content areas through the readings and class discussion.

Following the format of the Water Detectives book, students worked in groups and collected information at school and at home about water use and waste. Through this instructional activity students read and wrote using academic language, addressing Guideline 5. Specifically, each student recorded their data in English in a small journal that Jessica created which included space for drawings or pictures clipped from magazines. Students also used prior
mathematical knowledge in their reporting of findings. In order to use the mathematical concepts needed for this project, Jessica did a quick review of measurement and graphing concepts that the students had studied a few weeks previously. This review provided the students with important tools for their research and made for an authentic interdisciplinary project. Math is sometimes difficult to integrate appropriately, but this project provided a natural real-world application of mathematical skills. As discussed above, they addressed Guideline 2 by activating prior knowledge as they reviewed concepts they knew from previous lessons.

Students collected data in English during three consecutive days. On the first day of the research project the students were water detectives at school. On the second day they collected data from their observations made at home. During class time, Jessica helped her students analyze their data, make charts and graphs, and prepare poster presentations. On the third day, the groups presented their research findings. After the group presentations and the discussion about possible solutions to the waste problems, Jessica moved her students’ understanding to a higher level. Activating analytical and evaluating skills, she asked her students to evaluate whether they had adequately responded to the two research questions, How do we waste water at school and at home? (¿Cómo desperdiciamos el agua en la escuela y en la casa?) and What could we do to change the waste of this valuable natural resource? (¿Qué podemos hacer para evitar el desperdicio de este valioso recurso natural?). She also asked them to compare the group presentations to identify patterns of water use and water waste. This forced students to think critically and to use language at a higher level of academic proficiency in English. Once the guided discussion was finished, Jessica invited the class to gather at the rug to create an awareness campaign for the school using the research findings from the project and to design an advertisement for the campaign. This series of instructional events illustrated Guideline 3 by focusing on both language and content learning and Guideline 5 by providing students with multiple opportunities for academic language used to foster the acquisition of the academic discourse. In our final analysis we identified that the entire project reflected the meaning of Guideline 1, since it was based on the curriculum standards for the grade and disciplines and implemented challenging and inquiry-based instructional activities.

Concluding Activities

Every thematic unit should end in a celebration of learning. Jessica’s planning of the unit and its interrelated clusters of ideas made it possible to celebrate its conclusion during Earth Day. To start the lesson in Spanish, Jessica had her students watch a short video about Earth Day called Día de la tierra (GetGreenGlobal, 2010). This video helped students understand the importance of the celebration and make connections with the conceptual learning they had been experiencing throughout the unit. After the students watched the video and discussed its main ideas, Jessica distributed index cards to them and asked them to work in pairs to write key ideas to discuss and address during Earth Day. Students worked diligently with one another, and after they had completed their cards, they came to the front of the classroom and placed them on a web Jessica had drawn on the whiteboard. By using a video in Spanish, Jessica continued to
validate the Spanish speakers in her class (Guideline 4) as well as reinforce the transferring of content knowledge and skills across languages (Guideline 5).

In writing their key idea cards, students used academic Spanish terms such as medio ambiente (environment), recursos naturals (natural resources), conservación (conservation), preservación (preservation), reciclar (to recyle), tierra (Earth), aire (air), agua (water), polución (pollution), deforestación (deforestation) and capa de ozono (ozone layer) Corresponding cognates were also discussed to build prior knowledge for the English part of this instructional event. In so doing, Jessica’s instruction focused on Guideline 2, building students prior knowledge through vocabulary development, and also on Guideline 5 because of the emphasis placed on academic vocabulary in both Spanish and English.

During English literacy time, Jessica grouped the students and gave each group one of the cards on which was listed a key idea. She had the groups read from different resources about these concepts that had been introduced through the video. Jessica selected books about Earth Day at different reading levels to ensure the academic success of all her students. They read Kids Care for the Earth (Thompson, 2002), Protecting the Planet (Jerome, 2003), and Earth Day (Weaver & Weaver, 2004). Using the information from these readings, students were asked to propose ways to promote the celebration of Earth Day in school. Each of the four groups was assigned a rubric to follow for their creative presentation. The students used the internet, the readings provided by the teacher, and their own ideas to work on this project.

Each group of students presented their research-based creative project in English. The first group decided to develop a recycling campaign at the school. They developed a plan for how they would run the recycling campaign, assigned specific working roles to the group members, and organized a 3R (Reduce, Recycle, Reuse) campaign for a school assembly. The ultimate goal of this group was to make students aware that they can reduce waste, recycle and reuse many of the materials they use at school and at home.

The second group focused on water pollution. They became interested in this topic because their school was situated close to a park with an artificial lake where many ducks and birds lived. The students decided to write a letter to the principal asking permission to go to the park during school to do a cleanup of the lake, which was filled with trash. They planned to invite other classes and parents, and to ask stores to contribute gloves and trash bags for the cleanup. The third group focused on land conservation. The group brainstormed a list of possible ways to care for their schoolyard. First, students brainstormed the making of a series of posters to post around the school. After posters were designed, they invited the school janitor to help them create compost from the leaves, grass, flowers, and weeds collected from the playground and around the school. With his help, the students planned to make compost and then use it to help maintain the school grounds.

The last group decided to create a brochure that would inform the school community about the meaning of Earth Day and the importance of protecting the Earth’s resources: land, water, and air. The students planned to distribute the brochures in every classroom and to
parents as they dropped their kids at school.

The students’ projects illustrate Guidelines 3, using a variety of strategies to learn language and content, and Guideline 5, developing academic writing and using the academic vocabulary, as they created and presented their projects to the class or the school community. Through reading, writing, discussion, and meaningful research projects the students had learned important information that was useful both inside and outside the school. Most important, throughout the theme Water, Water, Everywhere, and more in particular in the last cluster, the students were involved in research to make them aware that their actions today impact the environment and the lives of everyone, thus supporting the significance of Guideline 1.

Conclusion

Throughout this inquiry unit, Jessica engaged her students in a balance of supported and independent reading, writing, vocabulary development, and hands-on activities to develop their knowledge about water and to develop their literacy skills. Jessica’s unit addressed the research questions framed around our Guidelines for Promoting Effective Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals. Our analysis revealed multiple connections to the guidelines across instructional events.

A close look at Jessica’s unit on water reveals that the exploration of grade-level content and the development of students’ academic language and literacy skills in two languages can effectively be combined. Reflective of Guidelines 1 and 2, rather than teaching language, literacy and content in isolation, Jessica was able to integrate her students’ learning through a well-developed, challenging, inquiry-based curriculum organized around standards, and was successful in holding high expectations for all her students. Because emergent bilinguals face double the work of native English speakers, in learning both language and content, addressing both through this type of unit is essential. The interconnectedness of content, academic language, and literacy skills in Jessica’s unit, facilitated the improvement of one area through the improvement of the others allowing all students to be successful in her classroom.

When looking specifically at language learning, relevant to Guidelines 3, 4, and 5, Jessica was able to enhance the development of her students’ first and second languages as well as their academic language. Throughout the unit, Jessica’s emergent bilinguals were engaged in activities that emphasized the use of meaningful academic language across different content areas but with a focus on science. At multiple points in the unit we found evidence that Jessica scaffolded the use of various linguistic repertoires of her students in different ways. Activities ranged from reading books in both English and Spanish aligned with the language of each instructional event to facilitating students’ transfer of knowledge across languages through meaningful multilayered activities. This allowed her to address the linguistic needs of both language groups in her classroom in order to keep all students challenged and engaged. As Jessica explained:

Because all activities are differentiated by language proficiency, all of the students
in my class are successful in accomplishing the learning tasks. They work together with their bilingual partners, and I provide extra support as needed as they work in their groups. My goal is that every student is engaged and motivated to learn despite his or her language ability. (Jessica, personal communication, October, 2008)

Jessica’s emergent bilinguals worked in groups and pairs for different academic language activities and participated in class discussions and academic presentations in which they were expected to use the academic skills learned in all language domains.

Educators who, like Jessica, work with students learning content in a second language need to provide their students with meaningful and appropriate instruction that focuses on the development of language, literacy, and content. In this article we proposed that one way to achieve that is by using the Guidelines for Promoting Effective Instruction for Emergent Bilinguals as a framework for instruction. Planning and implementing curriculum that follows the suggested guidelines is both a challenge and a necessity for teachers and administrators who work with the growing population of emergent bilinguals in the United States. Further qualitative studies that illustrate how the guidelines can be successfully implemented in classrooms in a variety of content areas would contribute to the body of research that connects theory to effective practice for bilingual teachers. Such studies could serve as helpful guides for teachers. In particular, studies that closely examine growth and achievement in language, literacy, and content area knowledge of specific students through the implementation of integrated curriculum would benefit the field.

**Children’s Literature and Video References:**


References


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Gaining Appreciation and Understanding for Writing in English in a Bilingual Class

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While participating in the Bilingual Teacher Research Forum (a teacher inquiry group), I decided to do research in my classroom to investigate the ways in which emergent bilinguals (EBs) expanded their appreciation and understanding of writing in English as a second language. The purpose of this study was to examine and describe first-grade EBs’ development of writing. A variety of assessment tools were used to document students writing growth over time. All the children made progress both in their spelling and in their writing of stories. Engaging in teacher-based research became a professional development tool to document and reflect on my teaching practice and its impact on the writing attitudes and skills of a group of first-grade EBs.

Introduction

For over 10 years, as the only Bilingual Reading Specialist at my school, I worked with teachers from the bilingual as well as regular all-English programs. Shell Elementary (all names are pseudonyms) is a small inner-city elementary school, Grades K–4, in a Spanish-speaking community in North Philadelphia, Pa. There, I provided guidance and leadership in literacy by working with teachers, paraprofessionals, and students. Several times a week, I also worked with a group of first-grade students who, as recommended by their regular classroom teacher, needed intensive small group instruction in the area of literacy. These children were straddling two languages and two cultures. Spanish was spoken at home, and in the school they were learning English. I had only 45 minutes daily to work with the students. The period was squeezed in between morning recess and lunch, so there was no question of keeping the students for a few minutes longer. The afternoon was not an option either, because their regular classroom teacher complained that they would be missing an important content class. I alternated between a reading and writing lesson each day. This group of emergent bilinguals (EBs) is part of the inquiry project I describe in this article.

School and Classroom Context

The building where Shell elementary school is located was built over a century ago. For the past 30 years it has served more students than what it was originally built for. For example, at the time of the study (during the early 2000s) there were almost 550 students in a building meant to house about 125 students. At that time, 90% of the students at Shell elementary were Latino, and most spoke Spanish at home. The student population was also highly transient, with many students moving back and forth to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Over 80% of the families were low income and in welfare. As suggested by standardized test scores, these
students were not achieving academically and many were considered future drop-outs.

Today, the school struggles to keep their enrollment at around 300 students, still being overcrowded. Ninety-three percent are economically disadvantaged and 92% are Latino. Transiency continues to be an issue that influences these students' lives and schooling. Charter schools have siphoned off some of the students, and the razing of deteriorating housing has forced many to move out of the community.

Another concerning characteristic of the school was that during the 1990s and 2000s, the school was also a setting for entrenched teachers. As indicated by Nevárez-La Torre (2010), about half of the teachers neared 30 years of service at the same school and many “maintained traditional classrooms with predetermined instructional objectives and narrow outcomes. The population of the school became increasingly diverse during their time of service, and they still talked about the ‘good old days’ when students sat in straight rows and copied work neatly from the blackboard” (p. 12). Given the small building, there was no space for a school library; instead, each classroom had a small library collection of books. This practice continues today, although for a different reason; now, there is space for a library, but due to budget cuts, there is no money for a librarian.

The increasing numbers of EBs were served through three types of programs. For those students whose parents requested maintenance of their L1, there was a Dual Bilingual program in Spanish and in English. The Sheltered English program was also implemented in classrooms where the teachers had been trained in using sheltered ESL techniques to make language comprehensible and scaffold vocabulary instruction. Because of the high percentage of EBs (over 60%) in the school, there were not enough ESL teachers to service all of them adequately. Thus, some mainstream teachers provided some sheltered instruction to support the academic learning of EBs. The third type was the All-English program, which provided instruction targeted for native English speakers. They did not offer any language-based modifications for EBs, although they differentiated instruction based on the ability levels of the students (e.g., slow learners, talented).

The Problem

Given the low achievement scores of students in the school, early identification and early intervention were two goals that the principal instituted for all the teachers to work on. I knew that one of the areas of most academic need in my school was writing in any language. Writing was an activity that students in my school suffered through. They viewed it as a penalty for not behaving well in class, since some of the teachers reprimanded them in such a way. Most teachers complained that the students did not want to write and did not know how to write. Their performance in most classroom-based writing tasks and testing confirmed the low performance in writing of many students in the school, in particular, those who were developing English as their second language.

After participating in a teacher inquiry group, the Bilingual Teacher Research Forum for a
few months (the Forum; Nevárez-La Torre, 2010), I decided to do research in my own classroom to investigate the ways in which EB children expanded their appreciation and understanding of writing in their second language. I was interested in exploring different methods that would serve as effective writing intervention practices in the early grades. Specifically, I wanted to document the writing progress of first-grade EBs in spelling as well as in composing and encoding their thoughts and creative stories.

**Purpose and Organization of Inquiry**

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe first-grade EB children's writing development. Through the research I wanted to analyze the pedagogical practices I use for writing instruction and explore ways to make them more meaningful and relevant to my students’ needs. This inquiry took me on an introspective journey that started with identifying the practices that were used to teach me to write when I was young, the pedagogy for literacy instruction I implemented early in my career, and the path that helped me challenge unproductive teacher-centered instruction. Instructional techniques that emphasized writing as a process (Atwell, 1987; Clay, 2005 a & b) were explored to see if and how they could promote writing growth in EBs. I uncovered how students’ home language and their spelling approximations can be honored: these strategies are a rich resource upon which to build instruction while guiding them toward conventions and book language form. Through observations across time and in daily lessons I was able to detect individual patterns of progress and help the children grow in their learning, specifically, in their writing development and enjoyment for this academic activity.

I begin the narrative by describing some of the practices I used to teach writing before I became part of the Forum. To provide the classroom context of the inquiry, I discuss the students’ writing dispositions and performance profile as well as how these change once I started to incorporate into writing instruction some different methods based on the research that I read with Forum members. The analysis of their writing development is based on my documentation of their performance in pre- and post-assessments and on the examination of their writing pieces collected daily. Finally, I reflect on what I learned from the inquiry project that allowed me to appreciate the students’ process of becoming writers and to experience my transformation as a practitioner.

**Teaching Practice Early in My Career**

When I first started to teach literacy and later became a reading specialist, my instructional practices were mostly influenced by the methods used to teach me to read and write when I was a child and those used in my teaching preparation program. I grew up in a bilingual home where Ukrainian and English were spoken. I was also biliterate because my elementary and middle schools offered language arts in those two languages. As I valued multilingualism, in high school and college I added a third language, Spanish, to my linguistic repertoire.
Looking back, growing up, I was taught using very traditional instructional practices which included attention to grammar and form in the writing product. The teachers gave us the topics to write and the preferred writing assignment was copying from books or the blackboard (to practice handwriting skills) and completing book reports. At the college level I was exposed to the importance of teaching the mechanics of writing, the benefits of skill drilling and memorization, and that writing development needed to be guided by error correction.

Not surprisingly, I incorporated this same type of instruction when I taught writing. Teacher centered instruction included filling in the blank in grammar workbooks, after reading a passage from a textbook, answering questions in a sentence or two, and writing spelling words multiple times. I did not expect my students to be creative writers or to produce knowledge. I just expected them to follow instructions when answering questions, write the assigned book report, and practice handwriting skills. I gave a lot of attention to error correction, teaching writing skills in isolation from authentic text, and mastering skills through repetition drills. Before participating in the Forum I did not question my pedagogical methods as being counterproductive to writing development, not only because of the instructional models I was exposed to but also because my colleagues at the school were implementing similar practices.

Still, I was always very bothered by the fact that the first-grade students with whom I worked did not see themselves as writers, they expressed a lot of displeasure when a writing task was assigned, and they did not want to write independently for fear of making errors and failing. While, many of them did not write in Spanish because they received their initial reading instruction in English, sporadically they expressed their ideas orally in Spanish. Furthermore, at times I needed to scaffold their comprehension by explaining complex ideas in their first language.

Participation in a Teacher Inquiry Group

It was at this juncture that I was invited to participate in the Forum, a teacher inquiry group that met once a month, each time at a different school in the city. I had been a mentor to new bilingual teachers as part of a summer institute induction program. One of its features was to guide teachers in learning how to conduct investigations in their classrooms to improve their practice. After the summer institute ended, a group of participants wanted to continue meeting informally to support their instruction, intrigued by the concept of teacher inquiry, I decided to join the group (Nevárez-La Torre, 2010).

What started as a short-term commitment one afternoon a month became, for me, a six-year wide-ranging exploration of my practice as a bilingual reading specialist. The group of ESL and bilingual teachers read and discussed scholarly literature, hosted guest speakers on topics related to biliteracy and teacher inquiry, examined videotapes of our own teaching, documented our reflections and insights, and gradually changed aspects of our practices that were unproductive. The exploration of literacy and biliteracy was a common interest of all the members and we pursued it diligently. As we introspected about the ideology that guided literacy teaching in our classrooms, current scholarly discussions were used to challenge these and uncover more relevant and productive ways of promoting reading and writing in multilingual classrooms.
Given my multilingual background and the issues with writing instruction that I confronted at my school and classroom, one of my inquiry interests became: *What happens when I encourage a group of first-grade EBs to write using process-oriented instructional approaches?*

The discussions with the Forum members and the articles we examined together about literacy helped me understand the process that authors experience when they write (Atwell, 1999; Graves, 1994). As I explained earlier, writing and reading for me were linear processes, with a beginning and an end that stressed achieving a product that followed the guidelines and expectations given by me, the teacher. In my teaching I valued writing as an independent activity with very little input from others. As a teacher, I followed the prescribed curriculum to maintain control over the instructional process.

Participating in the inquiry group opened my eyes to new conceptualizations about writing pedagogy that contradicted my beliefs about effective literacy instruction. Gradually I began to construct a new understanding about writing as a process (Atwell, 1999; Samway, 2006) and how best to promote its development with EB first graders.

One of my first tasks was to explore ways that would foster a learning environment where my class would become a community of writers (Freeman, 1995; Samway, 2006; Strahan, Smith, McElrath, & Toole, 2001; Whatley & Canalis, 2002). While closely examining my role as the teacher of writing, I would identify ways of teaching writing that promoted trust, collaboration, and more interaction among students (Igoa, 1995). Specifically, every day I scheduled an author-sharing time at the end of class. This time allowed one volunteer to read their writing for that day to their classmates. I modeled how to respond to an author’s writing. The students learned to not only respond with just a short complement but to react to the writing itself by commenting on the choice of topic, a writers’ craft, or the way a sentence was constructed. In addition, because we were a small group who worked together daily, closeness developed among the students. They felt free to ask one another for help in spelling certain words and generating writing ideas. Despite the increased noise level, I encourage them to interact with each other as I saw that they were being very productive. Another activity that promoted authorship, ownership, and camaraderie was that once a student finished writing a book, it became part of the classroom library. In this way everyone celebrated with the author the publication of the book and benefitted by reading a new book.

An additional emphasis became the discussion and modeling of writing as a process rather than focusing on just the final product. Initially, I had to model and teach explicitly how to brainstorm ideas for their writing and ways of expanding on those ideas to create a story. This was necessary since these students expressed doubt about their writing ability and insisted that they did not have anything to write about. Rather than emphasizing the written final product, I encouraged them to talk about their ideas. Through these conversations I helped to brainstorm details that made their writing richer. Mini-lessons (Calkins, 1994) contributed to their understanding of letter-sound correspondence, punctuation, capitalization, spacing, and other aspects of the mechanics of writing. A critical feature was that the mini-lessons were based on...
the specific needs of the students, rather than following a generic scope and sequence. Finally, we worked on drafting the student’s stories. For first graders, this proved to be challenging. They were impatient to get their writing down on paper and move to a different activity. Once they experienced success in writing by publishing some initial pieces, they were more willing to spend the time and energy on writing a draft. Gradually they appreciated that writing takes time and is part of a process involving several steps.

Integration of skills and strategies emerged as a key ingredient that permeated the instruction of writing in my classroom. As explained above, during the writing lesson block my students and I conversed about ideas, listened to one another’s drafts, and read what was written. In this way writing, reading, listening, and speaking were worked on at the same time. This cycle of interactive learning allowed them to learn language by using it in an integrated fashion.

As I began to implement these process-oriented instructional practices, I made documentation of writing instruction in my classroom a priority. To gather information for my inquiry, I studied the classroom dynamics during the writing lesson block. By observing how my students went about writing, I would learn from them how best to guide their writing development. Their writing would become the curriculum, and the observations could also help me to examine patterns in their growth as writers.

A Closer Look at My Inquiry Process

All of the students I worked with were repeating first grade and their level of spelling development was far below grade level. As part of my inquiry to support, extend, and guide their writing growth, the students and I worked together for six months (November to April). Of the 10 original EBs that I started to work with in November, only 6 stayed in the school for the remainder of the school year. Four students left at different times before April, and although four new students enrolled, I could not include them in the sample, because they had not received instruction in my classroom since November. Thus, the findings discussed below reflect data collected from 6 students, namely, Keila, Amarilys, Emanuel, Julio, Lisa, and Carmen.

Table 1 specifies the different sources that I used to gather information in my inquiry into my students writing development. In early November, I used two early literacy assessment instruments to gather baseline data on the students writing. In April, I planned to assess students again using the same tests to compare the results and see if any growth was evident. Background information on my students was also collected. To capture my students’ everyday writing behaviors and progress, I decided to document observations, keep anecdotal records, and complete checklists.

The Monster Test is a developmental spelling assessment based on the work of J. Richard Gentry (2007), professor of elementary education at Western Carolina University. This test, designed
Table 1

*Data Gathering Tools*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monster Test</td>
<td>Evaluate/demonstrate growth in children’s spelling ability</td>
<td>November and April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapted Writing Scale</td>
<td>Descriptors/level of EBs’ early writing development</td>
<td>November, January, and April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Background Data</td>
<td>Attendance, Behavior, Homework</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher observation of student work</td>
<td>Track progress, assess impact of instruction, and highlight needs</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual checklists</td>
<td>Items child controls in writing, strategy development</td>
<td>When appears in child’s writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For English-language pupils in kindergarten through second grade, is used to evaluate/demonstrate growth in children’s developmental spelling ability. It is valuable to teachers in making informed instructional decisions based on the students’ strengths and areas of needed development. It consists of 10 words, the first of which is *monster*. The other words are: *united, dress, bottom, hiked, human, eagle, closed, bumped,* and *type*. The results of the test can be categorized into five developmental stages: *precommunicative, semiphonetic, phonetic, transitional, and conventional* (Gentry, 2007). Although the test was not developed with EBs in mind, it is beneficial to establish a baseline for spelling development in English.

In November, most of the students in my inquiry tested at the *precommunicative* or the *semiphonetic stage*. *Precommunicative spelling* is used to describe writing that cannot be understood by others, and perhaps not by the child who writes it. *Semiphonetic-stage* writers know that letters say sounds, and they can write only some of the letters in a word (Gentry, 2007). If I would have given this test in Spanish, I suspect that the students would hear and transcribe more sounds, because Spanish tends to be more phonetic than English.

Attempts were made by the test developer to translate it into Spanish, but the phonemes in the words are different from those in English, making it difficult to compare results. Generally, it is difficult to translate across languages. However, it is my professional opinion that EBs may have tested better in a language that is more regular, like Spanish, than in English, which has so many irregular phonetic elements.

In English, spellers at the *phonetic stage* spell words like they sound. They write all the sounds they hear in words. These spellings do not necessarily look like conventional English spelling, but they are quite readable. Initial and final consonants are in place and these spellers gradually add vowels, even though they may not be the correct ones. Word spacing is evident.
The transitional stage has spellers begin to write words in more conventional ways. These spellers undergo a transition from reliance on sound to reliance on visual memory of how the word looks in print. They write with more correct vowels in every syllable. Often all the letters necessary to spell the word are there, but some letters may be reversed. The conventional stage is the final one where spellers are able to spell every word correctly (Gentry, 2007).

I also used an instrument adapted from the Blackburn-Cramp Stages of Writing Scale (2011). This writing scale was developed by teachers at Cramp elementary school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for EB writers at the first-grade level and below. However, at Shell elementary school the teachers renamed the stages of early writing development using the following categories: emerging, scribble/pictorial, precommunicative, semiphonetic, phonetic, transitional, conventional, and advanced. For purposes of my inquiry I refer to this adapted instrument as the Adapted Writing Scale. In November, my students scored at the precommunicative or semiphonetic stage in the Adapted Writing Scale.

The adaptation was guided by the teachers’ professional expertise. They decided that behaviors characteristic of the precommunicative stage of writing included stringing together random letters and letterlike forms, writing letters to convey a message and attempting to read it back. Students in the semiphonetic stage begin to understand that there is a relationship between letters and sounds and select some letters to match sounds. At the phonetic stage, students use initial and other consonants to represent words as well as write some familiar words. During the transitional stage children use some invented spelling and some conventional spelling in their writing to compose an understandable sentence independently. The conventional stage has students using both phonetic and sight strategies to spell words while writing short, simple sentences of more than four words. The advanced and final stage has children use conventional spelling as they write full sentences that are the start of a story. Their stories are structurally more complete and complex.

To gather background information about the students I spoke to their parents, their classroom teachers, and examined school records for attendance. Lack of attendance and completion of homework was a problem that all the teachers complained about. Parents indicated that they were not able to help the children with homework because they were not proficient in English. It was clear that I needed to help my students become independent writers so that they could perform well in the regular classroom and satisfy their mainstream teachers’ expectations of writing homework.

Through my documentation of observations and the use of anecdotal records (Himley & Carini, 2000) I was able to track my students progress in skills such as: knows letter sounds; uses correct spacing; makes sense; writes in sentences; includes a beginning, middle, and end; and, additionally, problem and/or solution, uses details, has an interesting lead, stays on topic, and concludes with a strong ending. Individual checklists (Allington & Cunningham, 2002) were helpful to track their progress in the developmental stages of writing when evaluating their written work and to identify areas where further observation and future mini-lessons were needed.
An Overview of Emergent Bilingual’s Writing Progress

This section describes the progress in writing stories made by 6 out of 10 emergent bilinguals, Amarilys, Carmen, Emanuel, Julio, Keila, and Lisa, with whom I worked for six months. I began implementing the process-oriented instructional techniques and methods soon after the baseline data were collected in November. As indicated in Table 2, all the children made noteworthy progress in spelling and writing development.

Table 2

Students Measures and Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amarilys</td>
<td>semiphonetic (MT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>conventional (MT)</td>
<td>poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>semiphonetic (AWS)</td>
<td>transitional (AWS)</td>
<td>conventional (AWS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>semiphonetic (MT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>conventional (MT)</td>
<td>fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>semiphonetic (AWS)</td>
<td>transitional (AWS)</td>
<td>conventional (AWS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuel</td>
<td>precommunicative (MT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>transitional (MT)</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>precommunicative (AWS)</td>
<td>semiphonetic (AWS)</td>
<td>phonetic (AWS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>precommunicative (MT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>transitional (MT)</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>precommunicative (AWS)</td>
<td>semiphonetic (AWS)</td>
<td>phonetic (AWS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keila</td>
<td>semiphonetic (MT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>transitional (MT)</td>
<td>poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>precommunicative (AWS)</td>
<td>phonetic (AWS)</td>
<td>transitional (AWS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>semiphonetic (MT)</td>
<td></td>
<td>conventional (MT)</td>
<td>fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>semiphonetic (AWS)</td>
<td>phonetic (AWS)</td>
<td>transitional (AWS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. MT = Monster Test (Gentry, 2007); AWS = Adapted Writing Scale (described in text)

In November, Keila was able to write only a letter or two for each of the 10 words on the Monster Spelling Test. Although she wrote random letters for the words *monster* and *hiked*, she was able to write the beginning consonant for at least 7 of the 10 words. Keila was at the semiphonetic stage of development, and was aware that letters represent sounds. The first pieces of writing that Keila completed included combinations of letterlike symbols and strings of letters as well as numbers and math symbols like the plus sign. At first there was no spacing evident in her writing, suggesting that she was at the precommunicative stage in the Adapted Writing Scale.

In April, Keila tested at the transitional level in spelling; she spelled most words on the Monster Test correctly. On the Adapted Writing Scale she was also at the transitional level, with
most words in her writing spelled conventionally. By analyzing her daily writing I noticed how gradually she began to use a period in the middle of the line to indicate a space between words. The exclamation point became her favorite punctuation mark, and she wrote lines and lines of them.

In his first piece of writing for me, Emanuel wrote entire lines of strings of letters. In the space on the paper where he wrote his name, Emanuel’s drawing spread out and into his name as though it were all part of the artwork. Both the Monster Test and the Adapted Writing Scale signaled him at the precommunicative stage of spelling and writing development respectively. In December, he wrote, “My Fopoph ate a banana” on the first line of a story, followed by lines of strings of letters. He had progressed to using some letters to match sounds and was able to write the above sentence with word-by-word coaching. However, when I left him to continue writing on his own, he only produced strings of letters. By April, Emanuel became a transitional speller, according to the Monster Test, and a phonetic writer, as indicated by the Adapted Writing Scale; he would write all the phonemes that he heard in words, occasionally using some vowels correctly. By then he was able to work independently on his writing for most of the class period.

Amarilys made the fastest progress of all the students in the group. For her first writing pieces she would only copy sentences out of her reading book. Then she wrote strings of letters and unconnected words with no spacing between words, as did most of the students in the group, and consonants represented words. The Monster Test identified her as a semiphonetic speller and the Adapted Writing Scale also showed her as a semiphonetic writer. She wrote initial, middle, and final consonants in words, but included no vowels. She wrote all the sounds she heard in the words, and they were quite readable, but did not necessarily look like English spelling. Like most of the students, Amarilys only wrote a sentence or two at the beginning of the inquiry.

By December, spacing was evident, words were spelled correctly, and she made increased attempts at writing sentences, but there was still no punctuation. She used transitional spelling: “scol” for school and “lon” for learn. By January, there was conventional spelling for most words, there was punctuation, and she would write three full sentences. Children generally use consonants as they sound out words before they begin to use vowels. She was moving from the phonetic to the transitional stage, undergoing a transition from reliance on sound to reliance on visual memory of how a word looks in print. She wrote with many correct vowels in every syllable. Often, all the letters necessary to spell the word were there, but she may have reversed some letters. “Famley” for family, “wit” for with, “fly” for fly, “brub” for brother, “wesngs” for wings, and “thay” for they.

By April, Amarilys knew when words did not look right and experimented with alternatives. Gradually, she began to write more, and her stories would contain details and a beginning, middle, and end. With guidance and support, she quickly reached conventional stages in both the Monster Test and the Adapted Writing Scales. Her writing exhibited standard spelling, and she used more complex sentence structure. Conventional spelling is a lifelong process, thus,
as she learned more and more words, her spelling continued to improve.

Julio’s writing displayed patterns of growth and development similar to the other students. His composing showed that he wanted to write about personal experience. His spelling progressed from the precommunicative stage in November to the transitional stage in April on the Monster Test. There was also progress shown in his writing as suggested by the Adapted Writing Scale, moving from the precommunicative in November to the semiphonetic by January, and reaching the phonetic stage in April. He was starting to build up a bank of high frequency words that he could spell correctly and write quickly. In class, as the students’ stories got longer we made them into books for the class to read. Julio’s book encouraged other students to think of titles for their work. His mainstream teacher told me that he was showing great writing improvement in her class.

Lisa loved to do fancy and detailed artwork. She often took so much time to draw that there was no time left for her to write. But she did write, she wrote about fanciful things. Analyzing the results of the Monster test, Lisa grew from the semiphonetic spelling stage in November to the conventional stage of spelling by April. The results from the Adapted Writing Scale also showed improvement. Specifically, her writing grew from semiphonetic in November to phonetic in January to transitional in April. This ongoing improvement was also evident in the everyday stories that she wrote in the classroom by increasing the amount of print included. The fact that she was able to spell correctly all the words in sentences she wrote in late April, such as “The princess has a castle and she likes it.”, suggested to me that she was approaching the conventional stage of spelling at that time.

Carmen followed the same pattern of growth in spelling and writing development as the other five students in the inquiry moving from semiphonetic to conventional spelling on the Monster Test and on the Adapted Writing Scales from semiphonetic to transitional to conventional writing by April. She expressed some metacognition development through a story she wrote. “I did some tests Today. It was easy for me. Ms. Jones told us to write spelling words. I did very well.” For the word told, she had written toD, but then crossed it out and spelled it conventionally. When she saw how she wrote the word, she realized that it did not look right and changed it to how she thought it should look.

Changes in my Teaching of Writing

As I continued to look at the student’s writing, I was very pleased with their growth and progress. The most important change I identified in April was that they had learned to enjoy writing. They expressed disappointment whenever I told them that we would not be writing. What a dramatic change from their reactions at the beginning of the academic year, when they hated to write, and said that they did not know how. Reading and writing were now fun for them. That was wonderful.

In reflecting about what influenced this progress in my students, I identified some areas of
my instructional practice that changed. Although I cannot state that these changes caused my students writing growth, I am certain that it influenced it in some way. As mentioned earlier, the Forum work exposed me to new research about literacy development. Specifically, learning about writing as a process expanded my thinking about how to teach. Gradually, the teaching practices I used in my class moved away from the prescribed curriculum in that they became more interactive and authentic and followed the learners.

Another change was that I made the writing of stories an important activity to engage in on a weekly basis in my classroom. I learned that having a regular and predictable time for writing every other day, as these students did, helped them to make those small increments in growth that added up to big changes. They were thinking about writing, even when they were not writing, and building up their creativity and stamina for the writing task. They experienced writing not as an isolated event but an ongoing opportunity to document their ideas and thoughts by creating connected text and sharing it with others.

I also abandoned the belief that the prescribed curriculum could not be questioned when it was not beneficial in promoting academic growth of your students. Asking questions about what I observed became more of a way of teaching for me. An inquisitive disposition about teaching and learning had replaced in me a complacent attitude about following the mandated curriculum and replicating instructional practices that were not producing first-grade writers. Instead of using the writing workbooks that emphasized rote memorization drills, exercises with decontextualized words, and copying text without understanding its meaning, my students own writing became the text that was read, analyzed, and revised. As their attitude towards writing improved, their engagement in writing their own stories increased, and their mastery of different skills improved, I became convinced that questioning my own practice was a necessary step in being an effective teacher.

I made my teaching more relevant to the students' cultures and more integrative of all language components, namely speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Culturally relevant instruction proposes that curriculum and instruction must relate to students cultural reality as a bridge to help them move from what they know best to the unknown that needs to be learned (Ladson-Billings, 1994; McIntyre, González, & Rosebery, 2001). Forum members opened my mind to the importance of allowing students to use their background knowledge in terms of culture and language in their writing. In this way they could really show me what they knew and valued as well as being willing to experiment and take more risks writing in their second language. Rather than giving them a topic to write about, I invited them to write about experiences they had. Quickly, these first graders started to compose stories about Puerto Rico, their families, and things that they liked to do during the weekends. When there was a word that they only knew in Spanish I suggested that they write it and later it could be translated into English. The fact that the student's complaints about not wanting to write or not having anything to write about decreased hinted to me that I was on the right track.

In each writing conference I had with individual students, we discussed their ideas and
analyzed their meaning, they read orally their drafts, and they listened to my suggestions and revised their drafts accordingly. This time was an opportunity to use all the components of language in an integrated fashion. Mini-lessons were added to explore in depth a particular unit of language, skill, or strategy to expand their oral and written fluency in English. Reading and discussing books written by their peers, housed in the classroom library, was always an opportunity to explore meaning and language in an integrated manner.

To conclude, engaging in teacher-based research became a professional development tool to document and reflect on my teaching practice and its impact on the learning of EBs in first grade. My involvement in the Forum was the beginning of a philosophical change in my thoughts and practices regarding effective instruction of writing in English as a second language at the early childhood level. I moved from a transmission framework to a constructivist framework of instruction. After completing my first inquiry project I realized that this arduous work had wonderful rewards. The improvement that I documented in my students writing gave me a lot of satisfaction. Yet, an unexpected source of encouragement came from one of my colleagues in the regular all-English classrooms. The teacher from whose classroom I pulled students out for my lessons told me that she began to notice changes in their learning as well. She invited me into her classroom to teach the entire class once a week, using the same process-oriented techniques that I used with my EBs, so that she could learn to do it herself. It was exciting to know that my path into inquiry about writing instruction was taking me into new spaces where I could share my findings with other colleagues at my school.

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Multicultural School Psychology: A Kaleidoscopic View

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Book Reviewed:


The Handbook of Multicultural School Psychology: An Interdisciplinary Perspective is the first resource of its kind to provide a comprehensive analysis of the development of multicultural school psychology, professional standards and ethics, models of training, and multicultural competencies in school psychology practice. Its unique interdisciplinary perspective makes this resource relevant to educators, school psychologists, counselors, and other professionals involved in the education of children and adolescents of diverse backgrounds.

The handbook is written in a scholarly manner. Each content area is developed on the basis of underlying theoretical concepts, critical reviews of research, and implications for evidence based practices. The contributors are educators, researchers, school psychologists, and other professionals with expertise in various interdisciplinary areas such as bilingual education, second language acquisition, bilingual assessment, cross-cultural consultation, and multicultural counseling. These authors are able to provide an integrated, dynamic, and systemic perspective on multicultural practices in a way that promotes collaboration among teachers, school psychologists, and counselors.

The content is organized into seven sections—each one addressing a very specific multicultural topic in school psychology. A scientist-practitioner approach is evident throughout the text. Each chapter is developed on the basis of theory, research, and specific implications for practice. The list of references is followed by an annotated bibliography and a list of resources, including organizations and websites, where the reader can refer for more information.

Section I presents a historical overview of the development of a multicultural perspective in school psychology (Chapter 1); ethical standards for multicultural practices (Chapter 2); and guidelines for preparing future school psychologists with multicultural competencies. This section provides a framework for understanding multiculturalism as a complex and multifaceted construct in relation to different aspects of development (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional) and relevant to specific competencies needed to provide educational services to children. Its discussion sets the stage for subsequent sections on specific areas of competence.

Section II addresses the process of multicultural consultation starting with a critical
discussion of the pertinent issues that arise when providing instructional interventions to English Language Learners (Chapter 4). It also provides guidelines and steps in the consultation process with multicultural parents (Chapter 6) and systemic consultation (Chapter 7). These chapters reflect an understanding of the importance of school-home-community collaborations from a multicultural/multilingual perspective.

Section III focuses on an interdisciplinary approach to instructional and classroom interventions. These chapters are written as collaborative endeavors between school psychologists and educators with expertise in special education, second language learning, and multicultural issues. The content includes multidimensional approaches for working with culturally and linguistically diverse students within the classroom (Chapter 8) and in the context of inclusion to general education programs (Chapter 11).

The first two sections provide an organized and comprehensive exposition. However, the content of the third section is relevant, yet incomplete. The lack of attention given to instructional strategies in academic areas such as reading, writing, and mathematics is a missed opportunity to extend and deepen the analysis of classroom-based practical implications of the interdisciplinary approach. Similarly, the absence of Response to Intervention procedures detracts from the contemporary significance of interventions discussed.

The emphasis on multicultural and bilingual assessment in Section IV is important to school psychology; there are not many texts that summarize how to conduct a comprehensive assessment of psychological and educational functioning while taking culture and language into consideration. Given the current narrow views on assessment and accountability models in education and the increasing demands to improve their use with linguistically and culturally diverse students (See Freeman Field, in this issue.), the authors are successful in delineating a sensible path towards assessment in multilingual educational environments. These chapters inform psychologists and teachers about the theoretical underpinnings of nonbiased assessment and assessment tools to be used with culturally diverse and bilingual students. Moreover, practical information is presented on how to conduct assessments in the areas of cognition (Chapter 13), personality and behaviors (Chapter 14), and neuropsychological processes (Chapter 15). Guidelines are presented for both psychologists and teachers on how to assess academic skills (Chapter 18) as well as both oral and written language (Chapter 12). Other less traditional areas, such as vocational assessment (Chapter 16) and assessment of acculturation levels (Chapter 17) are discussed as vital aspects of a comprehensive multicultural assessment process.

Section V presents a self-regulatory intervention model for teaching students skills for coping effectively with psychosocial stressors (Chapter 19). Another topic of importance addressed is vocational interventions with adolescents of low socioeconomic status living in urban areas (Chapter 20). This population is quite vulnerable to negative outcomes and often presents a challenge for school psychologists and educators. The authors also describe interventions that can be used as resources for working with these students. Despite discussing some important current counseling interventions, the authors do not present the breadth of
therapeutic interventions for this population. Providing direct counseling interventions is an important service, therefore, future editions of this volume should include a variety of both traditional and nontraditional interventions (e.g., culturally sensitive narrative therapy).

Section VI makes a valuable contribution specific to working with special populations. Topics range from how to identify (Chapter 21) and educate (Chapter 22) culturally and linguistically diverse gifted students to working with preschool students (Chapter 23) and providing services to migrant students (Chapter 25). Although there are other previous publications in these areas, these chapters are unique, because the authors synthesize the current literature regarding these populations, offering a unified analysis from which to design prospective implications for practice.

Finally, Part VII presents recommendations for future research and educational applications in multicultural school psychology. One highlight is the final chapter, where commentaries are presented from the perspective of experts from multiple disciplines, including special education, counseling psychology, clinical psychology, social psychology, and organizational psychology. This content is distinctive because it provides future directions in multicultural school psychology and exposes a final dimension on the interdisciplinary nature of this handbook.

This handbook is a wide-ranging resource for school psychologists, educators, and other professionals working with children and adolescents of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The reader will benefit from its scholarly value and interdisciplinary thrust, which are major strengths that assist to augment and broaden the field of school psychology into a multicultural perspective. Future editions would be enhanced by addressing more contemporary practices in assessment, counseling, and instruction. It would also be essential to expand upon contributions from authors and extend current content focus on Latinos to include African American, Asian American, and Native American groups.
Notes on Contributors to This Issue

Maria Acevedo, PhD, is a second-year pediatric neuropsychology post-doctoral fellow at Lenox Hill Hospital, Center for Attention and Learning. She holds a PhD in School Psychology from Fordham University. Dr. Acevedo is the second author in a chapter titled “Testing for Language Competence” in the *APA Handbook of Testing and Assessment in Psychology* (2012-2013 release). Her research interests include neuropsychological assessment, executive functions, bilingualism, and cultural diversity. Dr. Acevedo has over 10 years of experience in working as a school psychologist in New Jersey and in South San Francisco, California.

Justin B. Bennett is a PhD student in Bilingual Education at New York University and a full-time fourth-, fifth-, and seventh-grade Spanish teacher at George Jackson Academy in Manhattan. Justin is currently conducting a one-year linguistic ethnography in one of the city’s Spanish/English dual immersion programs in an attempt to better understand the language practices of Latino youth in bilingual settings. It is expected that the results of this project can be utilized by teachers and language policy makers in order to help maximize the acquisition by this population of both Standard American English and Standard Spanish.

Angela Carrasquillo, PhD, the Claudio Aquaviva Distinguished Professor of TESOL at Fordham University Graduate School of Education, retired three years ago but continues her involvement in multilingual education as an educational consultant and program evaluator. She is nationally known in the area of second language and bilingual education and has published extensively in these areas. Professor Carrasquillo’s publications include Between Puerto Rico and New York: A Latina Professor’s Journey (2011), *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: A Resource Guide* (with C. Zhang, 2007), *Beyond the Beginnings: Literacy Interventions for Upper Elementary English Language Learners* (with S. Kucer & R. Abrams, 2004), and *Language Minority Students in the Mainstream Classroom* (with V. Rodriguez, 2002).

Ann Ebe, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education and the Director of Bilingual Education at Hunter College in New York City. Dr. Ebe has taught the primary grades and worked as an administrator and as a teacher educator. Her work with teachers in the United States and abroad involves developing and implementing curriculum to put literacy theory into practice for emergent bilinguals. Her current research involves the reading process of bilinguals, using assessment to inform instruction and the selection of culturally relevant texts.

Miriam Eisenstein Ebsworth, PhD, directs the doctoral programs in Multilingual Multicultural Studies at New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. A member of the NABE Executive Board, Dr. Ebsworth was guest editor of *The International Journal of the Sociology of Language* issue on Affective Aspects of Second and Foreign Languages (2011). She is also a consultant developing an online course to teach English through the work of the UN to achieve peace worldwide (Patricia Duffy, PI). Dr. Ebsworth serves on the editorial boards of the Bilingual Research Journal, *The Journal of Writing and Pedagogy*, and the International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching.

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Jay Gottlieb received his doctorate in special education from Yeshiva University. His research has been focused on attitudes toward disabled students and on practices for identifying students as being eligible to receive special education. His most recent interests are in identifying factors that promote successful academic outcomes for special education students while they are in secondary level math classes. Dr. Gottlieb has been awarded more than 20 research grants in his career and has published about 100 articles in professional journals. At various times he has served on the editorial boards of half dozen journals in special education.

Barbara Gottlieb received her doctorate from Northern Illinois University in educational psychology. She is a licensed psychologist. A professor of special education at Lehman College of The City University of New York, she served as Department Chair and coordinator for the programs in childhood and adolescent special education. She is a certified reading teacher and has taught reading at the elementary, middle school, and secondary levels for before joining a college faculty. Her research interests focus on motivational factors that promote metacognitive development in children who have learning disabilities and on clinical practices in the identification of students as being eligible to receive special education services.

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Melissa Laracuenta is a licensed psychologist and certified school psychologist in New York State. She earned her doctoral degree in School-Clinical Child Psychology and master’s degree in School Psychology and Bilingual Extension (English/Spanish) from Pace University in New York City. Dr. Laracuenta has worked in various settings including hospitals, clinics, and schools. She is currently a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Education Psychology Program at Fordham University and has a private practice providing psychological assessments and psychotherapy for children, families, and adults. Research interests include the training of psychologists, use of creative arts with traumatized individuals, and bilingual/bicultural development.

Nancy Lemberger bilingual education career has spanned 30 years, from the elementary to the university classroom. As a Title VII Bilingual Education Fellow, she earned a doctorate in curriculum and bilingual education from Teachers College, Columbia University. For 16 years, she has taught various bilingual, ESL and literacy courses at Long Island University, Brooklyn. With a colleague, she created and administers the online Cross-Campus Bilingual Extension program. Her research interests show her commitment to bilingual education teachers and their students. Her widely used book, Bilingual Education: Teachers’ Narratives, documents eight bilingual teachers’ experiences in different programs, regions, and languages.

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