



Preface

This book is for teachers, administrators, instructional leaders, curriculum developers, professional development providers, assessment and evaluation specialists, policymakers, and advocates who expect their emerging bilingual students to develop biliteracy. It is grounded in ten years of research, instruction, assessment, and professional development in elementary school bilingual programs that serve emerging bilingual students from Spanish-speaking homes. The holistic biliteracy framework at the center of this work can be adapted and applied to any context that provides instruction through two languages with the explicit goal and anticipated outcome of biliteracy for all students.

History and Development of Literacy Squared

In 2004, two of the authors conducted an intensive session at the National Association for Bilingual Education Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The title of the session was, “Transitions to Biliteracy: Structures and Strategies.” Our primary purpose was to argue that transitions in bilingual and dual language programs should emphasize transitions to *biliteracy* rather than the more typical transitions to *English*. A secondary purpose was to discuss how to develop cross grade-level trajectories to ensure successful transitions, preferably to biliteracy, but also to English medium classrooms. More than 350 educators, including practitioners, researchers, and school administrators attended the session, and we engaged in a dialogue about the state of the field. Together, we concluded that issues in transition were among the most challenging in all program models, including bilingual education, dual language, and English as a second language (ESL). Specifically, we noted the following:

- Transition is somewhat of an oxymoron; children are in bilingual or ESL programs with native language support one day and in all English instruction the next. Many schools have transition criteria (e.g., test score cutoffs, time in program). However, they lack transition strategies for teachers to implement or mechanisms to monitor and guide these transitions. There is, in fact, no true transition between languages (August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008).
- There are few, if any, transitional curriculum materials and/or assessments, particularly in literacy, to assist teachers in helping children transition from one language to another (August & Shanahan, 2006).
- Teachers do not feel prepared to adequately address transition issues (Gersten, 1996), and transitional classrooms are places where children report feeling a great deal of stress (Pappamihel, 2001).
- Transition frequently means transition to English, with little or no emphasis placed on transition to biliteracy (August & Hakuta, 1997; August & Shanahan, 2006).
- Little research is available to guide practice with regard to transitioning children from one language to another (Gersten, 1996; Saunders, O’Brien, Lennon, McLean, 1998).

In short, we concluded that while the concepts of transition and transfer had been discussed abstractly in the field, they had not yet been operationalized adequately in schools and classrooms. We recognized a dire need to help children and teachers make more successful transitions between languages both in instructional practices and assess-

ment. As we complete this book in 2013, we note that this continues to be a critical issue (Beeman & Urow, 2013).

In 2004, we agreed to develop a research plan, along with an instructional model and assessment plan, to examine how programs of bilingual and dual language education could enhance the development of trajectories toward biliteracy. We were further motivated when some of the educators in the audience volunteered their schools and districts to be participants in any research related to the development of the proposed project.

In the fall of 2004, we convened a group of researchers and practitioners to conceptualize Literacy Squared and its four components: research, assessment, professional development, and the holistic biliteracy instructional framework. As we met and planned we conducted an extensive review of literature that led us to create a model that challenges some of the traditionally held paradigms about language and literacy instruction in bilingual/dual language and ESL programs. Our holistic biliteracy framework was novel in its paired literacy focus, connected literacy environments, and goal of biliteracy development rather than transition to English. Our framework demanded that assessments of emerging biliteracy be aligned with the holistic biliteracy framework and we achieved this through the development of novel ways of interpreting existing reading and writing assessments in English and Spanish.

Further, we agreed that a new instructional and assessment model for building trajectories toward biliteracy had to be comprehensive. The formal name for this project and this book, *Biliteracy from the Start: Literacy Squared in Action*, has been chosen because it captures our belief that best practice involves building trajectories toward biliteracy using both Spanish and English, beginning in kindergarten. The word “squared” indicates the exponential potential of literacy in two languages.

This book is the result of the past decade of research, professional development, and classroom implementation of Literacy Squared. Over the course of the past nine years, we have created a theoretical framework for developing biliteracy via paired literacy instruction; conducted an extensive review of literature to examine the most current research on transition and transfer; concluded a pilot study to examine the potential of the holistic biliteracy framework; completed two different longitudinal studies, each three years in length, to examine the reading and writing development and outcomes for children participating in Literacy Squared classrooms; developed an observational matrix for assessing fidelity of implementation of the model in research classrooms; and initiated a third phase of research and implementation. Participating school districts have included three districts in Texas, one district in Oregon, four districts in Colorado, and, most recently, a district in Washington. Over time, the project has involved over 6,000 children and 300 teachers. Our work is ongoing and iterative. Research informs practice, practice informs professional development and research, and all partners learn from and with each other.

How to Use This Book

Teachers and administrators in any type of bilingual program (e.g., transitional, dual language) or native/home/heritage language arts classes (e.g., Spanish language arts) can use the following features from *Biliteracy from the Start: Literacy Squared in Action*:

- The innovative holistic biliteracy instructional framework for grades K–5 to strengthen biliteracy development for emerging bilingual students
- Paired literacy instruction and assessment
- Empirically based biliterate reading trajectories, benchmarks, and zones that offer concrete biliteracy targets and anticipated outcomes for students from Spanish-speaking homes in well-implemented bilingual programs
- Assessment practices and techniques to monitor and document children’s trajectories toward biliteracy
- A curriculum development process to create units for biliteracy instruction that align with state content (e.g., Common Core) and language development standards (e.g., English- and Spanish-language development standards; new and home language arts progressions)

When educators use the holistic biliteracy framework, with its focus on paired literacy instruction and assessment, they can expect to transform teaching and learning effectively at the classroom and program levels.

The biliterate reading trajectories, benchmarks, and zones can also be used by dual language educators. However, educators cannot uncritically assume the same numerical values because of the differences in their target populations (e.g., two-way dual language programs include students from monolingual English-speaking homes) and their content and language allocation plans (e.g., dual language programs offer may more instructional time in Spanish). Therefore, dual language educators need to develop empirically based biliterate reading trajectories, benchmarks, and zones based on longitudinal evidence of how their students (from monolingual English-speaking homes, bilingual homes, or monolingual Spanish-speaking homes) develop reading in two languages over time using DRA2, EDL2, or other appropriate measures. Given that, by definition, dual language programs provide a minimum of 50% and a maximum of 90% of content-area instruction in the partner language (e.g., Spanish), we should expect to find stronger outcomes for all students over time.

Educators working to develop a coherent and coordinated Common Core-aligned language arts block that has allotted time dedicated to English language arts, native or home language arts (e.g., Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic), and ESL can use the holistic biliteracy framework to inform their language policy, structure their programs, align curriculum development across languages, stimulate creative ways to team-teach, and document student trajectories toward biliteracy. Teachers can use language development standards or progressions to differentiate instruction and assessment for the emerging bilinguals in their classes.

Special Features

This book has many features that make the Literacy Squared holistic biliteracy framework accessible and practicable, including the following:

- A model for paired literacy instruction—learning to read and write in two languages, beginning in kindergarten
- An expanded definition of literacy instruction that includes oracy and metalinguage as well as reading and writing
- Authentic methods to interpret the development of Spanish and English reading and writing
- Clear content- and language-allocation policy recommendations for an elementary school language arts block with dedicated time allotted to authentic Spanish literacy and literacy-based ELD
- Guidance for teachers in how to make explicit and direct connections between Spanish and English literacy environments
- Innovative Literacy Squared teaching approaches, including *Lotta Lara*, *theDictado*,* and *así se dice*
- Lesson plans, activity structures, instructional routines, student work, and assessment practices that illustrate Literacy Squared in action
- Detailed analyses of student writing side by side using the Literacy Squared writing rubric that provides strong models of paired literacy instruction and assessment across grade levels
- Literacy Squared observation protocol template that educators can use to monitor, evaluate, and strengthen implementation of instructional and assessment approaches.

The Literacy Squared writing rubric, observation protocol, and lesson planning template can also be found at casloncommunity.com/Biliteracy-from-the-Start/.

Overall the purpose of this book is to celebrate biliteracy, and to provide educators with strategies and structures to improve the biliteracy potential of Spanish-speaking children in U.S. schools.

*We invented the term “theDictado” to reflect the bilingual focus of this method in Literacy Squared.