Chapter 33
Understanding and Teaching Emergent Bilingual Students
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ABSTRACT
The aim of this chapter is to provide pre-service and in-service teaching with an understanding of who emergent bilingual students are and how they can adapt their practice in order to use students’ home language as a resource rather than as a deficit. The chapter will share findings from a study conducted with emergent bilingual students in a kindergarten writing workshop. It will also focus on how teachers should adopt an additive approach to language that expands children’s linguistic, social, and cultural resources while supporting learning a new language as well and literacy development.

INTRODUCTION
There are four million students who are classified as English Language Learners in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Today, most of these students attend schools with restrictive language policies that do not allow them to use their native language as a resource for learning (Gándara, 2000; Garcia & Curry-Rodriguez, 2000; Linton, 2007). Emergent bilinguals (García, 2005, 2009) are placed in mainstream classrooms where they are faced with learning a new language and simultaneously learning to read and write in English. Students receive limited support through educational programs such as English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) pullout or structured immersion programs, but many bilingual students who demonstrate oral proficiency are often excited from these programs under the assumption that the students have full command of the English language due to speak conversational English (Grant & Wong, 2003).

A key factor that impacts the educational achievement of bilingual students are the teachers that facilitate instruction. Teachers have a significant influence on the academic achievement of students. Darling-Hammond (2000) has identified the following general qualities of effective teachers: strong intelligence and verbal abilities, strong content knowledge, knowledge on how to develop higher order thinking, understanding of learning development, teacher experience, and adaptive expertise that allows
the teacher to make decisions based on students needs. Darling-Hammond (2000) concludes that there is a “strong, significant relationship of teacher quality variables to student achievement” (p. 23). This analysis also concludes that student characteristics, such as poverty or the label of being an English Learner, are negatively correlated to the qualifications of teachers. In addition, it is important to note that the growing diversity of students is not reflected in the teacher demographics. Emergent bilinguals are being educated by a teaching force of predominantly White, monolingual, and female (Boser, 2011). During the 2007-2008 school year, eighty-three percent of full-time teachers were White, 7 percent were Black, 7 percent were Hispanic, and 1 percent were Asian (Aud et al., 2012). In comparison, the number of students from diverse backgrounds continues to grow in U.S. schools. This chapter seeks to provide new understandings and ways in which teachers are working with emergent bilingual students.

BACKGROUND

The labels that are imposed on students are important and impact the way that students are viewed. Many emergent bilingual students continue to be labeled with identifiers that mark them as deficient or lacking through the use of terms such as Limited English Proficient or English Language Learner (Gort & Bauer, 2012; Reyes, 2006). These terms position students as lacking, instead of recognizing their linguistic competencies as they learn to read and write. The term most commonly used, English Language Learner, “devalues other languages and puts the English in a sole position of legitimacy” (Garcia, Klefgen, & Falchi, 2008, p. 7). For this reason, I adopt the suggested term emergent bilingual (Garcia 2009; 2010; Garcia et al., 2008; Gort & Bauer, 2012; Reyes, 2006). The term emergent bilingual is utilized in this study to refer to “young children who speak a native language other than English and are in the dynamic process of developing bilingual and biliterate competencies, with the support of their communities” (Reyes, 2006). The term also views their bilingualism as an asset rather than a deficiency and positions this group of students as having potential instead of seeing them as deficient because they speak a different language. In essence, this term validates the students’ home language and thus affirms their identity as language users.

While emergent bilinguals are developing their oral language competencies in both languages, they are often also developing their written literacy in English and Spanish (Garcia et al., 2008; Reyes, 2006). Biliteracy is defined by Perez and Torres-Guzman (1996) as “the acquisition and learning of the decoding and encoding of and around print using two linguistic and cultural systems in order to convey messages in a variety of texts” (p. 54). This definition of biliteracy takes into account how reading and writing development are influenced by the linguistic system. It also recognizes how reading and writing are embedded in the cultural practices and how the cultural system plays a part in a child’s literacy development.

Although bilingual students are a group of students who speak two or more languages, there are differences in this group that can help us understand their different needs. In their study of bilingual students, Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) and Yvonne and David Freeman (2002) discuss three different types of emergent bilinguals. In doing so, they also stress that this group of students is not a homogenous group, but that recognizing the different groups can help educators determine how their experiences impact their education. The three groups of students that they describe are adequate formal schooling, limited formal schooling, and long-term. Students in the adequate formal schooling group have a strong educational background and are able to apply their academic knowledge to the learning of a new lan-
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