

USING BILINGUAL BOOKS TO ENHANCE LITERACY AROUND THE WORLD

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Abstract

This paper focuses on approaches and practices for developing biliteracy and bilingualism across diverse international settings. The authors present a framework for why bilingual books can be used to develop both native language and second or other languages through reading and writing activities. Bilingual books and a basic taxonomy of types of bilingual books are described. A rationale for their use is provided in that bilingual books provide linguistic resources such as vocabulary development for students to develop across two languages (Ernst-Slavit&Mulhern, 2003) while also fostering awareness of cultural and social awareness (e.g. Botelho& Rudman, 2009). The authors provide specific examples of both linguistic and cultural support. Specific activities that promote bilingualism and biculturalism as an aim include read-aloud, shared reading, and writing instruction which can incorporate the use of student-created books in both languages. These student-written bilingual texts can draw on local cultural and linguistic practices in their composition (e.g., Dworin, 2006). Finally, the authors conclude with ways that cross-age reading and family involvement can support bilingual development by using bilingual books.

Keywords: Bilingualism, biliteracy, multilingualism, language

Introduction

Children's books play an important role in children's literacy development because they offer opportunities to expand children's awareness beyond their own places, to see reflections of themselves, their own culture and experiences, and invite them to build bridges to cultures unlike their own. High quality books written for children can lead to cross-cultural understandings, and can foster empathy and new perspectives (Botelho& Rudman, 2009).

More than half of the world's population speaks more than one language and on the continent of Africa, the majority of children use a foreign language when beginning school (UNESCO, 2010). This has widely varying ramifications for students around the world. While some families may send their dominant language-speaking children to a bilingual, dual language, or multilingual school, other families may need to send their child who speaks a minority language to the nearest school, where all teaching is carried out in a majority language that may not be spoken at home. Multilingualism and education has many faces throughout the world, as people cross national and linguistic boundaries for a variety of reasons including greater economic prosperity, displacement due to geopolitical conflict, and the desire to experience the world.

Biliteracy initiatives that use multiple languages increase student achievement, linguistic competency, and empower students as active participants (Baylac-Ferrer, 2009;

Pérez, 2003). Early experiences with books have a positive impact on the language and literacy development of monolingual children. While there is not as much research into the impact of book reading on bilingual children, there is evidence that book reading can facilitate literacy development (Hammer, Miccio, &Wagstaff, 2003; Kalia, 2007).

Multilingualism in an educational setting brings both advantages and difficulties. While affording children new linguistic and cultural perspectives, transitioning entirely from one language to another, especially at too young an age, can be problematic, with the child not being ready for the demands of learning in a new language and simultaneously losing the opportunity to further develop their home language (Hall, 2010). Given the great demands placed on both students and teachers in classrooms with multilingual students, sometimes with more than two or three languages as the children’s home languages, educational tools to support the multilingual classes of the world are vital to allow students to either become fully multilingual or to support transition from one language to another.

The purpose of this paper is to present bilingual books as a teaching tool, to explain their potential value, and to provide examples of how they can be used in the classroom. In our experience, the use of bilingual books can provide cultural and linguistic support for language learners. We suggest ways that bilingual books can be used for language and literacy learning, maintenance of the native language, and also as a way to provide culturally relevant experiences for students. Students bring rich cultural and linguistic resources to the classroom such as bilingualism, oral traditions, heritage, and culture. In this paper we draw on a “funds of knowledge” approach that recognizes the richness of literacy practices that come from homes and communities (Compton-Lilly, Rogers, & Lewis, 2012; Dworin, 2006; Gonzalez, Moll, &Amanti, 2009; Moll, Saez, &Dworin, 2001). A funds of knowledge perspective, as well as the strategic use of bilingual texts and stories, can enrich the language and literacy development of all students. We also draw on our own teaching experiences with English language learners in the context of teaching in the Unites States as we offer ways to use bilingual books in classrooms.

What are Bilingual Books?

Bilingual books, also known as dual language books, are available across genres and age groups, including classics and picturebooks in fiction and nonfiction. Since they involve translations from one language to another, we point out that the quality of translation is an important consideration. Literal translations may not maintain the integrity of a story; the ways that idioms, humor, culture, and syntax are expressed across languages requires special attention so that the *intent* of the story is communicated as naturally and accurately as possible (Hadaway& Young, 2013). Bilingual texts can expose all students to culturally relevant reading that provides opportunities for students to see themselves reflected in what they read, to look into other cultures that may be quite different from their own, and to step into the place of others in a vicarious experience with books set in new places and with new cultures. This mirrors, windows, and doors framework is at the heart of teaching in ways that demonstrate respect and acceptance, while providing rich cultural experiences through books (Bishop, 1990; Botelho& Rudman, 2009).

Here, we offer descriptions of the most common formats for bilingual books for children. Examples of representative bilingual texts that are used in our own context of the Southwest United States, where Spanish is a common spoken language, are listed in appendix 1. We also include in appendix 2 some representative types of bilingual texts in other languages. Additional sources to locate bilingual books include *The International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY)* and *The United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY)*. The journal *Book Bird: Journal of International Children’s Literature* is also a

good source of books and themes that center on internationally-focused children's literature as is *The Journal of Children's Literature*.

Full-Text Translations

In full-text translations, the entire story is presented in two languages. Both languages are placed on one page, or facing pages, often with a graphic to separate the two. Sometimes a different ink color or typeface is used to call attention to the difference in languages. Some issues have been raised about the placement of two languages, and the implication for privileging one language over another. For example, which language comes first on the page? If the orientation (left-right, top-bottom) of the two written languages is different, which orientation will the book use? These books are meant to be read in both languages, page by page, either by one reader who is able to read both languages, or by two readers, each fluent in one of the languages (Sneddon, 2009). Dual language books are available in paper in over 40 languages, and more are available digitally (Cass School of Education, 2008).

Single-Language Translations

Many books are published entirely in one language, with whole book translations into other languages. Sometimes the publication of various translations occurs intentionally and simultaneously, and sometimes a book is published first in one language and translated some time later.

Embedded Text

These books tell a story in one language, with some words and phrases from the second language added. Often, when the second language words are added, they are introduced alongside their first language counterpart (for example, *Hello. Hola*). Books with embedded second language text can rely on illustrations and the context of the story as aids for working between two languages.

Concept Bilingual Books

Concept books focus on a theme, and can use multiple languages within that theme. An example would be a picturebook about colors. The page would have images of objects in a particular color, and the text would be the name of the color in the focus languages.

Wordless Books

Although these books are not bilingual, they can be used as a prop for oral or written storytelling and object-naming in any language while helping children develop creativity.

Bilingual Books as Linguistic Support for Multilingual Classrooms

In addition to the valuable cultural support that bilingual books can provide, these books can also be used to develop children's linguistic skills in both their home and new languages. These linguistic skills can be separated into the three categories of vocabulary, syntax, and sound awareness for the sake of description although they necessarily come together in real-life language use.

Vocabulary

Bilingual books help children transfer conceptual knowledge and skills across languages, and compare and contrast concepts across languages (Taylor, Bernhard, Garg, & Cummins, 2008), and therefore are effective at helping students develop vocabulary across languages. Foreign language learners who are transitioning into their non-native tongue have different vocabulary needs than those of native speakers. Not only do non-native speakers

need to acquire the vocabulary of the new language, but they face the additional task of learning content area vocabulary specific to math, science, social studies, and language arts.

Success in reading comprehension is highly dependent upon vocabulary development (Bauer & Arazi, 2011; Biemiller 2006). Bilingual books support vocabulary in both the first and second languages.

Syntax

By using bilingual books, the comparison of syntactic structures across languages shows how word order varies in different languages. An activity meant to develop vocabulary as children search for parts of speech in text would naturally lead to a recognition that important differences exist between the grammars of different languages. For example, for English and Spanish, the concept of the gender of nouns in Spanish and other languages can be explicitly discussed. Such discussions not only help prevent confusion for children, but it also provides native majority-language speakers with meaningful insight into a linguistic characteristic of another language. Other grammar-based activities could include direct comparisons of a sentence with its match from the other language. Students can examine whether both sentences have the same number of words, whether the words are matched one-to-one and in the same order, and if not, why they are not matched one-to-one. This elevates a student from any linguistic background to the role of expert, being a native speaker of a particular language.

Specific Teaching Practices and Activities with Bilingual Books

There are many ways in which bilingual books can be used. In the following sections, we offer some specific practices that illustrate the role bilingual books can have in teaching. The models we share are part of balanced literacy in any classroom, and can be especially helpful in classrooms with language learners.

Dialogic Teacher Read-Aloud

In teacher read-alouds, the teacher models fluent oral reading while students listen. When teachers read books aloud, they offer children opportunities to participate in reading books that may be beyond their ability to read on their own, especially when the children are not fluent in the language of the text (Krashen, 1995). Often, these read-alouds take on a dialogic nature, as the teacher and students engage in discussions that support and value the sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students (Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013; Pappas et al. 2012; Vásquez, 2014). In a dialogic read-aloud, teachers invite discussion while books are being read. Teachers might lead the discussion by pausing after reading an interesting phrase or viewing an illustration. Children might also initiate discussions by calling attention to new words, to ask questions, or to offer personal connections.

For example, in a read-aloud of the picturebook *Sam and the Lucky Money*, upon hearing the words *leisees* (red envelopes given in China as gifts for holidays and special occasions) and *char siubao* (steamed pork buns), kindergarten children in the U.S. who spoke eight different home languages engaged in conversation about similar things in their own cultures, sometimes using English, the common language of the class, and sometimes using one of their home languages (see Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013 for more about this study). Literacy developed through conversations like this helps elevate reading to more than a set of skills. This kind of dialogue helps build biliteracy as a social practice as children look for connections between multiple languages and cultures, since all children can relate to general themes of childhood, and this perspective of biliteracy helps create bridges between families, communities, and schools.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is another model for teachers reading aloud. In this model, students read along, either silently or out loud as well (Holdaway, 1982; Stahl, 2012). As students read along with the teacher, they learn vocabulary, text structure, and text features (Coyne, Simmons, Kame'enui, & Stoolmiller, 2004; Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2001; McKeown & Beck, 2006). This model can be especially helpful for students reading in a second language who benefit from the support that hearing an expert reader while simultaneously following text on their own affords. For very young and less experienced readers, shared reading can occur with big books, which are oversized copies of common trade books that teachers hold open to students. By the time a student has mastered important concepts about print, such as one-to-one matching, they need to hold their own copies of the text and actively participate in reading (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2008; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010; Stahl, 2012). This kind of reading is often integrated with vocabulary instruction as words are pulled from the text for special attention, and lessons on the mechanics and skills of reading, including phonemic awareness, phonics, punctuation, sight words, and comprehension. Sometimes shared reading includes rereadings where students read in unison with rhyming text, text that has repeating phrases, or poetry.

Writing: Creating Bilingual Books

In contexts where bilingual books are not as available, bilingual books can be created by students and shared in school and at home to foster appreciation of both languages (Dworin, 2006). Teachers can enlist community translators to help create dual-language books; text can be printed or typed on labels that are affixed to book pages alongside the first language, and dual-language audio recordings can be made as another means of accessing the books (see Rowe & Fain, 2013).

To model the writing of narrative-focused (story-like) bilingual texts, bilingual books which tell a narrative story and/or draw on the life experiences of the author can be used as mentor texts (cite) and as examples for writing lessons. For instance, through a read-aloud, the teacher can point out how an author might get ideas for writing, organize their thinking to tell a story, and draw on their culture to have voice and style. To use these texts effectively, we suggest selecting texts that value the native culture and mother tongue.

For example, a teacher can select the work of a particular author to use as a model. Teachers can discuss the author's life history and how the author embraces bilingualism as an asset. As students write, teachers can discuss recurrent themes of bilingualism, cultural heritage, bilingual and bicultural identity that appear across several of the books written by the author. In our specific context of the Southwest United States (Texas), where Spanish is a key language, Latino/a authors we like and suggest for use include: Carmen Lomas Garza, Alma Flor Ada, Francisco Jimenez, Pam Munoz Ryan, and Juan Felipe Herrera. For instance, in teaching students how to write short auto-biographical pieces about their life, the following ideas can be incorporated into an author study. Carmen Lomas Garza is an author and illustrator from Texas who draws on themes from her own life to write picture books that are bilingual vignettes and paintings depicting mostly family life as a Latina. The themes in her book such as family, traditions, health, celebrations, pride in heritage, and community resonate with many students whose cultural background is similar to the authors. Ideas for an author study of Carmen Lomas Garza follows in Appendix 2. Additional examples of more internationally focused bilingual texts are in Appendix 3.

Cross-age reading and family involvement

Bilingual books can be used to support family involvement when family members do not speak English (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003). In such contexts, where children and their

families may be at varying stages of language acquisition, siblings can participate; peer instruction can offer another avenue for scaffolding. Within bilingual and multilingual households, the bilingual books that go home can be used so that parents who speak the native language can still support their children's literacy learning. For instance, parents can read the native language version of the text while the student reads the English version of the text. For instance, teachers can send home bilingual books in a literacy book bag with a bilingual note with tips for reading, writing, and learning at home.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

The ideas we present here show how bilingual books can be used to support language development when working with multilingual students. Bilingual books can be a useful resource for classrooms with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

They can be used to support native languages and cultures, to cultivate cultural understanding, to improve linguistic and metalinguistic skills in all students and to provide a basis for activities where all languages are equally valued and all children are recognized as experts.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Representative Examples of Bilingual Books in Spanish/English, with a Focus on the Southwest United States

- A Movie in My Pillow / Unapelícula en mi almohada by Jorge Argueta, Illustrated by Elizabeth Gomez.
- Calling the Doves / El canto de las palomas by Juan Felipe Herrera, Illustrated by Elly Simmons.
- Magic Windows / Ventanas mágicas by Carmen Lomas Garza
- My Diary From Here to There / Mí diario de aquí hasta allá by Amada Irma Pérez. Illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez
- The Upside Down Boy / El Niño de Cabeza. By Juan Felipe Herrera, Illustrated by Simon Silva.
- Where Fireflies Dance / Ahí donde bailan las luciérnagas by Lucha Corpi, Illustrated by Mira Reisberg.

Appendix 2: Other Internationally-Focused Bilingual Books

Jana and Milena Synek (2010). *Gris commeun Loup! Grey like a Wolf!* Bramhall Publishing. (French/English) The authors have other books in the series about wolves.

IwonaMacalka (2009). *Wyciecka do IndiiMisiaczkiRosalia/ Rouzanna Bear’s Trip to India*. (This book is primarily non-fiction, but narrated through the voice of a stuffed bear who describes her travels through an Indian village. The author also has a second book, *MisiaczkaRozalianaafrykanskim safari/Rouzanna Bear Goes on an African Safari*. Polish/English.

Alison O’Dornan. (2010). *A B C*. Diglot Books.Dutch/English. This is an alphabet concept book, with each page devoted to a letter of the alphabet. Care was taken to find words that begin with the same letter in both languages (apple/appel, waterfall/waterval), and each page has sentences that illustrate the use of the word in both languages. The publisher has additional dual language books in other languages on their website, www.diglogbooks.com.

Appendix 3: Ideas for using Read-Aloud of a Bilingual Text to Assist with Writing Instruction.: Example with Representative Bilingual Author Carmen Lomas Garza (Spanish/English), Texas, USA

Before reading:

1. Tap into students’ prior knowledge about the book by brainstorming students’ predictions based on the title and cover.
2. Do a preview of the text and ask open-ended questions: “What is happening in these photos? Have you ever done anything like this? Can you tell about that?”
3. Discuss the details in the art. If possible, have multiple copies available for students to examine closely with magnifying glasses with partners/small groups. Discuss student’s responses.

During reading:

1. The teacher can demonstrate a think-aloud about the author’s writing style: “I’m noticing that the author uses lots of descriptive and detailed writing here. An example is on p. ____ when she says ____.” Make your thinking explicit about the author’s use of detail to create good memoir writing.
2. Ask students, “What detail or description did you like?”
3. Encourage students to make connections between the author’s memories and experiences and their own. Suggest that they might also want to write about a similar experience.
4. Ask students to take turns reading aloud. Students can read in both languages as long as they are comfortable doing so.

After reading:

1. Encourage students to compare how their life is the same and different from the author’s life.
2. Have students close their eyes, step back in time, and visualize their memory. They need to slow down their thinking to really “see” all the details and remember what happened. Emphasize that writing memoir sometimes means filling in the gaps of what we can’t remember.
3. Visit the author’s web site together using available technology: www.carmenlomasgarza.com. Also, the class can create a memoir bulletin board with photos and collages from the student’s own lives as well as the covers of Carmen Lomas Garza’s texts.