



Learning
IN A
**NEW
LANGUAGE**

A **Schoolwide** Approach to
Support K-8 **Emergent Bilinguals**

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Learning IN A NEW LANGUAGE

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An Urgent Call to Action

As an educational leader, you have many responsibilities entrusted to you by a range of stakeholders—the families and communities you serve, your students, the school staff, your organization’s board or governing body, policymakers, and the greater community. These responsibilities range from basic management and safety to ensuring that all of your students have opportunities to become well prepared for college, career, and civic engagement. As times change, the responsibilities of school leaders continue to increase, and more information and strategies are needed to cultivate the success of an increasingly diverse population of students. It is in this context that *Learning in a New Language: A Schoolwide Approach to Support K–8 Emergent Bilinguals* has been written.

The book is designed to be a comprehensive and accessible resource for instructional leaders who work in multilingual communities with students who are acquiring English at school. The book brings together essential background information and evidence-based practical strategies into a one-stop reference for busy instructional leaders. The focus area of each chapter represents an aspect of educational reform that is often addressed in a full-length book. The purpose of this book, however, is to get to the heart of the topic quickly and present forthright solutions.

School leaders will vary in their background knowledge of the disciplinary content areas, the development of language and literacy, how to engage family members, cultural responsiveness, and schoolwide

systems of support. This book is designed to provide foundational information in all these areas, with a focus on approaches that are effective for students learning in a new language and representing a variety of cultural communities. With the knowledge presented here, instructional leaders will be able to engage with educators and family members from a solid foundation of understanding. At the end of each chapter, online resources for further learning are shared to expand on the content.

This chapter serves as an introduction. To begin, it explores a few details about the cultural and linguistic diversity of students in K–8 classrooms in the United States and why recent demographic shifts call upon educators to enlarge and enhance their educational approaches. Students from historically marginalized communities—for example, those who speak languages other than academic English, are immigrants, have fewer economic resources, are people of color, are differently abled, or represent gender diverse or sexual minority populations—face obstacles to receiving equitable treatment in schools and classrooms. For this reason, a vision for equity is the backbone connecting each chapter of the book and is introduced here in the first chapter. The chapter also provides information about the terminology used throughout the book and previews the content of each chapter.

Why This Book Is Needed

Approximately 10 percent of K–8 public school students were identified as English language learners (ELLs) in the United States during the fall of 2015 (USDE/NCES, 2017). Greater percentages of ELL students attended school in California (21 percent), Texas (17 percent), and New Mexico (16 percent), and more students were likely to be in grades K–2 (~16 percent) than middle and high school (~4–8 percent; McFarland et al., 2018). A greater percentage of ELL students (~14 percent) lived in cities as compared to suburban areas (~9 percent) and towns or rural communities (~4–6 percent; McFarland et al., 2018). Dozens of languages are represented by multilingual students, but by far the language with the highest reported number of speakers in U.S. schools is Spanish

(77 percent), with Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese being the next most frequent (McFarland et al., 2018). Each student who brings a language other than English to school deserves to be accepted wholeheartedly into a community of learners there and to receive instruction that builds on their linguistic resources so that they have the potential to excel.

Being bilingual is an achievement that is valued universally and has numerous positive effects on individuals' lives. People who speak—and potentially are literate in—more than one language gain cognitive flexibility; may have improved executive functioning; are able to maintain relationships with extended family members; better understand people from different geographical, cultural, and linguistic groups; and are prized in the job market (Bialystok, 2007; Rodríguez, Carrasquillo, & Lee, 2014). With these benefits in mind, it is clear that schooling should *add* to a student's linguistic repertoire, not take away from it. Tailored approaches are presented throughout this book for learning about students' linguistic resources, using them to leverage learning in a new language, and working to sustain their bilingual capabilities. With a two-pronged strategy of valuing what students bring to school and using instructional methods that facilitate learning in a new language, students are both validated and provided with clear access to the curriculum.

The current reality in schools and classrooms does not usually reflect the best practices to support students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Students are often viewed by what they lack rather than by what they possess. Family members who speak languages other than English are not frequently called upon to provide programmatic input or share what works with their children. For the most part, educators, who typically come from white and middle-class backgrounds, have not received enough preparation for teaching students who represent different races, social classes, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The result of these mismatches has been that students learning English at school are lagging behind in many metrics of educational success, including academic achievement, graduation rates, and career and college goals. The time is now to transform our schools into places that better serve students from traditionally marginalized communities. The plans laid out in this book present good starting points.

Focusing on Equity

Equity has been described as involving both fairness and inclusion. Equity is not the same as equality; students may need differing resources to achieve similar levels of success in their academic or social benchmarks (OECD, 2018). When a school's mission is equity, students who are not experiencing success are viewed as being underserved rather than possessing some form of deficit. Instructional leaders who promote educational equity seek to

- Identify who is not experiencing success within the local context.
- Collect related data to analyze and reflect on with school- and community-based stakeholders.
- Focus human and material resources to address inequities on-site and in the community.
- Move the equity vision to the forefront and lead the school community to set goals and action plans that result in social justice.
- Work in collaboration with families and communities to gather information, problem solve, monitor progress, and learn from outcomes.

Terminology Used

A number of terms are used throughout this book to characterize students' linguistic backgrounds and resources. Some of them are interchangeable, but they each hold a perspective or underlying value judgment. The sections that follow highlight the nuances of each term and explain why a given term might be used in particular cases.

Emergent Bilinguals

Students who bring a home language to school that is different from the language of instruction have the potential to be, and are becoming, bilingual. As they develop capabilities in the new language, their bilingualism is emerging. The term *emergent bilingual* views the student as reaching toward the enriched goal of possessing more than one

language rather than using a term that positions the student as coming to school with deficits (e.g., English learner or limited proficient; García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). Whenever possible throughout this book, *emergent bilingual* is used to describe students who are likely to have been described previously as English learners.

English Learner (EL) and English Language Learner (ELL)

The terms *English learner* (EL) and *English language learner* (ELL) also refer to students who come to school with a home language other than English and who require support in order to access the material and experience academic success. Because the EL or ELL label positions the student as *not* having something (deficit perspective), it feeds a negative stereotype and perhaps an instinct to blame the student or the student's family. These terms will be used only when quoting from research that has defined students with one of these labels.

Linguistically Diverse Students

The term *linguistically diverse students* describes students who bring languages or language variations that are not typically recognized or valued in the mainstream classroom where academic English is the language of instruction. Linguistically diverse students include not only those who speak a language other than English at home but also those who speak variations of English, such as African American English (AAE), Chicano English, Appalachian English, and others.

Bilingual/Multilingual Students

The term *bilingual* or *multilingual students* describes individuals who speak two or more languages or variations of a language—for example, a person who speaks English and Spanish or English, Spanish, and Nahuatl. Students who speak variations of English such as AAE and academic English also show multilingual skills and have the versatility to change codes depending on the people with whom they are communicating. Multilingual people often use interlanguage strategies (such as code meshing and translanguaging) when communicating with

other multilinguals and may serve as interpreters when interacting with monolinguals who do not speak a common language.

Overview of Chapters

This book will work as a read-through from cover to cover or as a resource guide to pull from when information is needed about a particular topic. The chapters are designed to provide straightforward background information, examples of evidence-based practices, tips for where to start, and resources for further exploration. The idea is to give instructional leaders a “just right” amount of information to understand the big ideas and potential pathways to improving schooling for linguistically diverse students. No educational leader will be an expert in every area addressed in this book, nor should that be expected. Leading for inclusion means that progress comes from collaborative efforts where group energy has an exponential effect. The chapters in this book give instructional leaders the background they need to support the work of educators and specialists within a schoolwide context aimed at promoting equity for underserved students.

Chapter 2 focuses on the foundational goal of learning about and joining forces with family members and communities to support student learning. The ideas and actions outlined in this chapter are key to improving schooling for marginalized students because when there is alignment of students’ in- and out-of-school experiences, students feel understood and supported. Family and community members have important information to share with educators about their priorities for schooling and what works best for their children.

Chapter 3 builds the foundation of big ideas used throughout the book: culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies, multitiered systems of support, and job-embedded professional learning. After these three frameworks are presented, example structures are highlighted that integrate the foundational principles in practical ways.

Chapter 4 examines how to make changes at the schoolwide level that increase inclusiveness for all students and center equity as

the mission and vision on campus. The chapter describes how to look beyond school climate and do the deep work of creating a school culture that prioritizes just outcomes for all students.

Chapter 5 takes a focused look at a topic of critical importance to educators who work with emergent bilinguals—the development of oral language needed to be successful at school and how to nurture the teaching practices that enhance this development. The chapter provides educational leaders with specific types of teaching and language-learning interactions to look for as they visit classrooms.

Chapter 6 shines a spotlight on literacy learning in a new language and the best practices in instruction for emergent bilinguals. For busy leaders, the chapter provides enough information to gain a foothold in understanding literacy learning overall and also the general guiding principles that are applicable to any grade level for embedding language in more focused ways in the literacy classroom.

Chapter 7 turns to teaching and learning in content-area classrooms. Although many teachers in these classrooms do not have focused preparation in serving emergent bilingual students, they are called upon to make their curriculum accessible and engaging to them. The chapter suggests a number of ways to strengthen teaching behaviors and classroom environments so that they are more helpful to students learning through a new language.

Chapter 8 turns once again to a systemwide topic, facilitating professional learning that is connected to the vision and goals of the school and prioritizes equitable outcomes for all students. The chapter presents the components needed for powerful professional learning to occur and then describes how leaders can use structures such as professional learning communities, coaching, and data-based inquiry to support emergent bilinguals' success.

The final chapter and the Appendix provide straightforward continuous-improvement resources for identifying what is important to see and measure on the road to better serving emergent bilinguals and other linguistically diverse students. Chapter 9 suggests how a school leadership team might begin to assess its progress on equity goals using multiple measures. The Appendix presents a series of simple guides

highlighting what an instructional leader might look for in the physical environment, interactions, and teaching behaviors in classrooms based on content presented throughout the book.

Fostering success with emergent bilinguals is a pressing challenge for all educational leaders, but with focus, persistence, and teamwork, it is one that can be accomplished. This book is designed to be a partner on this important mission.

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