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Editorial

Necessary Paradigm Shifts in Bilingual Education: Rethinking Multilingual Literacy

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Beyond acquiring oracy in multiple languages, learners who possess the knowledge and skill to read and write in more than one language are considered *biliterate* (literacy in two languages) or *multiliterate* (literacy in more than two languages). These constructs are complex in nature pointing to multidimensional interrelationships between multilingualism (de Jong, 2011) and literacy in teaching and learning. Although research in the field of literacy in one language (monoliteracy) has been very prolific (particularly in the English language), there is a dearth of explorations that focus on reading and writing in two or more languages.

Today *biliteracy/multiliteracy* are considered emerging fields in multilingual education (Baker, 2011), which offer provocative alternatives to finite and restricted views of reading and writing. At the same time, these emerging fields argue for more versatile, inclusive, and comprehensive understandings of instruction and learning. These constructs make visible the intricate manner that language, literacy, and technologies are negotiated inside and outside schools (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007).

During the past two decades, there has been a gradual evolution in our understanding of the requirements of reading and writing in two or more languages. The term *multiliteracies* acknowledges that literacy teaching in the 21st century should be more responsive to the *diversity of cultures* and the *variety of languages* within societies (New London Group, 1996). In other words, contemporary conceptualizations of literacy take into account the *cultural diversity of the contexts* where literacy is done and the resourceful *linguistic repertoires* used to read and write within and across societies.

New literacies (which do not depend solely on print) have emerged marrying different and pioneering forms of *digital communication* to, on the one hand, *learn to read and write*, and on the other, *use literacy to learn* (Castek, Leu, Coiro, Gort, Henry, & Lima, 2007). Canagarajah (2013) reminds us that there is a long history of individuals and societies that have used more than one language to communicate orally and in

writing. However, his perspective stresses that in today's globalized world, transnational contact, through migration and technological developments, have augmented exposure to and use of divergent languages, texts, and linguistic modes and mediums to think and communicate ideas. He contends that literacy should be re-envisioned through a "*translingual lens*" that magnifies literacy as *a negotiation of diverse languages* and "*semiotic resources* (i.e., icons and images) *for situated construction of meaning*" (p. 1).

The view that *monolingual reading as imposed on multilingual learners is restrictive* needs to be explored further. Instruction that emphasizes the separation of languages, obliges a view of reading which dichotomizes communication into disconnected spheres. For instance, some educators might argue that reading in Spanish involves the development of vocabulary, decoding, fluency, and comprehension, all skills that are disconnected from reading in English. Proficiency is compared to *native* Spanish readers; rather than to other Spanish/English bilingual readers (Beeman & Urow, 2013; Grosjean, 2008).

One common illustration of a monolingual view of reading in two languages is the measurement of vocabulary knowledge (Pearson, Fernández, & Oller, 1993; 1995). Typically, vocabulary breadth and depth is measured within languages (What words and concepts do I know in one language separate from the other?) rather than across languages (What is the cumulative knowledge of words and concepts that I know in each and both languages?).

That is, if I know the concept of "different ways to move from one place to another" in Spanish, then I can use the phrase **formas de transportación** to represent that concept. I also learn that **transportación, automóvil, motora, barco, bicicleta,** and **carro** are six terms that refer to **formas de transportación**. So I know seven elements in Spanish (one phrase to represent the concept, and six different words that relate to that concept).

Similarly, I learn that the phrase **forms of transportation** in English represents the same concept. I also learn that words related to that concept in English are **transportation, car, coach, airplane,** and **bicycle**. That means that in English I know six elements (one phrase which represents the concept and five different terms that relate to the concept).

The analysis of vocabulary knowledge from a monolingual literacy view regarding the concept of forms of transportation suggests that I know seven elements in Spanish and six in English. This might suggest that the vocabulary knowledge regarding this concept is more extensive in Spanish than in English.

However, from a multilingual literacy view my vocabulary knowledge actually has 14 elements (one concept, two phrases that represent the concept, and 11 individual terms that relate to that concept in different languages – *transportación, transportation, carro, car, bicicleta, bicycle, automóvil, motora, barco, coach,* and *airplane*). Further analysis of distributed characteristics of multilingual lexical knowledge (Oller, Pearson, & Cobo-Lewis, 2007) could indicate that I know three of those terms in both languages (doublets); also, I know three of those terms only in Spanish and two only in English (singlets; Pearson, Fernández, & Oller, 1993). This

integrative perspective is more realistic and authentic of what vocabulary knowledge is really like for a multilingual reader who reads in two languages (Grosjean, 2008; Mancilla-Martínez, Pan, & Vagh, 2011).

García (2009) explains that instruction of biliteracy usually follows one of two main approaches: sequential or simultaneous. According to Escamilla, et al., (2014) instruction in many schools follows a sequential model. That is, these students learn to read in one language before they learn to read in the other. An additional characteristic of this model is that languages are kept separate during instruction. There is one class for teaching reading in Spanish and a different class to teach reading in English. These researchers observe that there is no or minimal co-planning between teachers and the use of different curriculum is stressed. Research on multilingual literacy done with sequential bilinguals, although not extensive, suggest that teaching children to read in English and Spanish *promotes biliteracy as well as higher levels of reading achievement* in English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005, as cited in Escamilla, et al., 2014).

Interestingly, other researchers have found that *bilingual reading approaches*, where both languages are taught and used to *teach reading and writing simultaneously*, are also effective in helping children learn to read and write in two languages (Edelsky, 1986; Hudelson, 1987; Velasco & García, 2014). *Multilingual literacy approaches* to instruction stress the *use of transition strategies* by teachers to monitor and guide transitions across languages (August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008). To achieve this, Escamilla, et al., (2014) suggest the use of discussions on the use of cognates and analyzing writing across languages. Beeman and Urow (2013) recommend designing biliteracy units that use *the Bridge* (a time when students are taught to examine the similarities and differences between languages using contrastive analysis) as an instructional tool to develop students' cross-linguistic skills (p. 50).

Researchers have argued that instruction should maximize the bidirectional transfer of students' knowledge and skills from L1 to L2 and from L2 to L1 (Cummins, 1979; Dickinson, McCabe, Clark-Chiarelli, & Wolf, 2004; Fishman, 1980; Mace Matluck, 1982; Reyes, 2001; Talebi, 2013). Escamilla, et al., (2014) identify some ways that bilingual teachers may work on metalinguistic skills including bidirectional transfer. Books in English and Spanish that are not direct translations but deal with the same or similar topics, can be used to build concepts and vocabulary. In addition teachers may use direct translations to build bidirectional transfer. That is, after discussing meaning for comprehension, teachers can read both books at the same time to compare language structures, vocabulary, syntactic, and morphological structure across languages.

The fact is that language allocation in the biliteracy classroom can be multiform. García (2009) identifies four models of language and literacy use in biliteracy instruction where teachers need to make decisions about what and how languages are used in literacy.

1. *A convergent monoliterate model*, which uses the two languages in communication to transact with a text written in one language, usually a dominant one.

2. A *convergent biliterate model*, which uses the two languages in communication to transact with a text written in each of the two languages, but with minority literacy practices calqued on majority literacy practices.
3. A *separation biliterate model*, which uses one language or the other to transact with a text written in one language or the other according to their own sociocultural and discourse norms.
4. A *flexible multiple model*, which uses the two languages in communication to transact with texts written in both languages and in other media according to a bilingual flexible norm, capable of both integration and separation (p. 342).

Finally, based on these early conceptualizations of biliteracy models, Escamilla and her colleagues recently highlighted the potential of approaches like the “*paired literacy*” *concurrent approach to multilingual literacy instruction* in English and Spanish which draws on all the children’s bilingual competencies and engages in cross-language connections. To illustrate, a reading lesson could implement methods and instructional activities (i.e., interactive read aloud, shared, collaborative, guided, and independent reading) where the students guided by the teacher make comparisons across languages. The teacher may choose to read in Spanish first using one of these activities and at some point of the lesson discuss a reading strategy as it is used in English as well. The teacher may also choose to read two books in the same lesson that are direct translations to highlight similar reading strategies as they are used across languages (2014).

The research literature synthesized above challenges bilingual educators to consider integrative views of literacy in more than one language and to implement contemporary instructional approaches, which insightfully mix languages to navigate written texts. I invite readers to rethink literacy in bilingual education by pondering on these questions and discussing them with colleagues:

1. What is your stance on the best way to teach to read and write in more than one language in a bilingual classroom? Is that stance supportive of a monolingual literacy view or a multilingual literacy view? Does it reflect a sequential or simultaneous instructional structure?
2. What has influenced your thinking and practice in adopting this stance?
3. Consider some of the scholarly discussions regarding multilingual literacy presented here? How do they support /challenge literacy development and instruction in more than one language in your classroom?
4. How can rethinking literacy in more than one language in your bilingual classroom and school enhance your students self-image as bilingual and biliterate learners and their skills in becoming multilingual readers and writers?
5. How can you, as a bilingual and biliterate professional, challenge other educators in your school to meaningfully explore and rethink multilingual literacy?

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