

*Coaching Teachers in*

# **Bilingual** and **Dual-Language** Classrooms

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A RESPONSIVE CYCLE FOR  
**Observation and Feedback**

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Alexandra Guilamo



**Hawker Brownlow**  
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# Introduction

I have served in many different roles as an educator, but the two roles I loved most were those of academic coach and elementary school principal. They weren't always easy, but they gave me the opportunity to focus on the most important parts of education—teaching and learning. During those years, I refined many of the skills I needed to work with diverse teachers on implementing powerful practices to accelerate the growth of *all* students. After all, making a difference in the lives of students is the reason I went into education.

I loved shutting out the world, going into classrooms to observe a lesson, and working side by side with teachers to zero in on a goal that could improve student learning. This was something I did in every classroom—monolingual, bilingual, dual-language, special education, and so on. The teachers never questioned the ability to move in and out of each of these spaces with such ease. Being bilingual myself and having taught language learners all my life provided a sense of confidence in knowing what to look for and a strong credibility with the teachers with whom I worked.

As a principal and academic coach, I observed instruction in English, Spanish, and Arabic. Since I transitioned into my role as a consultant, I've observed lessons in nearly a thousand classrooms in Spanish, English, Mandarin, Arabic, Somali, Hmong, Polish, German, and many more languages.

When I first began my consulting work, I approached interactions with these new and amazing teachers with one basic assumption: that everyone observed teachers who use a language other than English with the same ease, lens, and process that had become second nature to me. And yet, with each school and district visit, it became more and more clear that this was not the case.

As I work with schools across the United States, I'm still amazed at the overwhelming pressures on the shoulders of bilingual and dual-language teachers. These pressures include keeping up with pacing, implementing buildingwide

initiatives that require anywhere from fifteen to sixty minutes of already limited instructional time, and of course, increasing achievement. These pressures are riddled with challenges, such as the absence of a viable curriculum (Marzano, 2003), valid and reliable data, time to teach the required standards, and basic supports that are staples for monolingual teachers.

As a former administrator, I believe that bilingual and dual-language teachers should and must be accountable for producing results. Students come to school counting on receiving an education that will prepare them for the future. But due to the unique challenges they face, the message that bilingual and dual-language teachers receive is to produce more with less. There seems to be an unspoken expectation that these teachers can produce the same academic results as their monolingual colleagues while having to teach an additional set of standards, translate huge amounts of print resources, and constantly justify why their classrooms have to look different—as if the program itself was the way to achievement.

Confronting and overcoming these challenges can be mentally and physically exhausting, resulting in immense turnover and creating a teacher shortage that could have huge consequences for U.S. students, schools, and the future workforce necessary for any society to thrive.

As educators, we must not force bilingual and dual-language teachers to simply make it work under these conditions. At a minimum, we must share the responsibility of providing all teachers with equal access to the same supports for improving their effectiveness. While aspects of the process are more challenging than others, leaving these teachers to fend for themselves is no longer tolerable or sustainable.

As schools determine how to ensure the academic success and language development of every language learner now mandated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), supporting teacher effectiveness must be the focus of discussion and action. This work of observing, providing feedback, and coaching teachers is critical. But this can't be just any support, especially if it conflicts with the research or focuses on using materials and initiatives rather than student thinking and increasingly complex language development.

The challenges teachers face in getting quality feedback and support always seem to reflect a few reoccurring themes.

- Support personnel in the building did not observe the teachers because they didn't know how it was possible to observe without speaking the language.
- District personnel only observed and evaluated teachers for the required two to four observations per year because no building coach or evaluator spoke the program language.

- District personnel observed teachers using a business-as-usual approach and offered feedback that was counterproductive to the very principles that were most essential to the program model in which they taught.
- Teachers felt disconnected and abandoned while still hungry for collaboration and opportunities to grow.

I realized that it wasn't only bilingual and dual-language teachers who needed support to grow their practice. Rather, school and district personnel who are there to coach and support the teachers who navigate this gray area of learning content and language were also at a loss. How would teachers get the coaching they needed if the coaches didn't, couldn't, or struggled to enter into classrooms to provide meaningful and constructive help? Interestingly, it wasn't only English-speaking coaches who steered clear of these classrooms. Even coaches who spoke the language of instruction struggled to understand teacher practice and how to improve student learning.

To answer the preceding question, I must first acknowledge that coaches who support bilingual and dual-language teachers face unique circumstances and challenges, and therefore need a different model for coaching and observation—one that helps them overcome the issues created by language barriers and misconceptions about the coaching process. This book presents a responsive observation and feedback cycle that diminishes the challenges of observing in the complex and diverse classrooms that serve language learners and helps coaches who support bilingual and dual-language teachers acquire the skills and perspectives necessary to effectively coach in these classrooms. In doing so, coaches will be better prepared to actively develop and engage in a fair and meaningful process that can transform current and future options for students.

## The Time Is Now

You might ask, "Why now?" Why have the number of bilingual and dual-language classrooms increased so much that they have reached a breaking point that demands a new model of coaching? The reality is that classrooms have undergone massive demographic changes. In fact, 2014 marked the first time in U.S. history that students who were once considered the minority are now the majority (Maxwell, 2014). Maxwell (2014) states: "This fall, for the first time, the number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students in public K–12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-Hispanic whites." In particular, educators have struggled with how to sufficiently and effectively serve the number of English learners (ELs) in K–12 schools.

English learners are a very diverse group, and we know that different states use a range of terms to discuss that diversity. However, for the purpose of this text, I

will use the term *bilingual and dual-language students*. I have chosen to use this term because it refers to students who are developing two language and literacy systems as part of their K–12 bilingual and dual-language educational experiences. These are students who emerge as truly bilingual and biliterate, rather than simply proficient in the English language.

To some, the distinction between biliterate and proficient is a small one. However, it is an important distinction in terminology that plays a role in teacher choices for leveraging educational theory and implementing best practices.

Before 2010, bilingual and dual-language students were present in only a handful of states. The Migration Policy Institute reports that between 2011 and 2015, the percentage of K–3 emergent bilinguals was 44.6 percent in California, 42.6 percent in New York, 45.3 percent in Texas, and 44.7 percent in Florida, while other states like West Virginia, South Dakota, and Kansas hovered between 1 percent and 5 percent (Park, O’Toole, & Katsiaficas, 2017).

But this trend of bilingual and dual-language students residing in only a handful of states has dramatically changed. In fact, between 2000 and 2017, “the young Dual Language Learner (DLL) population in the United States has grown by 24 percent” (Park et al., 2017, p. 1). What does that mean for schools across the United States? Based on 2017 figures, more than one-third of all U.S. students in grades preK through third grade are emergent bilinguals (Park et al., 2017). This immense growth in the number of bilingual and dual-language students has brought about a new education imperative for us all: improve the quality and impact of instruction for this growing number of students or face the consequences of a majority of the U.S. population without the expertise and training necessary to be our future workforce.

As schools rethink how to ensure high-quality instruction for bilingual and dual-language learners, sweeping school-level, program-level, and policy changes are happening across the United States. One of the policy changes that influenced other U.S. states was California’s repeal of English-only requirements with Proposition 58 in 2016 (Hopkinson, 2017). This move has opened the door to a growing number of options for schools to leverage bilingual and dual-language programs—programs that have proven to be more effective than English-only models that result in a consistent pattern of failure for language learners (Collier & Thomas, 2004).

Educators must take steps to ensure that the growing number of bilingual and dual-language students served by an expanding number of programs and schools is set up for success. The teachers in these schools are in varying stages of expertise and ownership and need support. With the range of teachers, students, programs, and situations, the best form of support is a coach who is successfully and consistently able to help teachers effectively drive student achievement.



unique and different about bilingual and dual-language classrooms and work with teachers to implement effective strategies.

## In This Book

I used a number of contexts as guides in developing this book. The work I have done with hundreds of coaches, building administrators, district leaders, and educators in a range of program models helped me shape the challenges and needed supports into a schema. In addition, I referenced theoretical frameworks from dual-language education, bilingual education, various evaluation instruments, various coaching models, and several change models in developing the observation and feedback cycle and the action-planning templates embedded in every chapter.

Part 1 includes chapters 1–3 and answers the question, What essential skills or perspectives do coaches need to focus the observation and feedback cycle into continuous opportunities to transform bilingual and dual-language instruction? Chapter 1 introduces the goals, challenges, and keys for creating a fair observation and feedback cycle when observing instruction that leverages another language. It also provides an overview of the unique stages and steps included in the observation and feedback cycle. Chapter 2 explores the eight goals of the observation and feedback cycle and theoretical frameworks coaches need to identify effective practices within the context of the program and school mission and vision. Finally, chapter 3 helps coaches distinguish what effective feedback looks, sounds, and feels like when it leads to action and improved student outcomes.

Part 2 includes chapters 4–7 and answers the question, What are the four stages of the observation and feedback cycle, and how can teachers consistently and correctly engage in this cycle if they don't speak the language of instruction? Chapter 4 describes the changes in mindset teachers and coaches must establish to lay the foundation for the observation and feedback cycle. Chapter 5 describes the actions that both teacher and coach need to take prior to the observation to minimize the impact of language on the quality of evidence the observer is able to collect. Chapter 6 explains the observation process for coaches. This process is the heart of the book because it encompasses the most important and difficult work that a coach must do. Bilingual and dual-language classrooms are dynamic environments. They require the coach to think creatively, recognize creativity, and be able to trust his or her own judgment, yet remain open to new ideas and other perspectives. In order to generate value from this process, coaches must be able to articulate what they observe and share their insights about complex behaviors and interactions. Chapter 7 describes the post-observation conference, offering a clear model for

coaches that connects the act of gathering accurate evidence from a variety of sources with identifying high-leverage feedback.

The book concludes with two appendices, which take a more detailed look at various program models and offer answers to the most frequently asked questions by coaches and teachers.

When coaches understand the complexities of these classrooms and have the tools to overcome the language barrier, they realize how much they can contribute to teacher and student success. Bilingual and dual-language teachers serve the fastest-growing student demographic in the United States, and they deserve and require these supports. That is the goal of this book—to provide the tools that coaches need to level the playing field in schools. In the end, structuring schools to provide equal access to instructional supports is the only way to make it work for all teachers and transform outcomes for students.

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