The Reading Process for Emergent Bilinguals

“Bilingual readers leverage all of their meaning-making resources and all of themselves as they engage with text. Some of these resources are linguistic and verbal; others are visual; others involve gestures, the body, as well as the lives and knowledge systems with which speakers have engaged.”

—OFELIA GARCÍA

In Part I, we proposed a way of thinking about emergent bilinguals’ languages, literacies, and resources, and how to capitalize on them in your classroom. In Part II, we apply a translinguaging framework to the teaching of reading. We discuss how the reading process exists and unfolds for emergent bilinguals and the types of practices you can put in place to reflect robust notions of bilingualism and biliteracy.

Reading is a process. However, many teachers focus on children’s reading levels, at the expense of their interests, their expertise in various areas, or the reading strategies they need to learn. When we focus exclusively on reading levels, we do not take into account who the child is as a reader and how the child navigates the text. Instead, our sole focus—and, too often, the children’s sole focus—is on moving from level to level, without ever considering if there is a topic they are passionate about or a genre they love.
We learn to gauge our effectiveness as reading teachers primarily on how students progress through levels.

However, while making progress across text complexity is critical to a child’s reading development and identity, so are engagement, thinking, knowledge of an author’s body of work, knowledge of particular genres, curiosity about a topic, ability to talk with others about texts. Don’t get us wrong, we want all students to develop their skills and abilities increasingly to become engaged, critical readers. Reading is a process and not a linear progression. And because of that, the pathway for each reader will be varied and diverse. For emergent bilingual readers, the process is impacted by language(s) and cultural resources that students bring to the table.

Reading as a Unified and Complex Process

Reading weaves together psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic processes (Kabuto, 2017). With that fact in mind, we propose replacing the outdated notion that students develop as readers in English and a language other than English separately. Instead, we propose that readers develop by drawing upon the full span of their resources, including their home and other languages, often in a synergistic, interwoven way (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2016; García & Kleifgen, 2019; García, 2020). When young children begin to read, they bring to the process their lived experiences (schemas); their emergent knowledge of books, letters, and sounds; and the conversations they have participated in at home and in their communities to make meaning (K. Goodman, 1996; K. Goodman & Y. Goodman, 2014). While the National Reading Panel (2000) identifies five pillars of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension—this view does not provide the whole picture because it separates competencies into discrete skills. Reading experts caution us about that view; comprehension must frame all components of reading to ensure that instruction is meaningful (Taberski, 2010).

Allyn and Morrell (2015) go further by rooting reading to students’ contexts. Strong readers develop within communities of readers. This is why it matters that we take the time to create a classroom community that values reading and who the readers are. This happens by viewing the child as a human being
and ensuring that reading is meaningful to him or her. In sum, as children learn to read and understand what it means to be a reader, they integrate their understanding of the world, words, texts, images, and language to engage with texts and develop deeper meanings.

As educators, we must envision the kinds of readers we need for a future in which multilingualism is the norm. Beers and Probst (2017) write, “Words matter in a democracy, and thus it is vitally important that all members of the society respect and attend closely to them” (p. 162). They add, “Ultimately, we are teaching children to read the text of their own lives. We want them open to possibility, open to ideas, open to new evidence that encourages a change of opinion” (p. 163). We ask, what are the qualities in readers that we need for a more multilingual, interconnected, and globalized world?

**Reading as a Dynamic Process**

Reading does not start with teaching students the letter *a*, but rather with the texts that surround them at home, such as environmental print (which often comes in the languages of the community), daily mail, notes from and by family members, conversations among family members, digital tools used in the household, as well as other ways of experiencing print. In some families, books and other literacy resources, such as recorded songs and language-based play experiences, abound. In other families, oral stories and playful poetic language are more common. Despite those differences, we must embrace a broad definition of reading, and recognize children’s experiences and strengths.

Our ideas about the reading process shape nearly every instructional decision we make in our classrooms. Our reading instruction must not be static nor “one size fits all.” We must draw upon our knowledge and resources about the reading process to support and challenge our students. We also draw on our own experiences as readers, since these often inform how we teach reading. When it comes to emergent bilingual students, we must understand how their rich linguistic repertoire impacts and influences their development as readers. Our pedagogy must start with the whole child and how he or she interacts with text.
These ideas are not new. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) coined the idea of reading as a transaction—a transaction that is carried out between the reader and the text, within a particular instance. For example, the first time I (Cecilia) read Mario Vargas Llosa’s La Fiesta del Chivo (The Goat’s Feast) I considered it the story of a dictator in a faraway land. After I visited the Dominican Republic and worked with New York City bilingual teachers who come from the Dominican Republic, I reread Vargas Llosa’s book and viewed it very differently because of my new personal experiences. Now I knew the people whose families were deeply affected by the actions of Trujillo, a Dominican dictator.

From Rosenblatt’s (1978) perspective, the text is just marks on paper until a reader engages with it. She argued vehemently for a transactional view of reading. Meaning lies in the interaction between the text and the reader. The reader’s prior experiences impact the construction of meaning, which is why no two readers will walk away with the same understanding of the same text, nor have the same experience.

More recently, K. Goodman and Y. Goodman (2014), Harvey and Goudvis (2017), Allyn and Morrell (2015), Goodman and Fries (2016), and Beers and Probst (2017) have urged teachers to define reading as thinking, as the construction of meaning, and as social enactment. The reader is not passive, but active and in charge of his or her own agency. We need to keep in mind also that who we are as readers changes as our experiences shift and as we read about familiar topics more deeply or read about new topics. As Tara Westover describes in her memoir Educated (2018), readers develop their voice in relation to both the texts and the people that usher them through the reading process. She writes, “My life was narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It had never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs” (Westover, 2018, p. 197).

We want all of our students, including emergent bilinguals, to grow as readers with the deep understanding that they are agents of the reading process, with strong voices. For the youngest emergent bilinguals, reading is also a transactional process. Young children need reading experiences. While they are learning to read, they need ample opportunities to interact with others (teachers, family members, classmates). Books, words, and stories come alive when connected to memories of being read to or reading along with others, as well as discussing those books, words, and stories with others. Talk deepens
their understanding of texts. When children live in a world of print and languages, they become familiar with the words around them.

Reading for emergent bilinguals does not mean reading in one language or another or transitioning to reading in only one language. Emergent bilinguals should be encouraged to use the full span of their linguistic and cultural resources to engage in reading. For example, while a student may read a book in English about going to the market, he may recall in Chinese experiences of going to different types of markets. The child might also share in Chinese the names of some vegetables with a partner. If the teacher invites the child to share his or her thinking using his or her entire linguistic repertoire, it will likely be a richer and deeper experience than if the child shared only in English. Teaching this way allows the student to connect to the reading process in multifaceted ways.

For emergent bilinguals, the reading process should not be divided into English reading and reading in another language. It is a unified process. If we see reading from an internal perspective—as it exists for the reader—we see more clearly that reading is not partitioned into various named languages. García (2020) writes, “Even though the teacher, in what she or he imagines is an English-language classroom, may be viewing instruction only through English and restricting other languages, bilingual students need to orchestrate, and are in fact orchestrating, all their multilingual/multimodal resources in the act of reading a text” (p. 558). Emergent bilinguals, regardless of the type of program they are in, are developing biliteracy, which is, at its heart, a meaning-making process that involves reading and writing across languages and modalities (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

As you read the rest of this book, we invite you to reimagine reading and writing from the perspective of children and how they bring together all of their resources to make meaning and enjoy text. Regardless of the grade you teach, or the students you have, one of your first teaching steps is to create an intentional reading environment that is rooted in emergent bilinguals’ strengths. In the following section, we discuss how setting the stage for learning can shift when you take a translanguaging perspective to create a linguistically rich and welcoming environment.
The Reading Environment From a Translanguaging Perspective

Creating a reading environment where multilingualism is the norm is critical. One of the first steps is to ensure that your classroom contains resources that reflect your students’ languages and cultures. Those resources should include the print around the room, such as posters and anchor charts, as well as books that are read to students and to which they have access. The classroom should also contain reading materials written in the languages the children speak, such as fiction and nonfiction texts, environmental print, songs, poems, magazines, and student- and teacher-made announcements.

Lastly, it is important to understand what home literacies exist and to value them, even if they are unfamiliar to you. For example, I (Laura) grew up in a home that was rich in oral language but contained very few books. For many educators, that may sound an alarm that I was in danger of missing out on a literate life or falling behind even before going to school. However, my life was rich and quite literate because of the stories I heard while walking to the fruit store and before falling asleep. It’s critical for teachers to value all types of literacies, even if they do not match those the school values.

Ways to Create a Multilingual Reading Landscape

Display:
- photographs of various places in the community and maps (local, world)
- children’s writing in all their languages
- teacher-made charts (classroom community–generated)
- books in a variety of genres (e.g., poetry, nonfiction, fiction). To the best of your ability, make sure they represent the students’ language backgrounds.
Embracing Diverse Children’s Literature

One way to link students’ home and school lives is by gathering diverse, multilingual children’s literature. Here, we discuss how children’s literature can expand horizons in your classroom to create a rich multilingual reading environment.

The landscape of children’s literature is constantly changing. While more books with diverse characters are being released, these types of books still do not parallel the U.S. population at large (Henderson, Warren, Whitmore, Seely Flint, Tropp Laman, & Jaggers, 2020; Lee & Low, 2019). Teachers must make conscientious and continual efforts to stay abreast of the literature available so that their classroom libraries are filled with books that are culturally and linguistically relevant and sustaining.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) calls upon teachers to offer books that serve as “mirrors” and “windows.” She writes, “Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (1). In other words, Sims Bishop notes the importance of books containing characters and experiences that children can intimately relate to, as well as books that open wide entire new worlds. Since Sims Bishop’s call, the need for books that reflect the identities of children from diverse communities has become even more urgent (España & Herrera, 2020; Lee & Low, 2019; Lehner-Quam, West, & Espinosa, 2020).

In Chapter 2, we invited you to examine the children in your class, the languages they speak, and the resources that they bring. Now, use that knowledge to think about the kinds of stories and books that reflect their experiences. Janelle Henderson, an elementary school teacher who challenges other teachers to interrogate their classroom libraries,

This English as a New Language (ENL) teacher offers her students books in a variety of languages, which contributes to a rich multilingual environment.
pushes our thinking (Henderson et al., 2020). She notes that while it is commendable to have, for example, books with Black characters, it is our responsibility to make sure that those characters reflect the diversity of our students’ personalities and lived experiences. She reminds us how important it is to resist accepting classroom libraries that we inherit, and instead constantly inquire about and search for books that actively reflect a range of identities and support students in seeing both themselves and others.

Ways to Interrogate Your Classroom Library

When you engage in this process of interrogating your classroom library, ask yourself:

- Who is depicted in the books that you read aloud to children and that they read on their own? Think about the characters in books along multiple dimensions (gender, sex, race, identity, personality, etc.). How are they depicted? Are they represented in simplistic or complex ways?

- When students choose books, do they have access to books that depict kids like them in complex ways?

- When students choose books, do they have access to books that depict diverse people across the United States in complex ways?

- How are characters who speak languages other than English depicted in the books?

Once you’ve considered the books you have and the books you would like to have, you need to locate the latter. How do you begin? Look for books that have won awards from a wide range of reputable committees and organizations. By reputable, we mean committees and organizations that not only examine children’s books for their quality, but also for their contribution to expanding the diversity of characters and content. The following list of committees and organizations, while not exhaustive, can help you begin to search for books that serve as mirrors and windows for the children in your classroom. We want to highlight the Pura Belpré Award, which focuses on Latinx authors writing about the Latinx experience. Winners of this award celebrate multilingualism for Spanish-English bilinguals.
Looking for Books? Start Here!

- **We Need Diverse Books** diversebooks.org
- **Pura Belpre Award** ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal
- **Coretta Scott King Award** ala.org/rt/emiert/cskbookawards
- **America’s Award** claspprograms.org/americasaward
- **Schneider Family Book Award** ala.org/awardsgrants/schneider-family-book-award
- **Jane Addams Peace Association** janeaddamschildrensbookaward.org
- **American Indians in Children’s Literature** americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/p/best-books.html
- **Charlotte Huck Award** ncte.org/awards/ncte-childrens-book-awards/charlotte-huck-award
- **Orbis Pictus Award** ncte.org/awards/orbis-pictus-award-nonfiction-for-children
- **NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children** ncte.org/awards/excellence-in-poetry-for-children-living-american-poet

**Establishing Routines and Expectations**

It’s important that daily routines and expectations for your students are written in the languages they speak, and perhaps also with pictures to convey key ideas. If the schedule is predictable, the routines clear, and the reading environment student-centered, emergent bilinguals will take ownership and be able to exercise fully their agency during reading time. Remember, reading the daily routines is a way to support children’s literacy development in authentic, purposeful ways. Reading is reading, regardless of the language in which it is done.
Preparing for and Managing Reading Time

Here are some questions to help you reflect on the way you prepare for and manage reading time.

• How do I want to organize the reading time and how will it best support my students?
• What do I know about how my emergent bilingual students read, and based on this understanding, how can I support emergent bilinguals as they read?
• What are my students’ practices outside of school?
• In what languages do the readers in the community read?
• What do you want to share with the emergent bilingual children about what you value about the reading practices you want them to develop in your class?
• In what ways do these practices contribute, sustain, and celebrate the children’s multilingualism?
• In what languages do you need to offer the children reading material?
Emergent Bilinguals as Emergent Readers

It is important to distinguish between the terms emergent bilingual readers and emergent readers in general. Emergent bilingual readers are children who are learning to read in two or more languages, regardless of their developmental phase. Emergent readers are children who are gaining knowledge about what it means to be a reader and that reading holds meaning while they are developing concepts of print. Over time, they will develop knowledge about sounds, letters, and words, always starting with what’s important to them.

This section is about emergent bilingual readers, who, no doubt, have had rich experiences with text, often in various named languages, from a very early age.

Where Does Reading Begin?

Children are cradled in oral language and print. Beginning at birth, most of them participate in and hear conversations around them from important people in their lives. Through those conversations, they hear stories that are told to them and read to them. How children learn to talk about those stories can vary, depending on the sociocultural contexts of their family. What is important for us educators to remember is that, in all families, there is richness of language.

The literacy practices around print are multimodal and differ, depending on the sociocultural and linguistic practices of the family. Language practices are clearly part of a family’s funds of knowledge.

Three-year-old Rosaly enjoys one of her favorite bilingual books.
(Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; López-Robertson, 2017). Children are also surrounded by music, TV images and sounds, street signs, advertisements, digital media, books, and other forms of communication. There are many pathways to learning language. Emergent bilingual children come from homes in which authentic literacy practices serve the family’s purposes, and many of those practices are carried out in a variety of languages. Family members engage in translanguaging or use resources from a variety of named languages.

Emergent bilingual children learn early on that print has function and purpose (to advertise, to advise, to show, to inspire, to share feelings, to help the reader figure out how to do something, and to argue, among others). They, often with their parents, are continually reading their environment and interacting with it. The print is often in a variety of languages to serve particular purposes and needs in the community. Children observe their parents engaged in authentic literacy events daily, ranging from reading the newspaper, to finding out what’s on sale at the supermarket, to taking in information for their jobs. They might observe their parents reading a text on their phone in a language other than English. They might observe them reading the news in English but talking about it in a language other than English.

Family literacy practices are not static but instead evolve based on need, purpose, and access to resources (smartphones and computers, for example). We must start with an understanding that children come to school with language practices that were developed within families and communities, and their backgrounds may be different from what we typically value in school.
Into the Classroom

Exploring Environmental Print

It is the beginning of the school year. Mr. Lee asks the children in his first-grade class if they know how to read. Only a few hands go up. He reminds the children that he thinks everyone is a reader and that he has a way of showing them. Mr. Lee takes the children on a walk around the community to examine its environmental print. During the walk, he talks to the children about the purpose of signs they notice: a stop sign, a stoplight, a crossing street sign, one-way and two-way street signs, the school’s entry sign, no parking signs, etc. He also takes photographs of these signs. The next day, Mr. Lee asks the children again if they think they are readers. He shares a slide presentation of the photographs he took the day before. He asks the children to read with him each sign as it is projected and explain its meaning. To ensure that everyone fully participates, he pairs up students to translate for one another, as necessary. For example, he partners Joaquin, who speaks Spanish at home, with Silvia, who speaks mostly English with her family. Joaquin shares in Spanish that the sign with an arrow means “una vía,” and then Silvia translates “una vía” to English, “one way.” At the end of the session, Mr. Lee reminds the
children that they are all readers. He then tells the children they will create a bilingual class book about signs. He again pairs them carefully and gives partners a sign to draw and write about. This book will become part of the classroom library.

Next, Mr. Lee writes a letter to parents, asking them to send in empty boxes for items the family buys often, such as cereal, beans, and cookies. He also asks them to take a walk with their children in the neighborhood and take pictures of the print they see. His aim is to encourage the families to closely examine how print exists in the world. In the classroom, he will ask the children to share their noticings, and he will create a new learning experience with environmental print by displaying the text in the artifacts and photos the children bring that illustrates for everyone that they are all readers, and that print exists everywhere. In creating this experience, Mr. Lee wants to ensure that the classroom environment reflects the print that exists in the communities in which the children live, as well as the fact that in many cases, texts in these communities exist in multiple languages.

Early childhood teachers are often encouraged to place great value on alphabetic knowledge when children enter school. The rich knowledge about literacy that emergent bilinguals bring to school, and how it exists in their particular multilingual communities, is often overlooked. As a result, emergent bilinguals are frequently viewed as empty vessels or, worse, incapable of becoming successful readers and writers. As teachers of young emergent bilinguals, we want to capitalize on the knowledge emergent bilingual children bring with them.

As we stated in Chapter 2, teachers should pay attention to the linguistic landscape of the classroom because it sends a powerful message to families and students that their language practices are valued. Also, when familiar linguistic and social practices are present, they serve as starting places for children’s literacy development.
Classrooms are small communities that showcase cultural norms through the print on display. For example, many elementary teachers post welcome signs on the door in English only, even if their students speak languages other than English. We believe the environmental print of your classroom should be multilingual, capturing the languages of all your students. Environmental print is one way young readers begin to read through their lived experiences in the classroom. At the heart of that action is the question, “What message do I want to send to the children and their families about the language ecology of my classroom?”

Here are some questions to consider when you think about environmental print and your students’ languages and social resources.

- Are labels in your classroom in English and a language other than English?
- In dual-language bilingual classrooms, do the resources in the home languages have an equal presence with the resources in English? Are there resources in the languages of children who speak a language other than the target languages? (For example, in a Spanish-English dual-language bilingual program, it is possible that children who speak Albanian attend. Are there resources in Albanian, in addition to Spanish and English?)
- In monolingual classrooms, are there resources in languages other than English?
- Does the work posted on bulletin boards reflect the languages of the students in your classroom and the broader school community?

As you consider these questions, take a tour of your classroom, starting with the door and moving to the walls—the bulletin boards (including the titles and children’s work), anchor charts, posters; parent corner; books in the library; student materials on the desks; labels on objects, materials, and furniture. The chart on the following page may help you.
# Multilingual Analysis of Classroom Environmental Print

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Feature</th>
<th>How does this feature contribute to a multilingual print environment?</th>
<th>What are some ways to incorporate multilingualism?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Door</td>
<td>It’s the first thing that students, parents, faculty, and visitors see and sets the tone for the classroom.</td>
<td>Welcome greeting in different languages Pictures of diverse book covers on the door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titles of Bulletin Boards</td>
<td>Normalizes multilingualism of students’ work featured for the classroom community</td>
<td>Use bilingual titles on bulletin boards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters &amp; Photos (children, families, the community)</td>
<td>Serves as a reference or affirmation for students</td>
<td>Put up bilingual posters and pictures and/or posters in languages that students use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Made Anchor Charts to Support Content Areas</td>
<td>Serves as a multilingual reference tool for students</td>
<td>Create bilingual/multilingual anchor charts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Resources on Desk</td>
<td>Provides students with resources to support their work</td>
<td>Provide students with bilingual dictionaries (with pictures).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials around the Room (e.g., books in different genres and languages, including books written by children in the class)</td>
<td>Provides access to a classroom library that is inclusive of diverse authors, which includes the children themselves, and features diverse language practices Ensure these are representative of multilingualism of the children and their families.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Passes</td>
<td>Normalizes multilingualism around the school</td>
<td>Make school passes multilingual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labels for objects, materials, class areas, content-area stations, class jobs, calendar, weather, and furniture</td>
<td>Provides a reference for students of classroom features Normalizes bilingualism in the classroom</td>
<td>Post labels for objects, materials, and furniture in both English and the languages that students use. Provide labels for content areas in multiple languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send-Home Letters to Caregivers</td>
<td>Provides information to all caregivers, regardless of the language they use Sends the message to everyone that they are included in the classroom community</td>
<td>Send letters to caregivers in the languages they use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word walls and content area-specific displays</td>
<td>Give students access to key words in multiple languages</td>
<td>Provide translations and definitions of key words in the languages that students use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Corner</td>
<td>Provides information to all caregivers, regardless of the language they use Sends the message to caregivers that the classroom community is inclusive</td>
<td>Provides resources to caregivers in the languages they use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Find a blank form online at scholastic.com/RootedResources.
Action 5 continued

Here we offer starting points for weaving students’ home practices into the classroom environment. Many of them may seem familiar but are likely only in English, making multilingual students and their families feel invisible.

- Ask families to send in boxes for food items they typically buy, including boxes in a variety of languages. Create a chart with the empty boxes and labels gathered and read them with the children. Help them see that opportunities for reading exist everywhere.
- Go to the supermarket and take photos of product labels, including labels in languages other than English. Then examine the photos with your students.
- Take a walk around the neighborhood with students and read and photograph the signs. Notice in which languages the signs are written. Talk about the purposes these signs have.
- Make or have children make signs for important places around the school building, such as the office, the bathrooms, and the gym. Then, with the children, post the signs in the appropriate locations.
- Explore students’ names as a wonderful way to personalize the language ecology of a classroom. Students may create self-portraits or family portraits that they label with names. Their names might be part of a highly visible attendance chart or job chart. By studying the spelling of letters of their own names, their classmates’ names, or the names of people important to them, children learn the characteristics of each letter and how to use all letters in a word to read it, not just the first letter. Also, focus on the pronunciation of each name and how the letter sounds vary, depending on the language in which you’re speaking.


**Into the Classroom**

**Exploring Children’s Names**

It is the beginning of the school year in Karina’s second-grade bilingual class. Karina is working on establishing a classroom community and is asking the children to share family stories about the origins of their names. Because children’s names are so central to their identities and connect them deeply to their families, learning about names is a powerful way to support young readers and should be where early literacy begins. In a commitment to involve families, she sends home the letter on the next page in Spanish and English.

In the next few days, children share their name stories with the class during morning meeting. They prepare by writing their stories and creating illustrations. Then their work is posted in a display in the hall outside the classroom. Here are some other possible engagements related to children’s names.

- Read name-related books to the class. Note also that several of these are available in English and in Spanish. (See some suggestions on page 60.)
- Ask parents to write down in their preferred language the story of their children’s names. Then have children share with their classmates how they got their names.
- If your students are young, label their cubbies with their name next to their picture. From a literacy perspective, you may want to explore how to write a name in other languages—for example, José, Joseph, Josef, and Ioseph.
- Before class, write children’s names on cards and place the cards on a table near the door. When children enter, have them choose their name cards. Then ask them to compare their names with those of classmates. (Often, they will notice just the first letter, so encourage them to go further with spelling.) Have them say their names to one another, using the pronunciation their families prefer. This name-sharing practice builds awareness of particular letter sounds or accented syllables.
- Sing a song that includes the children’s names. Be sure to pronounce each child’s name according to the family’s preference.
Dear Caregiver,

Our school year has started, and we are rapidly getting acquainted with one another. When children know each other’s stories, the learning environment is richer. I always start the year with a study of our names—specifically, the origins of our names. I ask you to talk with your child and, together, write the story of his or her name, using these questions that we developed as a class:

- What does my name mean?
- Am I named after someone? If so, whom?
- Why did you select this name for me?

You might share the meaning of your child’s name or something about the person after whom he or she is named. It is important that you both talk and write.

When children study their names, it empowers them, gives them a sense of belonging, and offers glimpses into their family history.

I will be sharing the story of my name, too, and reading books that focus on names, such as...

- *Alma and How She Got Her Name* (2018) by Juana Martinez-Neal
- *The Name Jar* (2001) by Yangsook Choi
- *Chrysanthemum* (1991) by Kevin Henkes
- *My Name Is Yoon* (2014) by Helen Recorvits
- *Your Name Is a Song* (2020) by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow
- *Thunder Boy Jr.* (2016) by Sherman Alexie

Thank you in advance for taking the time to do this homework with your child.

Su maestra,

Karina
Teaching Concepts of Print With Predictable Books

It’s important for young emergent bilingual children to acquire the basic concepts of print, as well as knowledge of the alphabet and letter-sound correspondence. From our perspective, the issue at hand is how to create opportunities for them to build their reading identities, while capitalizing on their entire linguistic repertoire, which includes developing their concepts of print.

Sometimes, early literacy experiences begin with isolated bits of language. For example, when students are learning to read in Spanish, teachers often begin with syllables: “ma, me, mi, mo, mu.” They then move to studying words, and then sentences. Finally, they move to reading simple stories. However, those experiences offer children vocabulary that is too controlled, often at the expense of making meaning and experiencing relevance.

Instead, we propose that you read aloud quality predictable books, which allow children to join in on the reading because of their naturally repetitive patterns. Children can predict what comes next because the text flows naturally. The power of a good predictable book is that it carries the reader. It invites him or her to make connections to prior knowledge. Captivating predictable books offer children access to the richness of language and craft. And they’re available in English, other languages, and bilingual versions.
What a Good Predictable Book Offers
the Emergent Bilingual Reader

- Illustrations that support and extend the text
- Natural language (how people talk and use language in a particular community)
- Repetitive, yet meaningful text throughout: phrases, sentences, repeating words
- Rhythmic language
- Ideas that build on one another (cumulative text)
- Familiar topics
- Stories that capture oral traditions, poetry, and song (culturally sustaining texts)
- Familiar characters, when the books are part of a series

Given the wide variety of predictable books available, you can carefully and intentionally select them. Choose based on your knowledge of emergent bilingual children, their needs as readers, and their knowledge of predictable books. For example, when reading the bilingual predictable book, *Maria Had a Little Llama/María tenía una llamita* by Angela Dominguez (2013), you can begin by showing children the cover and inviting them to describe what they notice. After a few comments, ask the children to predict what the book might be about.

Consider translanguaging and remind children that they can share their thoughts using their entire linguistic repertoire. For example, nudge them to notice key details about the cover and make predictions about the book in the language of their choice. Read the book's title and author and illustrator's names while pointing to them. As you read, demonstrate directionality. For example, in English and Spanish, readers read left to right, top to bottom. In other languages, such as Arabic, Hebrew, Urdu, and Persian, directionality in reading is right to left. Explain that you will read the book to them and stop at spots to ask them to predict what will happen next, again in the language of their choice. Doing this allows them to capitalize on their linguistic repertoires to construct meaning. While reading the book, share the meanings of challenging
words by pointing to them, providing synonyms, and/or asking someone to translate their meaning. This is also an opportunity to discuss the purpose of punctuation and capitalization and to guide them in developing knowledge of letters.

When you’ve finished the book, spend a few minutes talking about it. Questions such as “What did you like about this book?” and “What did you notice about its language?” provide opportunities for children to draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire, making the discussion richer. Lastly, offer the book to children so they can explore it on their own during independent reading time. In a follow-up reading of the book, ask emergent bilingual children to join you. Encourage them to make predictions. Maybe cover a repetitive phrase that challenges the emergent bilingual children to enhance their abilities to predict.

You may also want to revisit the book on another day and focus on the semantic cueing system (what makes sense) or the graphophonic cueing system (what looks and sounds correct). For example, if you want emergent bilingual children to pay attention to the semantic cueing system, choose a word or phrase from the book, cover it, and ask children to think about a word or phrase that would make sense. The last step would then be to cover the word or phrase and talk with the children to confirm whether their prediction makes sense (synonym) or it matches the actual text. It is important that you discuss with them why the prediction made sense or if it changed the meaning.

If you’re going to focus on the graphophonic cueing system, choose a predictable book that provides emergent bilingual children with semantic and syntactic support. Choose a word from the book and cover the end of it. Ask the child to predict what the word might be, given the letter or letters he or she can see. Slowly reveal more letters until the child is able to determine the words. You can also help the child learn the sound of individual letters and chunks and/or patterns by connecting the target word to words that they already know.

Another option to help the children pay attention to all three cueing systems is to write the text of the predictable book on sentence strips, and ask the emergent bilingual child to organize the sentence strips in a way that makes sense, at first with some support of the illustrations, then slowly removing the scaffold. It is important to allow children to use their entire linguistic repertoires for all of these activities.
Student-Made Predictable Books

Children can also be authors by composing a predictable book that integrates the languages they speak. This is a great opportunity for students to discuss from a writer’s perspective concepts of print (title, author, illustrator, etc.). They can talk about spaces on the page for drawing and spaces for writing. From there, you might want to have each child compose a page. When the book is completed, the class can celebrate its publication with a read-aloud.

Emergent bilingual children need ample opportunities to return to a favorite predictable book over and over. Sometimes they might do a choral reading of the book, sometimes they might read it with a partner, and sometimes they may read it independently. These practices go a long way in helping emergent bilingual children develop a positive stance toward reading.

Teaching Phonemic Awareness and Phonics in Context

Phonemic awareness and phonics are essential to developing readers, as long as these are not taught in isolation. Phonemic awareness is an understanding that spoken words are composed of individual sounds called phonemes. Phonics focuses on the understanding of letter (grapheme)-sound (phoneme) relationships and their spelling. When taught in context, both skills help students decode words and, over time, read more complex texts independently. Moreover, phonemic awareness and phonics, while often considered foundational, should not be taught in isolation and solely as a precursor to reading (Shanahan, 2020). Reading development is not strictly linear but is best described as a dynamic process and for emergent bilinguals, necessarily involves their linguistic repertoire.
When tackling phonemic awareness and phonics with emergent bilinguals, it is important to value the language they use most often at home, which can be difficult because so many programs target foundational skills solely in English. However, when teaching in a dual-language bilingual program, phonemic awareness should be covered in both English and in relevant ways in the students’ home languages. For example, examine rhyming words in the home language. When teaching in a monolingual program, you can invite the children to engage their families in sharing songs and spending time exploring the rhyming sounds and comparing them to rhyming sounds in English. We feel strongly that for striving emergent bilingual readers, or those taking longer than others to learn to read, teachers must provide opportunities for them to receive multimodal foundational support in the languages they speak. Otherwise, they will be denied intervention in their languages and, by default, be tracked into English-only approaches.

For emergent bilingual students, the teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness needs to be contextualized in reading authentic texts. Phonics in isolation becomes an impossible task in a language the child is learning. To teach phonics well, it is important to know individual children as readers and understand their needs. Some children need more explicit phonics instruction (always in context and with the intention that reading for meaning is the goal), while others develop understandings about phonics with more ease. Traditionally, phonics instruction has been carried out through innumerable drills and worksheets that have students isolate sounds. Students spend so much time learning the sounds in individual words, they never get to the task of reading. Consequently, they become disengaged because they never see how phonics can actually help them with their reading. Furthermore, those drills and worksheets are usually in English and divorced from authentic meaning.

Even English-speaking students may be stumped by what they are supposed to do! My son (Laura’s) was recently sorting pictures containing images that began with either \( n \) or \( p \), to help him learn letter sounds. After looking at a picture of a nest with eggs, he declared, “This one’s a mystery!” because he was focusing on the eggs in the picture and not the nest. While my son has a wide English vocabulary, many emergent bilinguals are just in the process of acquiring it and, therefore, nearly every picture clue may be a “mystery” for them. Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction for emergent bilinguals
makes sense when their interests, intentions, and own words are taken into consideration. They need to be immersed in analyzing phonics, using words that matter to them and taught in context.

At the core of reading is the construction of meaning. Without question, children need decoding skills to comprehend text and transact with it. However, too often, emergent bilinguals are expected to learn to decode before having any meaningful experiences with text, which deprives them of the enjoyment of reading. When teaching phonics, we must always keep in mind a vision of the kind of readers we want to help develop: readers who know that reading is the construction of meaning, readers who understand that sounding out is only one of many word-solving strategies, and readers who are active, engaged, and in conversations with themselves, the text, the author, other texts, and so forth. The teaching of phonics should never be in question. However, how we teach it to emergent bilinguals must be rooted in their multilingual resources.

**Children’s Writing, Phonics, and Phonemic Awareness**

Learning to read and learning to write are tightly interconnected. When children are encouraged to sound out words as they write them and use invented (phonetic) spelling, and are given appropriate support, guidance, and demonstrations, they develop awareness of the alphabetic system. For example, a child might at first hear only the letter l in love. But when the teacher helps him or her stretch the word (“l-o-v-v-e”), the child will likely first hear the v. In time, the child will also hear the o and be able to write lov. When children use invented spelling to convey messages, they develop metalinguistic awareness. They might compare the spelling of words that follow similar patterns and discover that only one letter sets them apart: cake, bake. Invented spelling also helps children develop curiosity about language, letter-sound correspondence, word patterns, etc.

In essence, when children use phonetic spelling, they are applying their evolving knowledge of letters and phonemes. Watching them write and reading their writing enables us to find out about their knowledge of the alphabetic system and their phonics and phonemic awareness skills, and, from there, provide explicit instruction more effectively. Children need opportunities to explore letter-sound relationships on their own terms and receive explicit instruction. Invented spelling is never static. As children
become more sophisticated spellers, their knowledge of phonics and phonemic awareness also develops further.

When young children write, capitalizing on their entire linguistic repertoire using invented spelling, they are using everything they know to create their own meaningful texts. It is possible that letter-sound correspondence from one named language will appear in the spelling of another named language. For example, a child might hear “dejrispriti” when trying to write “The horse is pretty.” What is important at this point is that the teacher works within what Lev Vygotsky named as the child’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), that space where the teacher can support the child in gaining deeper, more complex understandings about print. What matters is focusing first on the meaning, the child’s written message—what he or she is attempting to tell the reader. Next, ask a question such as “What color is the horse?” Then point to the words the and horse, and sound them out slowly, helping the child to make each letter-sound correspondence by sounding out individual words and really stretching each sound. You might also point to the word the and remind the child that it is one of the class’s sight words, and that in English the letter h sometimes sounds like a j in Spanish. Depending on what you know about the child, those two points might be all you work on. On another day, you might work with the child on the letter-sound correspondence of a word such as pretty.

For the most part, letter-sound correspondence in Spanish is very predictable—that is, each letter has for the most part one sound. As mentioned previously, in Spanish, the teaching of writing and reading has often started with teaching syllables (e.g., ma, me, mi, mo, mu). Then, students are asked to put these syllables together (e.g., Mi mamá me mima [My mother cares for me]). This often results in a sentence filled with controlled vocabulary. We recommend that when reading in Spanish, teachers help children examine the syllables of a word within the context of authentic reading or writing experiences. For example, begin by reading the poem to the class. Then identify a key word, write it separately, break it down into syllables, examine each syllable, helping the child stretch...
the word to hear the different sounds that make up the word. Then read the word together with the child. Afterward, it is important to go back to reading the whole text together one more time. It is important to help them see that the purpose of these experiences is not doing exercises in isolation, but reading a text that make sense.

When working with a child's writing, identify one word from the child's writing, spell it conventionally, and if you want to study with the child how it is composed, break it down into syllables. Assist the child in hearing and sounding out each syllable. Then go back to the child's writing. Focus on the message the child is conveying and accept approximations. In spite of the predictability of letter-sound correspondence in Spanish, give children the opportunities to read predictable texts, songs, and poems, and to explore letter-sound correspondence (syllables) in the context of predictable books. Help them also develop their ability to hear syllables in the context of their own writing. Often, children will hear the vowels first because vowels tend to have a stronger sound in Spanish than English (Hudelson, 1981). For example, a child may write in Spanish: Ooaia/Yo quiero a mi mamá. In English, it would be: llvmmom/I love my mom.

**Closing Thoughts**

The reading process is complex. A translanguaging vision of reading posits that reading starts with the person. In other words, the multilingual person does not read in one language or the other, but rather brings his or her whole linguistic repertoire and social repertoire to the text. Reading cuts across named languages, modalities, and experiences. That's why we insist that you encourage emergent bilingual children to read books in their home language, the language they're learning, and with features from different linguistic repertoires. We also encourage you to make sure they know themselves as readers who have particular interests and areas of expertise. As teachers, we want children to recognize that reading is a meaningful act and engage them in reading as it exists in their communities.
Suggestions for Professional Development

The professional development suggestions in this chapter guide you to examine your own experiences as a reader (and writer). We also ask you to explore your collection of predictable books and to tap into the potential of nursery rhymes, songs, and chants as you more intentionally and purposefully plan for translanguaging in early literacy experiences.

As you become more knowledgeable about the reading process, it is important that you examine how you learned to read and write. In Appendix B, we offer you a recollection with some questions that can lead you to examine your own experiences as a reader and a writer.

1. Analyze with a colleague predictable books in your classroom and ways to incorporate opportunities for translanguaging. After looking through your library, take out a few books that you identify as predictable books. (Review our description of what characterizes a predictable book.) What makes each book predictable? Would all the students in your class understand the patterns? If not, what could you do to support them to understand what makes the book predictable? Does the book have controlled vocabulary? How can you tell? With a partner, read through three to five of these books. Think about what you could do to support students in understanding the patterns that make each book predictable. Also think about how you could incorporate students’ language and social resources to understand the book.

2. Create resources for the children to learn from each other’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds by incorporating family input. Ask the parents/guardians in your class to share via video, audio, or in person a nursery rhyme from their cultural background. Ask the parents to provide the oral version as well as the print version. Introduce it to the class. You can create a class book, a center, or a poster with these nursery rhymes.

3. Pick a nursery rhyme that you know well and analyze it. Who are the characters? Which language features would you like to highlight, including the nursery rhyme’s phonemic awareness development possibilities? Find ways to make connections between the nursery rhyme and your students’ lives and interests, if possible. Create a plan to teach it to the class, including introducing it, reciting it, and pointing out features. Introduce the nursery rhyme to the class and support the home-school connection by sending resources for families home so that children can share it with someone they live with.