

Effective Practices for English Learners



BRIEF 4

Core and Supplemental Biliteracy Instruction for English Learners



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Multitiered Instructional Frameworks

Response to intervention (RTI) describes models that use data to inform decisions regarding delivery of instruction. Many RTI models closely align with three-tier models of instructional delivery, where Tier 1 refers to the core curriculum that all students receive, Tier 2 refers to supplemental support that some students receive, and Tier 3 offers an even more intensive level of instruction for students who do not demonstrate adequate improvement, given Tier 2 support. In practice, RTI and three tiers have become synonymous for many. Accordingly, this report uses “multitiered models” to describe the broad group of instructional approaches that depend on students’ response to instruction as a primary indicator for planning ongoing levels of instructional intensity. This distinction acknowledges that the number of tiers in the model is not the critical feature. The important features in multitiered models are the use of appropriate, research-based reading instruction and interventions; assessment, screening, and progress monitoring of students in need of support; and culturally responsive teaching strategies and principles. These features can be implemented in any number of tiers, depending on the resources and needs that characterize a school, district, or state.

Core and Supplemental Biliteracy Instruction for English Learners

This brief is the fourth in a series for school leaders, educators, and policymakers charged with implementing or supporting multitiered instruction that accommodates English learners (ELs). This brief summarizes the work of three model demonstration projects (Cohort 5 of the Model Demonstration Coordination Center—see sidebar) that implement research-based practices for the successful delivery of core and supplemental literacy instruction for ELs in urban, near-urban, and rural schools. Six of the nine participating schools offer Spanish-English bilingual education programs for students in kindergarten to grade 3. Brief 4 discusses biliteracy instruction in the context of these programs and multitiered instructional models for ELs. It includes three major sections: (a) an overview of biliteracy and bilingual education, (b) a framework for biliteracy instruction, and (c) examples of the principles of biliteracy instruction in practice in project schools.

Audience

This brief is designed to support practitioners, instructional coaches, and policymakers in the design and delivery of core and supplemental biliteracy instruction for ELs in kindergarten to grade 3 who are enrolled in Spanish–English bilingual education programs.

Practitioners: Classroom teachers and interventionists who support ELs will find Brief 4 valuable for the preparation and delivery of biliteracy instruction for ELs. This brief is intended to enhance educators’ understanding of key features of biliteracy instruction and intervention, as well as provide evidence-based recommendations for biliteracy practices.

Instructional coaches and school leaders: By applying the guiding principles outlined in this brief, instructional coaches can help to ensure that ELs receive culturally and linguistically responsive core and supplemental biliteracy instruction.

Policymakers: This brief also provides district and school administrators and policymakers with a framework for core and supplemental biliteracy instruction for ELs in the context of multitiered instructional frameworks.

Cohort 5 Model Demonstration Projects

The three research projects that authored this report were funded in September 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs. These projects make up what is known as Cohort 5 of the Model Demonstration Coordination Center (MDCC). Each of the research projects works with school districts that serve large populations of ELs.

Cohort 5 works to improve the outcomes of ELs in the primary grades by implementing tiered approaches that incorporate the following instructional features:

- Appropriate, research-based reading instruction and interventions for ELs
- Culturally responsive teaching strategies and principles
- Progress monitoring and data-based decision-making
- Professional development and strategic coaching for teachers

For more information, visit <http://mdcc.sri.com>.

Biliteracy and Bilingual Education in Multitiered Instructional Frameworks

Biliteracy

For the purposes of this brief, *biliteracy* is defined as students' mastery of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in the native language and in English, in the context of schooling.

Bilingual Education Programs

A goal of all bilingual education programs is that ELs become proficient in English and meet federal and/or state-mandated curriculum standards in English. Some bilingual education models also have the goal that ELs achieve proficiency and meet high academic standards in their native language. The extent to which programs promote bilingualism and biliteracy depends on the particular model that schools adopt. Transitional and dual-language bilingual education models are cases in point.

Transitional Bilingual Education

The primary goal of transitional bilingual education programs is for students to acquire oral language and academic proficiency in English. Students receive initial instruction in their native language (L1),

Principles in Practice: Project ESTRE²LLA, Texas

The Project ESTRE²LLA model emphasizes two elements of sound core literacy instruction that are essential for ELs: explicit instruction in the five components of reading, in both languages, and differentiation of instruction to meet the needs of students at varying stages of literacy development. In addition, the model emphasizes culturally and linguistically responsive practices, including the transfer of literacy skills across languages and supports for oral and written language development in each language.

Project schools A and B are in an urban district that has adopted the Gomez and Gomez dual-language model. Literacy instruction is in Spanish only in kindergarten and first grade and then 50% in Spanish and 50% in English in second grade and beyond. School C is in a rural district and offers a one-way dual-language program for students whose primary language is Spanish. Students receive 50% of their literacy instruction in Spanish and 50% in English beginning in kindergarten, with the language of instruction alternated each day. All three schools clearly articulate the goal for students to become bilingual and biliterate and to meet high academic standards in both languages. To that end, literacy instruction integrates all four domains (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and incorporates a variety of culturally and linguistically responsive practices. For example, basal reading instruction is supplemented with multicultural literature. Teachers link literacy activities to students' background knowledge and cultural background and create opportunities for students to interact with each other about what they are reading or writing. Interaction structures like think-pair-share, student bilingual pairs, and small-group work target academic language and comprehension skills, for example, by having students use target vocabulary, predict what will happen next in a story, or compare and contrast a new story with one previously read. Teachers' acceptance of students' language use and translanguaging practices is a prime example of culturally and linguistically responsive practices in these schools. Teachers use Spanish to ensure that students understand key concepts and ideas in lessons taught in English and vice versa. Teachers also accept students' responses and contributions, regardless of the language. During guided reading, teachers focus lessons on the specific decoding and/or comprehension skills students need to become proficient readers. Writing activities, such as reading response logs and journals, allow students to reflect on what they read, work on communicating effectively, and practice writing conventions in both the native language and English.

and the time allocated to English instruction increases as students acquire greater proficiency in that language. Students in early-exit transitional models typically exit by the end of second grade; in late-exit programs, students continue to have access to native language instruction through the elementary grades (i.e., through fifth grade or sixth grade). In both early- and late-exit transitional programs, most, if not all, instruction is in English by the time students exit the program and enter general education classrooms. This plan is understandable, given that English competence, not bilingualism and biliteracy, is the expected outcome of transitional programs. Transitional programs benefit ELs by providing initial literacy instruction in a language they understand and speak, thus building the foundation for English literacy.

Dual-Language Bilingual Education

In contrast, bilingualism and biliteracy are express goals of dual-language bilingual education program models. In one-way, or developmental, programs, all students are ELs from the same language group. In two-way programs, classes comprise, ideally, 50% ELs and 50% non-ELs (i.e., English-proficient students). In both one-way and two-way bilingual education programs, students receive instruction in two languages over the course of their schooling, so they develop oral language and academic proficiency in both languages. The time allocated to the languages of instruction varies by program model, from equal amounts of time in each language in 50/50 models, to models in which the majority of instruction is in L1 in the early grades (e.g., 80/20 or 90/10 models). In these latter models, English instruction typically increases over time until a 50/50 balance is achieved. Dual-language programs are offered at least through the elementary grades, but some school districts extend programs through middle school and high school to increase the likelihood that students graduate fully proficient in their native language and in English. Unlike transitional bilingual education programs, in dual-language models, students do not exit when they meet English proficiency standards because the expected outcomes are bilingualism and biliteracy.

A Framework for Biliteracy Instruction

The goal of biliteracy instruction is for students to master each of the four language domains—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—in their native language and in English. For ELs, Tier 1 core instruction involves teaching literacy skills in the native language and bridging these skills to English literacy.¹ In this process, specific attention is given to native language development and to English as a second language acquisition.

The following principles² guide biliteracy instruction for ELs:

- The native language and English have equal status.
- Teachers tap into students' linguistic and cultural knowledge and resources.
- Instruction reflects a balanced approach, focusing on both skill and meaning and using interactive and explicit instructional approaches.
- Oral language instruction targets both social and academic language.
- Instruction targets the key components of literacy and facilitates cross-linguistic transfer and metalinguistic awareness.
- Language arts and content area instruction are integrated to facilitate development of academic language skills.

1 Beeman & Urow, 2013

2 Beeman & Urow, 2013; Hamayan, Genesee, & Cloud, 2013

Language Instruction

Because the native language is the foundation for acquiring English proficiency, educators must build on the communication skills students have acquired in their homes and communities. Children with effective native language oral language skills have mastered age-appropriate phonological, semantic, grammatical, and syntactic skills, as well as the ability to observe the norms and expectations for language use across social contexts. Instruction should ensure that students acquire academic, or “school,” language, the more formal registers associated with teaching and learning (i.e., the language of textbooks and academic discourse). This instruction should include the language concepts, vocabulary, and patterns required to process, understand, and communicate curriculum-based content and perform higher-level comprehension functions, such as analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, inferring, and predicting.³

Effective biliteracy instruction provides a structured English as a second language program (also referred to as an English language development program). Such instruction is designed to develop students’ ability to understand and speak “everyday,” or conversational, English and academic English. Teachers use a variety of scaffolds and strategies to facilitate comprehension as students progress through the stages of acquisition, from preproduction, or the “silent period,” to advanced fluency in English.⁴ These scaffolds may include building background knowledge; modeling; using graphic organizers, visuals (e.g., pictures, video), or realia (e.g., concrete objects, manipulatives); teaching key vocabulary; and providing multiple opportunities for ELs to collaborate with native-English-speaking peers. Using the native language to support English acquisition is also an excellent English as a second language strategy.⁵ For example, previews of lesson content in the native language serve as advance organizers for content that will then be taught by using English as a second language strategies.⁶ Main points in lessons taught in English are reviewed to check for comprehension. Once students achieve basic communication skills in English, explicit instruction on English syntax and grammar may help them acquire correct structures and self-correct their oral and written communication.⁷

Teachers recognize that in the process of becoming bilingual and biliterate, ELs use their two languages separately and together.⁸ That is, students call upon their linguistic resources, including dialectal registers (i.e., regional or social variations of language) and translanguaging (i.e., the use of two or more languages in the same communication act).⁹ Other terms such as *codeswitching*, *hybrid language*, or *code mixing* may be used for *translanguaging*, which may involve aspects such as language borrowing (e.g., *parkear* for *park*). Rather than trying to eliminate dialectal variations or keep languages separate, educators accept students’ communication styles as legitimate communication systems while at the same time providing instruction to develop students’ ability to communicate in the standard forms of their native language and English. Dialects and translanguaging serve as resources for biliteracy development.

Literacy Instruction

Before they begin formal instruction, children typically have already developed concepts of print (e.g., the orientation of books and pages, directionality) through home literacy practices and interactions with

3 Coelho, 2004; Scarcella, 2003

4 Krashen, 1982

5 Coelho, 2004; Goldenberg, 2008; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Ulanoff & Pucci, 1999

6 Gárate, 2012

7 Krashen, 1982

8 Grosjean, 1989; Soltero-González, Escamilla, & Hopewell, 2012

9 García, 2009

Principles in Practice: Project ELITE, Texas

Project ELITE worked within the district's transitional bilingual program model to enhance core instruction for ELs. To serve the large number of ELs in the district, the three participating campuses provided an early-exit bilingual program in prekindergarten to grade 5 in which intensive instructional time in Spanish was provided in the early grades (prekindergarten to grade 2) and students transitioned to all-English instruction with sheltered support in grades 3 to 5.

Project ELITE model practices for enhancing core instruction for ELs were adapted to fit the needs of students developing literacy in English, Spanish, or both languages. Because the same instructional practices embedded in the Project ELITE read-aloud routine can support Spanish literacy development, bilingual teachers implemented the read-aloud during different instructional blocks. For example, teachers delivered the routine in Spanish as part of core literacy instruction or in English as part of the English language development block. Teachers bridged literacy development in Spanish by using strategic first-language support during English instruction. Depending on the language needs of their students in both Spanish and English, teachers adapted the strategies to emphasize areas of needed development (e.g., vocabulary in English, comprehension skills in Spanish).

Finally, because principles of cultural and linguistic responsiveness are essential to ELs developing literacy, teachers drew on students' linguistic resources and cultural identities during the interactive read-aloud activities. Teachers incorporated texts that reflected the authentic experiences of ELs and provided structured speaking activities in which students could practice new language in ways that were meaningful to them (i.e., text-to-self, text-to-world connections). Schools collaborated with parents and families by designing a modified version of the core practices and offering training to bridge home and school literacy practices.

environmental print.¹⁰ They have also acquired an underlying phonological awareness that is not dependent on the language spoken; this awareness is significantly related to the development of reading abilities. In the course of formal literacy instruction, students benefit from lessons that explicitly target phonemic awareness, phonology, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency skills. In some cases, phonemic awareness instruction is less relevant, or may even be unnecessary, for native languages that have transparent orthographies, as is the case for Spanish.¹¹ Instruction in writing allows students to compose and express both their own ideas and responses to teacher assignments and benchmark and accountability assessments.

Native Language Literacy

For ELs, proficiency in native language literacy is the foundation for developing English literacy. When students are taught in a language they already understand and speak, they have an easier time tapping into their background knowledge and relating instruction to their prior experiences. This method facilitates academic engagement. To ensure quality and consistency of instruction, native language literacy instruction must align with state and district accountability standards; these standards must, in turn, be embodied in the basal series and related instructional materials used for literacy instruction within and across grades. The same types of instructional strategies described in *Brief 3: Core and Supplemental English as a Second Language Literacy Instruction* apply to literacy instruction in the native language. These strategies include building comprehension, developing vocabulary, developing fluency, and making the connection between reading and writing.

10 Thurlow, Liu, Albus, & Shyyan, 2003

11 Goldenberg et al., 2014

English Literacy Instruction

Teachers also must provide a systematic program of instruction that builds listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English. As is the case for native language literacy, English literacy instruction should align with state and district accountability standards, and the standards must be embodied in the literacy basal series and related instructional materials. English literacy instruction should build oral language proficiency, integrate oral and written language instruction daily, use explicit and interactive approaches, and provide high-quality instruction in the key components of English literacy (see *Brief 3: Core and Supplemental English as a Second Language Literacy Instruction*). Like for native language literacy instruction, these strategies include building comprehension, developing vocabulary, developing fluency, and making the connection between reading and writing.

Connections Between L1 and L2 Literacy

Literacy instruction in English initially focuses on helping students transfer the reading skills and strategies they have already acquired in their native language to reading in English. The strongest transfer occurs for elements the native language and English share; transfer is weaker when shared elements are limited, as is the case when one language uses a character system (e.g., Chinese, Japanese) and the other an alphabetic system (e.g., English) or when languages use alphabets composed of different letters (e.g., English and Russian). Cognates, or words with common meanings and spellings, and morphological analysis (e.g., word roots, affixes, and suffixes) should be emphasized in the bridging process to help students derive the meaning of unfamiliar words in the second language.¹² And teachers should ensure that students apply native language comprehension skills, including metacognitive skills (e.g., self-monitoring, making predictions, summarizing the main idea), when reading in English.

Biliteracy instruction also addresses the distinct rules of each language in the areas of phonology, morphology, syntax, grammar, and pragmatics.¹³ For example, the letters *b* and *v* are pronounced exactly the same in Spanish; the English *v* sound does not exist in Spanish. These differences may cause students to have problems spelling. Biliteracy instruction pays specific attention to words or structures that may result in negative transfer. For example, some types of words, such as prepositions, pronouns, cohesion markers, metaphors, and idioms, are confusing to ELs. Spanish-speaking students frequently apply the Spanish rule for possessives (“la casa de Juan”) to English (“the house of Juan,” instead of “Juan’s house”).

Focusing on how the languages are similar and how they are different helps students develop metalinguistic skills that are critical for biliteracy development. As students achieve higher levels of English proficiency, they may begin applying English literacy skills to native language communication (“Juan’s casa,” instead of “la casa de Juan”). This phenomenon is evidence that cross-linguistic influences are bidirectional and that ELs draw on all their linguistic resources when developing bilingualism and biliteracy.¹⁴

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Language and Literacy Instruction

When there is dissonance between the communication and learning styles students experience at home and the teaching and communication practices educators use in school, ELs are more likely to struggle academically. This struggle puts students at risk of not meeting their potential and/or of having their

12 Beeman & Urow, 2013

13 Beeman & Urow, 2013

14 Dworin, 2003; Soltero-González et al., 2012

linguistic and cultural characteristics misinterpreted as language or learning disabilities.¹⁵ Teachers who understand the central role of language and culture in learning provide instruction that is linguistically and culturally responsive. Through their involvement with the families and communities of ELs, these teachers develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the social, linguistic, and cultural contexts and characteristics that are the foundation for students' learning experiences at school. These teachers validate these foundations by incorporating the families' funds of knowledge, including family literacy practices, into biliteracy curriculum and instruction.

Supplemental Tier 2 and Tier 3 Instruction

Students who experience literacy difficulties despite an effective core curriculum and differentiated instruction should receive intervention that supplements, rather than replaces, core instruction. Supplemental instruction typically is provided in the language(s) in which students experience difficulty, consistent with the language(s) of core instruction. In this model, teachers, or interventionists, use thematic approaches and provide systematic, explicit instruction that targets specific skills (e.g., phonics, fluency, comprehension, and/or vocabulary) in Tier 2 and Tier 3.¹⁶ Small groups comprise students experiencing similar difficulties. Supplemental instruction also specifically focuses on language development, with op-

Principles in Practice: Project REME, Colorado

The Project REME model was adopted in three schools in a rural district that served a large number of Spanish-speaking Latino children from working class neighborhoods. One of the schools offered a schoolwide dual-language bilingual program in which the majority of the children were Spanish-speaking ELs. The other two schools offered English-only instruction and English language development services to their ELs.

A key component of the Project REME model was core literacy instruction delivered through culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy and research-based literacy practices to address the language and literacy needs of ELs. Project REME model core literacy instruction integrated all language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). It included literacy strategies common to Spanish and English, such as reading fluency, comprehension, and writing, as well as language-specific literacy strategies, such as phonics and phonemic awareness through meaningful reading-writing activities in English and word work based on the syllabic nature of Spanish. As part of its culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy component, the model emphasized oral language development and relevant instruction that builds on students' backgrounds, interests, and experiences, connecting home experiences with school learning. For biliteracy instruction in the dual-language school, strategies to connect the Spanish and English literacy blocks and to help students make cross-language connections were presented (e.g., connecting literacy blocks by theme, genre, or literacy objectives; analyzing similarities and differences between properties and uses of Spanish and English).

The Project REME model core literacy practices were compiled in a guide that was adapted from an English as a second language instructional practices publication.¹⁷ This guide was used as a teacher self-reflection and coaching tool. Classroom teachers in kindergarten to grade 3 classrooms and other school staff members participated in a series of professional development workshops that addressed each of the above-mentioned core literacy instructional practices followed by on-site mentoring and coaching.

15 Harry & Klingner, 2006; Hoover & Klingner, 2011

16 Cavazos & Ortiz, 2014

17 Hoover, Hopewell, & Sarris, 2014

opportunities for elaborated discourse such as in storytelling and retelling activities. Instruction in English always is scaffolded to accommodate students' limited English proficiency. Teachers continuously document student progress and examine the results of language and literacy benchmarking and progress-monitoring assessments to redirect instruction and/or to move students across tiers.¹⁸ Careful documentation of tiered instruction is helpful in identifying students who might benefit from referral to special education. Data about the types of difficulties and the strategies used for supplemental instruction are of tremendous value in conducting comprehensive individual assessments and developing individualized education plans for students who qualify for special education services.

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For Further Guidance

This brief is part of the *Effective Practices for English Learners* series. The goal of this series is to assist administrators, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in implementing or refining a campus-wide model for improving the academic achievement of ELs in the primary grades. Other briefs in this series address key issues in implementing multitiered systems of support for ELs and can be consulted for further guidance.

Effective Practices for English Learners

BRIEF 1

Meeting the Needs of English Learners
Through a Multitiered Instructional Framework

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BRIEF 2

Assessment and Data-Based Decision-Making

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BRIEF 3

Core and Supplemental
English as a Second Language
Literacy Instruction for English Learners

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BRIEF 5

Professional Development to Support
a Multitiered Instructional Framework

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