

Literacy Success for Emergent Bilinguals

**GETTING IT RIGHT
IN THE PREK-2 CLASSROOM**

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2. Children’s deep connection to their first language and the multiple ways its utilization in schools can contribute to language and literacy achievement is detailed in this chapter. I discuss effective and realistic practices for increasing the use of first language in classrooms where children speak multiple languages and teachers speak few of them.
3. In this chapter, the manner in which children acquire a first language, based on the most recent research, is explained as a simple three-part process. I present the central role played by teacher-student interaction and methods of classroom organization to strengthen English proficiency.
4. The important dimensions of language structure that emergent bilinguals need for language and literacy success are explained in this chapter, with many examples to illustrate effective classroom practices for teaching language structure. I highlight the contributions to learning language structure that can be made through children’s language production related to meaningful ideas and topics, correction, and peer collaboration.
5. In this chapter, I explain the reasons why strong reading foundations are critically important for emergent bilinguals and are deserving of significant instructional time in PreK–2. I identify common instructional methods to be used for teaching alphabets, phonemic awareness, and word reading, which are all particularly supportive for emergent bilinguals’ reading success.
6. This chapter provides teaching guidance on the questions of *what* vocabulary to teach and *how* to increase vocabulary learning through instruction and during more informal vocabulary learning opportunities. I emphasize the importance of a cohesive, explicit, and organized vocabulary scope and sequence in PreK–2 for ensuring that emergent bilinguals have sufficient English vocabulary for language and literacy success.
7. Core strategies for comprehending and thinking that are effective and accessible for emergent bilingual children are presented in this chapter. Specific attention is devoted to the topics of how to teach close reading, how to use the first language to support comprehension and thinking, and how to balance the use of narrative and informational text.
8. The goal of this chapter is to help teachers increase the use of classroom practices that support emergent bilinguals’ emotionally positive and self-sustaining motivation for language and literacy learning. I explain the research on how teacher praise and achievement-related statements, evaluation practices, and the organization of student learning and collaboration can increase motivation for language and literacy, and suggest many immediately applicable practices.

At the beginning of each chapter, I present *Important Research Findings* pertaining to the chapter topic. Throughout the chapters, general school, district, and program *educational principles* and especially classroom *teaching practices* are offered. Having these practices in your toolbox will help you generate specific activities embodying that practice that fit the multifaceted nature of the EBs you teach. At

the end of each chapter, the principles and practices are summarized, inviting many quick reviews. Individual *Apply Your Knowledge* exercises are included throughout each chapter. The purpose of these exercises is to help you evaluate, sharpen, and deepen your understanding and instructional competence with the key ideas presented in the text. Each chapter also includes a list of ideas for how to engage families as true partners in supporting student learning related to the specific topic of that chapter.

The scope of the book is bold in my ambition to establish continuity across the 4- to 5-year span from PreK–Grade 2. This continuity is needed for establishing a strong foundation for EBLs’ language and literacy achievement. I hope that each of you, whether you are a PreK educator or K–2 educator, will attend equally to the PreK and K–2 portions of each chapter, as this could powerfully contribute to turning vision to reality for PreK–2 language and literacy continuity in the schools where you teach. Each chapter closes with discussions of the PreK–Grade 2 Continuum and connections to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and PreK standards for that chapter’s topic. These connections are intended to help schools and districts in the large majority of states that have aligned their curriculum and instruction to the CCSS, even if they are not using Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARRCC) or Smarter Balance assessments. Explanation of these connections will also be helpful to schools and districts within states that have chosen to write their own standards, as there is much overlap between high-quality state standards and CCSS.

The Multifaceted Context of Emergent Bilinguals' Achievement

IMPORTANT RESEARCH FINDINGS ABOUT THE MULTIFACETED CONTEXT OF EMERGENT BILINGUAL ACHIEVEMENT

- » Emergent bilinguals have linguistic, emotional, familial, and cultural Wellsprings of Promise.
- » English language proficiency is a centerpiece of EBs' academic success.
- » Psychological, cultural, sociopolitical, linguistic, and educational factors shape the academic achievement of EBs.
- » EBs are a very diverse group with respect to culture, first languages, economic circumstances, family education and literacy levels, and patterns of second language acquisition.
- » Cognitive stimulation and resources in the home are greater challenges of poverty than is social-emotional support in the home.
- » By grade 4, 69% of EBs do not read English at a basic level.
- » Two-thirds of EBs come from families with incomes below 200% of the poverty level.
- » Most teachers are Caucasian, speak only one language, and have limited professional development in teaching English language learners.
- » The PreK and K-2 systems have different funding sources, goals, and teacher workforces, and often function with little coordination.
- » Effective English language development programs have been lacking.

The achievement of emergent bilingual students is influenced by many factors. My goal in this book is to advance teacher understanding of this multifaceted context of EBs' achievement and provide concrete educational principles and practices to capitalize upon the Wellsprings of Promise within children and their families that can support language and literacy. These wellsprings include linguistic, cultural and individual resources.

Linguistic, familial, cultural, economic, and sociopolitical factors are among the most important of the broad, deep, and diverse influences that shape emergent bi-

linguals' development and school achievement. Some of these formative influences provide EBs with strengths they need to support language and literacy learning and should therefore be capitalized upon within classrooms. Others present challenges and obstacles to achievement. Understanding these challenges can help educators accurately identify sources of responsibility for the difficulties in language and literacy achievement that many EBs experience. Understanding can also guide educators in finding solutions to challenges and obstacles by modifying educational programs and practices. The first part of this chapter will explore the most important facets that educators need to be keenly aware of:

- Linguistic, familial, cultural and individual Wellsprings of Promise
- Current societal context and patterns of academic achievement of EBs
- Socioeconomic circumstances of children, their families, and their communities
- Variation in the patterns in which the home or first language (L1) and English (L2) are being learned
- Characteristics of educators
- Separation of PreK and K–2 educational systems
- The value of alliances with families of EBs

Awareness and understanding of this multifaceted context is a starting point on the long journey to change the historical context of EBs being at risk for school achievement into a current and future context of being at promise for school language and literacy achievement. Educators' disposition and skill to carefully, thoughtfully, consistently, and robustly respond to accommodate and draw upon these deeply rooted and influential facets as resources is foundational for EB achievement. This book focuses on supporting EBs in PreK–2 to achieve educational excellence that results in high levels of speaking, listening, reading, and writing competence. Advocacy for EBs and their families is a final part of every educator's role because of these students' underrepresented voices and the economic challenges and continuing discrimination and bias that can affect EBs and their families outside of school and, sadly, far too often within schools. The importance of creating alliances with families to enable and enrich the connection between home life and school life is elaborated upon.

In the second part of this chapter, I provide an overview of how this multifaceted portrait interfaces with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts (ELA) and preschool learning standards, guidelines, or frameworks. The major opportunities, challenges, and omissions of the CCSS and PreK standards and frameworks will be identified. We turn now to the happy experience of highlighting children's linguistic, familial, and cultural Wellsprings of Promise.

LINGUISTIC, FAMILIAL, AND CULTURAL WELLSPRINGS OF PROMISE

Educational Principle 1: Consistently increase the extent to which school and classroom practices draw upon children's and their families' linguistic, familial, and cultural Wellsprings of Promise.

Young emergent bilinguals enter school with several strengths deeply embedded within their core. I refer to these strengths as *Wellsprings of Promise*. When children's Wellsprings of Promise flow continuously and deeply into language and literacy learning, achievement is supported. Language and literacy programs that brilliantly incorporate all of these Wellsprings of Promise will be those where the language and literacy achievement of EBs shines. It is like a precious gem: The more facets that are cut and the better the craft in shining each facet, the greater the final brilliance.

Linguistic Development

The first Wellspring of Promise is the language children have learned in their homes and communities. Use of the language children know best at home and school allows them to function at their cognitive maturity. When children can use their first language (L1) to discuss their reactions to story characters and plots, critique the reasons an historical event occurred, or generate hypotheses for how water turns to ice, they are enabled to think more fully and at a conceptual level closer to their maximal capacity. Competence in and motivation to use their first language is necessary if children are to maximally benefit from the cultural, social, familial, and other learning opportunities available in their homes and communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Use of the first language for high-level thinking and other purposes in schools also adds to children's first language competence. Opportunities to use the first language in school signals to children and their families that the home language is valuable and respected. Usage will also encourage children to value this linguistic wellspring of promise and maintain their motivation to use it.

Family Support

A second wellspring of promise is children's families. All children are most often raised in families where they are loved and cared for. These positive and nurturing experiences imbue children with emotional security that encourages them to confidently move out from the family and eagerly take part in the enriching experiences they encounter, if they find similar levels of emotional support in these new contexts. In these supportive contexts, the familial Wellspring of Promise can flow and gently carry the child forward into new territory.

Research has confirmed the presence of familial resources that will support EB children's language and literacy achievement in out-of-home settings. Parents and teachers of kindergarten children estimated that the majority of both EB and English fluent (EF) children demonstrate positive social skills. Another study suggested that at-risk EB children may have social-emotional strengths greater than those of EF children (Crosnoe, 2004). The extensive social contacts and greater percentage of intact families characteristic of many groups of EBs have been suggested as possible supports for resilience and coping, even in the presence of other family stressors (Espinosa, 2006).

Cultural Context

The cultural context in which children and their families may be embedded is a third Wellspring of Promise. For some EBs, this cultural context may be similar to that of English-fluent children from families of similar economic circumstances. Many others will have extensive socialization experiences within their families and community that differ significantly from those of typical mainstream U.S. culture. This diversity may range from something as simple as what is eaten for breakfast to issues as serious and deep as medical practices and the nature of religious beliefs. Head Start has published a document titled *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2010) that clearly elaborates educational principles related to cultural context. This document asserts that children's cultural context should be the basis for educational programming. Children's cultural context is seen as a foundational component of their background knowledge that can and should be brought to bear in what is learned, as well as in learning materials and instructional practices. In addition, PreK frameworks and standards strongly endorse the inclusion of children's home experiences. However, there are few clearly conceptualized, broad, and comprehensive program models based upon children's home experiences. There is opportunity within CCSS to include books, topics, and community materials and human resources that flow from children's Wellsprings of Promise because the CCSS do not dictate what must be taught or which practices should be used to achieve the standards. Unfortunately, there is a long history of schools failing to honor and draw upon these sources of strength (Goldenberg, 2008), although noticeable winds of change are beginning to stir. Your efforts to enact Educational Principle 1 (listed earlier) can add to that breeze.

Apply Your Knowledge: Reflect upon the ways in which your curriculum in language and literacy, math, social studies, science, and the arts capitalizes upon children's Wellsprings of Promise. List these practices. Then identify one to two ways in which you could add to these practices in your classrooms. Begin the implementation process.

CHALLENGES TO THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF EMERGENT BILINGUALS

Educational Principle 2: Hold steadfast every day to high expectations and optimism for language and literacy achievement for all emergent bilinguals.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of PreK–2 children who are acquiring and learning with both a home language and English (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2012). Head Start serves more than 300,000 EBs who are present in 87.4% of its classrooms (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2012). The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that fully 68% of 4th-grade EBs cannot read English at even a basic level, compared to 20% of non-EB students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Other emerging evidence suggests that preschool EBs may need development in both their first language and English. These facts set off a loud alarm that should engage all educators in deep reflection and help establish an openness toward fresh and perhaps very different instructional practices for teaching language and literacy. The long history of achievement challenges, disappointment, and concern for children, families and educators has led to challenging conditions for maintaining the high expectations and optimism for a better achievement future necessary to turn possibility into reality.

Socioeconomic Circumstances

Educational Principle 3: Develop comprehensive plans and ongoing focus to help families increase the amount of cognitive stimulation in children's homes.

EB children are disproportionately overrepresented among America's poor, with the majority (66%) coming from households with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (Editorial Progress in Education (EPE) Research Center, 2009). Low income is a significant risk factor for school achievement. As pointed out above, most children in poor families are loved and cared for and have nurturing relationships. The greater challenge within these families is the availability of resources for cognitive stimulation (Bradley & Cervyn, 2002; McLoyd, 1998). From my experience, home visits to low-income families may reveal that a blank sheet of paper and a pen cannot be located, there are few children's books or adult literacy materials, educational games and toys in working condition are limited, and all of the surfaces in the home are taken up by things needed for daily life, leaving few spaces available for engaging in child projects or homework. In one low-income community, many preschool children who lived less than 5 miles from the local children's discovery park had never been there. The pressures and demands of providing basic necessities limits families' time and focus to engage in interactions that provide cognitive stimulation.

Research has shown that classrooms serving children and families with limited economic resources exhibit similar lacks in cognitive stimulation. The CLASS