

# FOREWORD

There are upwards of 10 million children who enter U.S. schools speaking languages other than English; current estimates put this number at about 1 in 10 of every student in a U.S. school. The language, culture, and funds of knowledge that emergent bilingual<sup>1</sup> children bring to school constitute a huge and often untapped national resource. That these emerging bilingual students can benefit from educational programs that capitalize on and develop their linguistic and cultural resources is well established in the educational research (e.g., see Goldenberg, 2008<sup>2</sup>). Concomitantly the extant research has established that students who enter U.S. schools as monolingual English speakers also can benefit greatly from educational programs that afford them the opportunity to acquire and develop languages other than English. It is the potential for children in this double demographic that underscores the critical need for books such as *Teaching for Biliteracy: Strengthening Bridges between Languages*.

Karen Beeman and Cheryl Urow have done a masterful job of outlining *who* the children are in U.S. schools; *how* programs such as dual language can provide opportunities to become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural; and *what* potential instructional learning units can be utilized by teachers to provide these important learning opportunities for diverse linguistic and cultural groups. They skillfully use profiles of real children and their teachers to demonstrate both the enormous heterogeneity of this population as well as how the profiles of each child can be used in the development of English and other languages.

Beginning in chapter 1, the authors take on and debunk the widely held misconception that children's non-English languages present a barrier to English acquisition and/or that they are a source of cognitive and linguistic interference. Their use of the term *Bridge* emphasizes both that first languages are resources to learning other languages, and that the language bridge is a two-way conduit, where there is cross-linguistic transfer from English to a non-English language and vice versa. This image is used artfully throughout the text to illustrate how the learning and acquisition of two languages is connected, and is an important contribution of this book.

*Teaching for Biliteracy's* focus on bridging as something that is informal and unplanned and also critical in the day-to-day practice of teaching emergent bilingual children is another unique contribution by this work. Too often we try to separate rather than connect children's languages, thereby limiting rather than enhancing their opportunities to utilize the totality of their linguistic repertoires as learning resources. The authors clearly explain that cross-language bridging is what separates monolingual learning from biliterate learning.

Unlike many other texts about bilingualism and biliteracy, which limit their discussion to instructional programs and practices and the children they benefit, Beeman and Urow provide a chapter that discusses the importance of teacher profiles.

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<sup>1</sup>Although English language learner (ELL) is widely used, the field is moving to wider utilization of the term "emergent bilingual learner," which is a more positive synonym for ELL.

<sup>2</sup>Goldenberg, C. (2008). Teaching English language learners: What the research does and does not say. *American Educator*, 2(2), 8–23.

Teachers are the frontline providers of opportunities to become bilingual and biliterate, and it is their dispositions and attitudes that influence and shape the emerging biliterate identities in all of the children they teach. Understanding the developmental trajectories of bilingual teachers in the United States is critical in planning professional development activities that subsequently improve the implementation of high-quality dual-language learning opportunities for children.

Another important contribution that this book makes is the assertion that dual-language programs can coexist with the new Common Core State Standards. I would add that any educational program intent on developing biliteracy in all of its students establishes a standard and rigor that surpasses the Common Core—for biliteracy, in any form, is a higher form of literacy than monoliteracy.

Readers of this text will find it informative partly because of its firm footing in many relevant theoretical perspectives. These include the use of sociolinguistic theory to better understand teacher and student language profiles; the use of sociocultural theory as a grounding for the importance of understanding that all learning, and most importantly language learning, is social in nature and situated in particular social and political contexts; and contrastive analysis as a way of arguing effectively why the pedagogy and methodology used to teach literacy in Spanish must differ fundamentally from the pedagogy and methodology used to teach literacy in English. This grounding in theoretical perspectives makes the book comprehensive in its orientation about how to strengthen the development of biliteracy for the diverse populations of children becoming biliterate in U.S. schools.

Finally, readers of this book will benefit from the authors' broad definition of biliteracy development as including oracy and metalanguage as well as reading and writing as critical components of development of biliteracy. Quite simply, the book represents state-of-the-art thinking with regard to the building of quality educational programs designed to ensure that large and quite diverse populations of students become biliterate.

Beeman and Urow are to be congratulated for writing a book that, in concrete ways, illustrates how to build bridges to biliteracy **and** how to bridge theory to practice. Teachers and other educators will find many concrete suggestions about how to value non-English languages. Although written from a Spanish/English perspective, the book is applicable to the development of biliteracy from many different pairs or languages. It is an excellent text to read and discuss as the field builds the next generation of dual-language programs for new millennium children.

—*Kathy Escamilla*