

# Biliterate Writing From the Start

Follow-up to the  
bestselling book,  
*Biliteracy  
from the  
Start!*

The Literacy Squared Approach  
to Asset-Based Writing Instruction

Sandra Butvilofsky  
Kathy Escamilla  
Susan Hopewell

# **Biliterate Writing From the Start**

# **Biliterate Writing From the Start**

## **The Literacy Squared Approach to Asset-Based Writing Instruction**

by

**Sandra Butvilofsky, Ph.D.**  
Boulder Valley School District  
Boulder

**Kathy Escamilla, Ph.D.**  
University of Colorado  
Boulder

and

**Susan Hopewell, Ph.D.**  
University of Colorado  
Boulder

· P A U L · H ·  
**BROOKES**  
PUBLISHING C<sup>o</sup>®

Baltimore • London • Sydney

Excerpted from *Biliterate Writing from the Start*  
The Literacy Squared Approach to Asset-Based Writing Instruction  
by Sandra Butvilofsky, Kathy Escamilla, Susan Hopewell



Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.  
Post Office Box 10624  
Baltimore, Maryland 21285-0624  
USA

[www.brookespublishing.com](http://www.brookespublishing.com)

Copyright © 2023 by Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.  
All rights reserved.

“Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.” is a registered trademark of  
Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

Typeset by Progressive Publishing Services, York, Pennsylvania.

Literacy Squared and Lecto-Escritura Al Cuadrado are trademarks of Literacy Squared, LLC.

The individuals described in this book are composites or real people whose situations are masked and are based on the authors' experiences. In all instances, names and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Purchasers of *Biliterate Writing From the Start: The Literacy Squared Approach to Asset-Based Writing Instruction* are granted permission to download, print, and photocopy the Literacy Squared Writing Rubric in the text for educational purposes. This form may not be reproduced to generate revenue for any program or individual. Photocopies may only be made from an original book. *Unauthorized use beyond this privilege may be prosecutable under federal law.* You will see the copyright protection notice at the bottom of each photocopyable page.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Butvilofsky, Sandra, author. | Escamilla, Kathy, author. | Hopewell, Susan, author.  
Title: Biliterate writing from the start : the literacy squared approach to asset-based writing instruction /  
by Sandra Butvilofsky, Ph.D., Boulder Valley School District, Boulder, Kathy Escamilla, Ph.D., University  
of Colorado, Boulder and Susan Hopewell, Ph.D., University of Colorado, Boulder.  
Description: Baltimore, Maryland : Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., [2023] | Includes bibliographical  
references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2023005175 (print) | LCCN 2023005176 (ebook) | ISBN 9781934000472 (paperback) |  
ISBN 9781681257303 (epub) | ISBN 9781681257310 (pdf)  
Subjects: LCSH: Education, Bilingual—United States. | Literacy—United States. | Multiculturalism—  
United States. | Culturally relevant pedagogy—United States.  
Classification: LCC LC3719.B8 2023 (print) | LCC LC3719 (ebook) |  
DDC 370.117/50973—dc23/eng/20230221  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023005175>  
LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023005176>

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data are available from the British Library.

Version 1.0

# Contents

---

About the Download.....	vii
About the Authors .....	ix
Foreword <i>Allison Briceño, Ed.D.</i> .....	xi
Acknowledgments .....	xiii
<b>1 Literacy Squared, and Why We Need to Focus on Biliterate Writing.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Key Terms .....	1
Guiding Questions .....	1
A Brief History of Literacy Squared.....	2
Biliterate Writing .....	6
Research Findings to Guide the Development of Literacy Squared.....	9
The Need for a Book on Spanish–English Biliteracy .....	12
Summary and Preview: Biliterate Children, Biliterate Writers.....	13
Questions for Reflection and Action.....	14
Chapter 1 Appendix: Literacy Squared Writing Rubric.....	15
<b>2 The Role of Oracy and Writing in Teaching Foundational Skills .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Key Terms .....	19
Guiding Questions .....	19
Oracy and Writing: The Forgotten Components of Foundational Skills Teaching .....	22
Sample Literacy Unit Incorporating Oracy: What Is a Refugee?.....	25
Considerations for Developing Biliteracy.....	32
Summary: Literacy, Oracy, and Writing.....	35
Questions for Reflection and Action.....	35
<b>3 TheDictado Method for Writing Instruction.....</b>	<b>37</b>
Key Terms .....	37
Guiding Questions .....	37
TheDictado: Definition, Purpose, and Implementation Basics.....	38
TheDictado in Practice.....	41
Summary: TheDictado.....	50
Questions for Reflection and Action.....	51
<b>4 Nurturing Biliteracy in Emerging Writers in Kindergarten.....</b>	<b>53</b>
Key Terms .....	53
Guiding Questions .....	53
Research Supporting Biliterate Writing Instruction in Kindergarten.....	54

Profiles in Biliteracy: A Nuanced Analysis of Early Biliterate Writing.....	55
Instructional Implications.....	61
Daily Writing Instruction in Both Spanish Literacy and Literacy-Based ELD .....	61
Paired Literacy Lesson.....	65
Summary: Biliterate Writing in Kindergarten.....	74
Questions for Reflection and Action.....	74
<b>5 Cultivating Biliterate Writing in Grades 1 and 2.....</b>	<b>75</b>
Key Term .....	75
Guiding Questions .....	75
Diego’s Story: Biliteracy in Grade 1.....	75
General Trends in Biliterate Writing in Grades 1 and 2 .....	77
Abel’s Story: Biliterate Writing Potential in Grade 1 .....	79
Instructional Implications.....	81
Summary: Biliterate Writing in Grade 1.....	91
Questions for Reflection and Action.....	91
<b>6 Developing Biliteracy via Genre Studies in Grades 3 to 5: Biography .....</b>	<b>93</b>
Key Terms .....	93
Guiding Questions .....	93
Expanding Upon the Main Writing Genres to Develop Biliteracy.....	94
Backward Planning for Biliterate Writing.....	98
Sample Fourth-Grade Biliteracy Unit: Biography.....	100
Summary: Biliterate Writing and Genre Study in Grades 3 to 5 .....	112
Questions for Reflection and Action.....	113
<b>7 Furthering Biliteracy via Genre Studies in Grades 3 to 5: Social Justice .....</b>	<b>115</b>
Key Terms .....	115
Guiding Questions .....	115
Fostering Engaged Writing in Grades 3 to 5.....	116
Using a Bilingual Lens to Promote a Developmentally Appropriate Trajectory.....	117
Beyond the Common Core: Social Justice Standards and Humanizing Curricula .....	117
Sample Unit Sketch: Reading and Writing About Racism.....	121
Summary: Biliterate Writing in Grades 3–5 and Beyond.....	127
Questions for Reflection and Action.....	127
Glossary.....	129
References.....	133
Index.....	137

# About the Download

---

Purchasers of this book may download, print, and/or photocopy the Literacy Squared Writing Rubric for educational use.

To access the materials that come with this book:

1. Go to the Brookes Publishing Download Hub: <http://downloads.brookespublishing.com>
2. Register to create an account (or log in with an existing account).
3. Filter or search for the book *Biliterate Writing From the Start: The Literacy Squared Approach to Asset-Based Writing Instruction*.

# About the Authors

---

## **Sandra A. Butvilofsky, Ph.D., Boulder Valley School District**

Sandra A. Butvilofsky, has been a bilingual/biliteracy elementary teacher and interventionist, instructional coach, researcher, and professor. She is coauthor of *Biliteracy From the Start: Literacy Squared in Action*. Her work in the Literacy Squared project involved assisting in program development, conducting research, and providing professional development to bilingual teachers and administrators. Her research interests include examining the biliterate writing and reading development of Spanish/English Latinx bilingual learners from preschool through fifth grade to demonstrate the potential of bilingual/biliteracy education.

## **Kathy Escamilla, Ph.D., University of Colorado, Boulder**

Kathy Escamilla is a Professor Emeritus of Education in the Division of Equity, Bilingualism and Biliteracy at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Dr. Escamilla's research focuses on issues related to the development of bilingualism and biliteracy for emerging bilingual children in U.S. schools. She is a cofounder of Literacy Squared, a program dedicated to creating biliterate pedagogies with and for Spanish-speaking children and their teachers. She is a lifelong bilingual educator and has been a teacher, administrator, and professor in her 50+ years in public education.

## **Susan Hopewell, Ph.D., University of Colorado, Boulder**

Susan Hopewell, coauthor of *Biliteracy from the Start*, *Literacy Squared in Action* and Associate Professor of Equity Bilingualism and Biliteracy at the University of Colorado Boulder, has spent her entire career working with, and learning from, bilingual learners. As the current director of Literacy Squared, Dr. Hopewell provides extensive professional development to schools around the United States to help them better design effective biliteracy instruction



# Foreword

---

As a first-year bilingual teacher I was underprepared to support my students' biliteracy acquisition. But what I learned from them has stuck with me.

For example, Gloria, a quiet child, learned to read before she learned to write and would often use her favorite books as resources when she wrote. Another student, Brandon had a lot to say, and when I was able to direct his verbosity to a blank page, his strong oral language was the foundation for great writing. But he resisted reading for a long time. Citlali was diagnosed with developmental delays but learned to read beautifully, despite her special education teacher telling me I should direct my attention to the other kids, who were more likely to learn to read and write.

Other students, like María and Nicolás, made me look good, but they essentially taught themselves. While they needed some support with spelling, their strong oral language and the literacy skills they brought from home made them successful with minimal help from me. I was less successful teaching Edgar to read and write, and his lack of success haunts me to this day.

During my first year teaching I was also completing my teacher credential program. My credential classes were focused on English only, and I was primarily teaching in Spanish. I struggled this way for a number of years, as many teachers do, until I came across the work of Drs. Sandra Butvilofsky, Kathy Escamilla, Sue Hopewell, and the BUENO Center. Their ground-breaking research taught me many things, including how to teach through a holistic biliteracy lens, despite schools traditionally having monolingual curricula and assessment practices.

The authors also taught me that bilingual teachers do not have to struggle like I did; we do not have to sacrifice children's biliteracy while we (teachers) are novices. The research on effective biliteracy practices exists. In fact, some of the most significant biliteracy research of the last three decades was done by the authors.

Butvilofsky, Escamilla, and Hopewell's first book, *Biliteracy from the Start: Literacy Squared in Action* (2014) codified a biliterate instructional model and provided a set of evidence-based instructional practices that were tested and proven in bilingual programs across the country. I have been using it with preservice teachers for almost a decade.

*Biliterate Writing from the Start* builds on the authors' prior work and focuses on writing as a critical piece of the puzzle that is often missing from "science of reading" programs. It is also extremely timely, as many bilingual programs are feeling the pressure to apply English-specific "science of reading" literacy concepts to bilingual classrooms. Butvilofsky, Escamilla, and Hopewell demonstrate how to teach foundational skills—and broader literacy skills—in ways that are appropriate for bilingual students.

For many kids, writing is the first and most accessible entry point to literacy. The authors explain that writing is evidence of what students know and can do across languages; it is a fantastic window into students' understandings of how biliteracy works. We learn to use students' writing as a useful formative assessment and an opportunity to consider next instructional steps. Learning from our students' writing allows us to provide more targeted and strategic instruction and improve as teachers every day.

This is the book I wish I had years ago when I struggled to teach biliteracy. Butvilofsky, Escamilla, and Hopewell share evidence-based practices from *Literacy Squared* that have been

proven to advance students' biliteracy acquisition. They open doors for all of us to engage in biliteracy through a social justice lens by identifying culturally and linguistically relevant practices that connect home language and culture to the classroom. Having done the research themselves, they make it practical and understandable for the reader. The authors excel at connecting research and theory to classroom practice, showing teachers what it looks like with real students and real writing samples.

Butvilofsky, Escamilla, and Hopewell's concept of "bilingualism as a first language" (p. 3 of this book) shifts our thinking from the monolingual norm to bilingual practices. It provides a better representation and understanding of many of our students. And, building on the idea of bilingualism as a first language, the authors advance a *holistic biliteracy framework* that enables us to approach bilingual classrooms through a lens that values the whole child, including their linguistic assets. While taking a bilingual approach to bilingual classrooms may sound obvious, many bilingual programs instead apply monolingual views of teaching, learning, and assessing in each language.

But, as the authors explain, bilingual people—bilingual brains—don't compartmentalize languages in their brains. Instead, we judiciously use the entirety of our linguistic knowledge and consider the task, context, and audience. Therefore, it is clear that an assets-based bilingual pedagogy must involve building cross-linguistic connections, developing metacognition, and integrating all aspects of literacy across languages. Students learn that they can write what they can say, they can read what they write, and they can do it all across two or more languages. The holistic biliteracy framework, therefore, supports both the teacher and the students as we all continue learning and developing our bilingualism and biliteracy.

This book brings the holistic biliteracy framework to life, showing how students' approximations are invaluable clues to us, their teachers. The authors consolidate the relevant research, break down key concepts, and provide lots of real-life examples to help us understand what we can do to support our students. They illustrate how to systematically analyze students' writing and how to use it as a tool for future teaching. They explain how to differentiate and how to implement in online settings. In short, the authors' holistic biliteracy framework is a foundation for increased educational equity. It provides a biliterate trajectory across the elementary grade levels, ensures greater access for students to grade-level content, and, as the authors' award-winning research has shown, results in more equitable outcomes.

The book is organized to ensure our success: the key vocabulary and guiding questions at the beginning of each chapter, the student examples, the useful summaries, and the reflection questions at the end of each chapter help us learn the key ideas and how to implement them. After reading this book, teachers will feel confident to use the strategies in their classrooms.

Butvilofsky, Escamilla, and Hopewell have been working with schools and educators for decades, doing the research, examining student work, and identifying classroom practices that effectively advance biliteracy. Together, they have close to a century of experience in bilingual education as teachers, literacy specialists, coaches, teacher educators, professional developers, and researchers.

This book sets the stage for teachers to have high expectations for all students. Due to housing segregation and other inequitable systems, Latinx students are largely segregated in schools across the country. I taught in such a school and was repeatedly told it was unrealistic to expect all students to learn to read and write. To overcome that belief, which permeates many schools with large populations of students of color, the authors have codified culturally and linguistically relevant research-based practices that advance students' literacy development. After using this book other teachers won't have to continue wondering, 20 years later, what else they could have done to teach their version of Edgar.

*Allison Briceño, Ed.D.  
San José State University  
San José, California*

# Acknowledgments

---

We want to make special mention of several valued colleagues, all of whom actively contributed to the development of some of the lessons we share in the book: Khanh Nguyen Le ([Chapter 2](#)), Lucinda Soltero-González ([Chapter 4](#)), Adriana Alvarez ([Chapter 4](#)), Sandra Castor ([Chapter 5](#)), and Hilary Barthel ([Chapter 6](#)).

*Este libro se dedica a todos los aprendices bilingües y sus familias para quienes la educación es más que un derecho, sino un acto de justicia social; y para los maestros bilingües que dedican su profesión para realizarlo.*

# 1

## Literacy Squared, and Why We Need to Focus on Biliterate Writing

*“La escritura es importante en la escuela porque es importante fuera de ella y no al revés. Leer no es descifrar, escribir no es copiar.”*

—Emilia Ferreiro, 2017

### Key Terms

---

Bilingualism as a First Language	Metalanguage
Biliterate pedagogies	Metalinguistic development
Biliterate writing	Oracy
Cross-language connections	Paired literacy instruction
Holistic biliteracy framework	Trajectories toward biliteracy
Literacy Squared	

### Guiding Questions

---

- ▶ How does a **holistic biliteracy framework** differ from earlier versions of biliteracy instruction?
- ▶ How does a focus on quality of instruction shift the debate about effective practice in the bilingual education field?
- ▶ What are examples of deficit-oriented views of emerging bilingual (EB) children’s writing, and how can we create more asset-based views?

About one quarter of U.S. children (10 million) speak a language other than English at home. EB learners often perform below monolingual English grade-level expectations, are twice as likely to drop out, and are less likely to attend a 4-year college. EB learners have been the recipients of many monolingual English reforms over the years, but research about their strengths and needs are rarely considered and built upon when literacy reforms are created and implemented. As a result, outcomes have been disappointing and perceived gaps have maintained.

This student population has not been served well by approaches to literacy instruction that are geared to monolingual students; in particular, approaches that emphasize foundational skills to the detriment of oracy and comprehension. This is not just an education issue but also an equity and social justice issue—we must do better by these students. We have a strong research base upon which to build effective literacy approaches for EB learners, and in this book, we intend to build on and utilize that strong research base to recommend pedagogical orientations as well as strategies and methods for teachers and schools to use that are both research based,

and research tested. These include the **Literacy Squared** model, examples of assets-based orientations and teaching approaches for EB learners, and attention to all components of biliteracy instruction, with a particular focus in this book on writing.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF LITERACY SQUARED

In 2004, the authors of this book set out on an academic and pedagogical adventure that asked a seemingly simple question—how do we create school-based opportunities for Spanish/English EB children in the United States to develop, enhance, and value their language and literacy skills in two languages (Escamilla et al., 2014)? As with all excellent adventures, we have picked up colleagues, friends, partners, and critics along the way, all of whom have helped us to reflect, revise, and refine our thinking. This collection of colleagues originated in Colorado and Texas in 2005 with a small pilot program and over the years has expanded west to Oregon and Washington while also moving south to Texas and Arizona and east to Illinois. Our musings and experiences eventually spawned a formal project titled “Literacy Squared.” In its totality, Literacy Squared has four components, including research, professional development, assessment, and instruction. Over the course of the past 18 years, this project has touched 450 teachers and 12,744 children in 7 states. We have also written 1 book, 18 journal articles, 12 book chapters, and 24 technical reports about the research results from Literacy Squared projects nationally, many of which can be accessed on our website (<https://literacysquared.org>).

From the onset, we argued the need for innovative approaches to the instruction of EB children that would include the following:

1. A deeper understanding of EB children in 21st-century U.S. schools, with an emphasis on viewing these children from assets-based perspectives
2. A broader definition of literacy to include **oracy**, **writing**, and **metalinguistic development** in addition to reading
3. Biliteracy instruction from the beginning of school, with more focus on the quality of instruction rather than the language of instruction
4. An approach to assessment that was built around a holistic biliteracy framework and building **trajectories toward biliteracy**.

Each of these concepts is explained briefly below, and each contributes to the focus of this book on writing assessment and instruction for EB Spanish/English learners. It is important to note that we view writing assessment and instruction not as a discrete and separate subject area, but as a part of an integrated approach to teaching literacy in Spanish and English that includes **cross-language connections**.

This book is particularly relevant at this time given the resurgence of a movement in U.S. literacy instruction that has waxed and waned over at least the past 50 years. Currently, this movement is known as the Science of Reading (SOR) (Ehri, 2020; Moats, 2020) and signals a renewed focus on teaching **foundational skills**, particularly phonics. A precursor SOR in the 1950s was a movement led by Rudolph Flesch, who wrote a book titled, *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Flesch argued that the reason that Johnny couldn't read was that he didn't know phonics (Flesch, 1955). Over the decades, how much time and attention should be devoted to teaching phonics and other foundational skills within school literacy programs has been hotly and laboriously debated. In 2000, the National Literacy Panel Report released findings of a synthesis of research that concluded that effective reading programs need to include five foundational skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. A \$6 billion program titled Reading First (2008) took the findings of the National Literacy Panel Report and created literacy programs for U.S. schools, which were heavily focused on phonics and other foundational skills. Research results from Reading First were not positive. An extensive evaluation of the efficacy of Reading First was conducted by the Institute of Educational Research (2008) to determine its impact on student reading achievement and on classroom instruction. The report found that there was a

significant impact on strengthening decoding skills among first-grade students. However, Reading First did not produce a statistically significant impact on student reading comprehension test scores in grades 1, 2, or 3, and there was no substantial improvement in student motivation and engagement with literacy.

The current SOR approaches are primarily based on the previous Reading First Program and the findings of the National Reading Panel Report. It is important to note that neither the National Reading Panel nor Reading First research and subsequent programs were created for EB learners. Proponents of SOR have argued that beginning reading instruction should focus on teaching five foundational skills of phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. As it relates to this book, it is important to note that we agree that the teaching of foundational skills is important in the teaching of reading, especially in alphabetic languages. However, we propose that the current focus on foundational skills in literacy instruction is insufficient in the creation of robust and effective biliteracy programs for EB learners.

Significantly, the five foundational skills endorsed and emphasized by SOR have excluded the teaching of oral language and writing (see [Chapter 2](#) for a more detailed discussion of this issue). Further, SOR has been criticized as being monocultural and inattentive to issues of social justice and has been characterized as being “entrenched in Anglocentrism, and Eurocentrism” (Share, 2021, p. 5391), as being “confined to an insular, Anglocentric research agenda addressing theoretical and applied issues with limited relevance for a universal science of reading,” (Share, 2021, p. 5391), “as needing to be reimaged to attend to linguistic, cultural and individual variation . . . to make it more robust and socially just,” (Auckerman & Schuldt, 2021, p. 585), and as “neglecting to promote bilingualism and biliteracy which has mostly been ignored in debates over English only and bilingual education,” (Goldenberg, 2020, p. 2).

We agree that the teaching of foundational skills is important, but insufficient for teaching EB learners in either Spanish or English. We would further argue that the teaching of foundational skills is different in Spanish than English. Most important, we would further argue that what our field needs is not another monolingual framework focused on reading; rather we need to build programs based on the most current research on developing bilingualism and biliteracy, in which the foundational skills of SOR are integrated and taught but expanded to include oral language, writing and metalinguistic development; these are *all* considered foundational skills.

To further understand the history and aims of Literacy Squared, let’s turn to the four elements we identified above as being key to innovative approaches to the instruction of EB children.

## **A Deeper, Assets-Based Understanding of Emerging Bilingual Children**

Over 85% of EB children of the 21st century are U.S.-born (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). EB children are simultaneous bilinguals for whom bilingualism is their dominant language. They represent a “new normal,” and a demographic shift from children entering bilingual programs in the 1980s and 1990s who were clearly limited in their exposure to English and who clearly had a non-English language dominance. For this reason, Literacy Squared has maintained from the start that school programs need to be created in ways that develop Spanish and English literacy side by side beginning in kindergarten. Literacy Squared is one of the few programs in the United States that was created for EB children in Spanish and English who enter school with a language dominance that we label as [Bilingualism as a First Language](#).

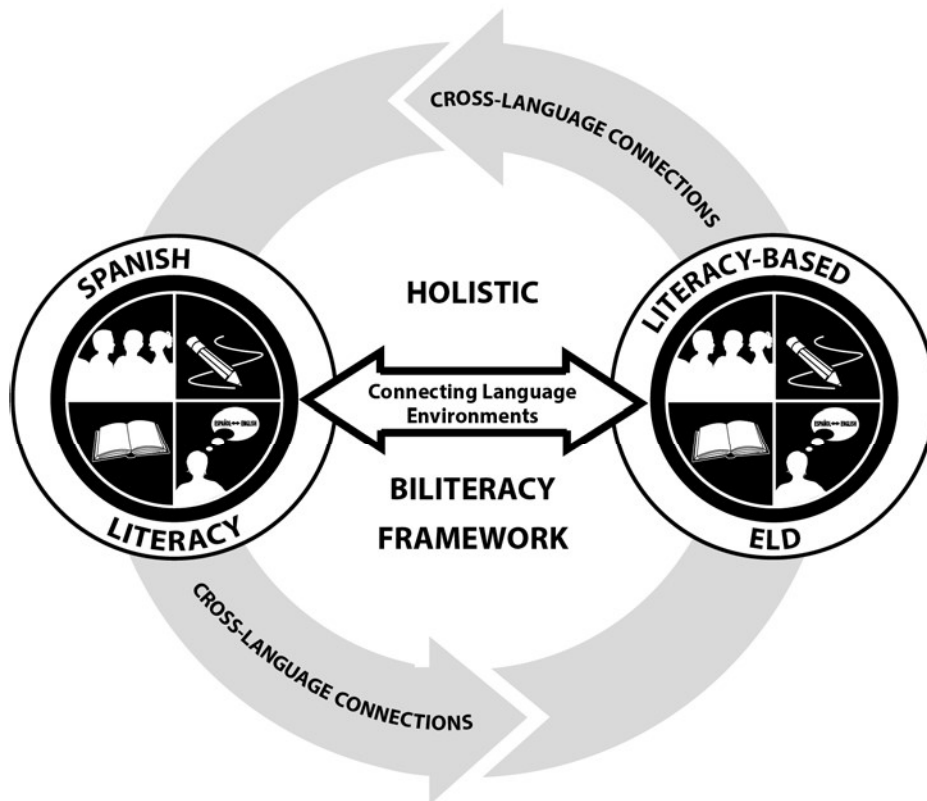
## **A Broader Definition of Literacy—Including Oracy, Writing, and Metalinguistic Development**

As our adventures in biliteracy grew and developed, we created and continue to use a holistic framework for biliteracy laying out our vision for a more comprehensive approach to teaching biliteracy in Spanish and English. A holistic biliteracy framework is one that includes recommended teaching approaches and time allocations across the grades intended to foster development and learning in two languages through [paired literacy instruction](#), in which students learn to read

and write in two languages simultaneously starting in kindergarten. This holistic biliteracy framework intentionally and purposefully connects Spanish and English environments.

While this book focuses on writing, we cannot emphasize enough that the writing instruction in Spanish and English is an endeavor that should integrate and teach writing in tandem with other language arts skills. We would never advocate for the teaching of writing as an isolated subject area. In our framework, we decided to develop Spanish and English literacy at the same time and redefine biliteracy instruction to include oracy, writing, and **metalinguage** as well as reading. **Oracy** refers to the development of oral skills in formal education, while **metalinguage** refers to the language used to think and talk about language and, in biliteracy, understand the relationships between and within languages. Further, we decided not to delay English literacy instruction while children are learning to write and read in Spanish, as is commonly done in many bilingual and dual language programs. We also made the decision to discourage schools from ceasing Spanish literacy instruction once children reach some criteria for transition or redesignation as is also common practice in many bilingual programs.

**Figure 1.1** is a visual illustration of our comprehensive holistic biliteracy framework. The pie charts presented under Spanish literacy and literacy-based English-language development (ELD) illustrate the need for oracy (the children talking to each other), reading (the book), writing (the pencil) and metalinguistic awareness (the child with the idea bubble). This framework emphasizes building trajectories toward biliteracy, with sustained language and literacy development in both languages. A trajectory toward biliteracy is a framework for documenting patterns of development and growth in Spanish and English for EB learners who are receiving paired literacy instruction. Children's achievement is expressed in terms of biliteracy development rather than by grade levels or other monolingual norms that separate the two languages. Spanish literacy outcomes may be higher than English literacy outcomes in this trajectory or vice versa.



**Figure 1.1.** Holistic biliteracy framework. (From Escamilla, K., Hopewell, S., Butvilofsky, S., Sparrow, W., Soltero-González, L. & Escamilla, M. [2014]. *Biliteracy from the Start: Literacy Squared in Action*.)



While this book will focus on writing, it is important to note that we have developed Literacy Squared with a lens toward the following:

1. Giving equal attention to Spanish literacy and literacy-based ELD, with
2. Oracy, reading, writing, and metalanguage sharing equal attention within instructional blocks in Spanish and English.

Readers of this book should also note the arrows surrounding the framework in [Figure 1.1](#), referring to cross-language connections, and the arrows within the framework, suggesting the need to connect language environments. Making cross-language connections is a strategic method a teacher uses to help students connect what they know in one language with what they are learning in another. Cross-language connections are particularly useful in **biliterate writing** development and assessment practices, and we will argue throughout this book that cross-language connections are particularly important components of **biliterate pedagogies**. Similarly, cross-language connections indicate the need to connect literacy environments to explicitly help children deepen their knowledge and awareness of how two languages work in ways that are both similar and distinct.

### **Bilingual Instruction from the Beginning, Focused on Quality and Bilingual Pedagogy**

When we began our adventure in biliteracy work, we observed that the field of bilingual/dual language education seemed to be mired in a debate about minutes of instruction that we have come to call “language of instruction.” These debates generally address how many minutes of a school day should be devoted to teaching in Spanish and how many in English. To be sure, these debates are over 50 years old and were created to define certain types of bilingual/dual language instruction as well as to ensure that non-English languages were included in instruction and given status in school programs labeled as bilingual and/or dual language. Language of instruction guidelines are present in virtually all textbooks related to teaching in bilingual/dual language programs in the U.S. including in Escamilla et. al. (2014), and *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (Howard et. al., 2019) is the most widely used resource in the United States to guide the development and creation of bilingual/dual language programs. Recently, time allocation debates have included spaces and times students are invited or allowed to use both of their languages, or their full linguistic repertoires, in bilingual/dual language classrooms (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Selzer, 2017; García & Wei, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012).

In our early work, and after reading the work of Genesee and Riches (2006), García and Kleifgen (2018) and García et al. (2017), we proposed to our partner teachers and schools that perhaps the quality of instruction, including bilingual pedagogies, was equally, if not more, important than the language of instruction. To that end, we have encouraged teachers to use more explicit and direct instruction for teaching all literacy domains in Spanish and English and to consider giving children more opportunities to do more collaborative and shared oracy, reading, writing, and metalanguage development. Further, and far more controversially, we have advocated for bilingual pedagogies. This means developing methodologies to teach students bilingually and reducing the use of the ubiquitous methods and materials used to teach monolingual English students. Too often, these materials have not been translated into Spanish and/or have been poorly translated without attention to how languages differ and/or to how children use both of their languages to make sense of the world.

This high-quality bilingual instruction needs to be present from the beginning of a student’s education beginning in kindergarten. Children coming to school with two languages are blessed with bilingual brains, and their schooling experiences should reflect and develop these assets. Social justice teaching in biliteracy programs has its foundation in biliterate pedagogies, which can possibly best be explained by the use of the metaphor of a tandem bicycle to illustrate. Imagine starting out learning to ride a bike, but with the caveat that you must do so while coordinating with another person. The process itself (mounting, balancing, coordinating, and communicating) would be substantially different than learning to ride solo. Certainly, much

about riding a bike solo (pedaling, steering, etc.) overlaps with what one needs to understand about riding tandem, but the effect of two riders changes the experience in meaningful ways. Similarly, we propose that the effect of two languages changes the language acquisition and academic learning process in meaningful ways. Those changes are what we need to attend to as we think about conceptualizing bilingual pedagogies (Hopewell et al., in press).

### A Greater Focus on Writing

Historically, research and practice for EB learners has focused on oral production and learning and to a lesser extent reading (August & Shanahan, 2006; Escamilla, et. al., 2014; Serrano & Howard, 2007). Further, assessment and testing for EB learners, no matter what their program of instruction, has been focused on achievement in English with little or no attention to developing bilingualism and biliteracy.

The role of writing in the learning of two languages has received much less attention in the research and literature and indeed in instruction in bilingual/dual language programs. The teaching of literacy in the United States in elementary schools has placed less emphasis on teaching writing than teaching reading, and moreover, bilingual curricula mirror monolingual English curricula, both in the overemphasis on teaching reading and on the pedagogical approaches to teaching writing.

The current high stakes testing practices that include writing assessment as well as reading aligned with the Common Core State Standards have outlined what students in the U.S. should know in English language arts and mathematics at the conclusion of various grade levels. In bilingual/dual language programs, this entails writing development in two languages, for which some states have not only created standards to accompany English but have also developed those same standards in Spanish. (See for example the Spanish Language Development standards page on the California Department of Education website, accessible at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/sldstandards.asp>.)

The high stakes tests and their companion standards have provided much information but notably little guidance and direction in either the processes of teaching writing in two languages, or formative and summative assessment practices to help determine expected outcomes across grade levels for developing trajectories toward biliteracy. This lack of guidance leaves thousands of bilingual/dual language teachers, charged with developing biliteracy in their students, on their own to “figure it out.”

### BILITERATE WRITING

This book is about writing, specifically about biliterate writing when learned in early childhood in Spanish and English, and in contexts when culturally and linguistically diverse children are not always viewed as assets to schools and their families are not always viewed as assets to a community. In this book, we set out to challenge some of the deficit labels and perceptions that have been applied to the EB children, including but not limited to the idea that they “have no language,” that they “are low in both languages,” that “learning to write in two languages confuses them,” that “Spanish causes interference in learning English,” and that “their parents aren’t involved [in their] education.” We, like many others, have frequently heard the above perceptions in our professional development sessions and in other venues (Escamilla, 2006; Escamilla & Hopewell, 2010; Escamilla et al., 2014; Soltero-González et al., 2011).

To be sure, and in an effort to refrain from the all-too-common teacher-bashing so prevalent in current discourse about public schools, our teacher partners had evidence to support their statements. For example, when examining EB children’s writing, teachers have often applied the term “interference” to children’s writing when children write in the ways shown in [Figure 1.2](#).

Since the approximations in [Figure 1.2](#) relate to children’s writing and to children using the Spanish phonetic or syntactic system to write in English, teachers interpreted these approximations as signs of cross-language interference and potential confusion. Through our work we have

Children write:	They mean:	Interference	Asset
eschool	school	Spanish beginning sounds cause interference.	Child hears sounds in words and can encode them.
Plei	play	Child does not use ay to spell letter sound for long <i>a</i> .	Child's use of sounds indicates a cross-language application of what is heard orally (in English) and how it applies in writing in Spanish.
Es not bery perti.	It's not very pretty.	Child does not use subject to start the sentence; use of letter <i>i</i> in <i>perti</i> is Spanish.	<i>Es</i> means "it is." <i>B</i> and <i>v</i> in Spanish sound alike. <i>I</i> makes <i>e</i> sound like <i>y</i> in <i>pretty</i> .
Mai favrit ting at rices	My favorite thing at recess	Child is confusing Spanish vowels with English.	Writing is rule-governed with regard to use of phonetic principles.
A duck wing is hirt we look for the doctor of the zoo.	A duck's wing is hurt and we looked for the zoo's veterinarian.	Spanish syntax interferes with English; child lacks vocabulary in English.	Child has knowledge of syntax and knows circumlocution as a communicative strategy.
Et tuc os o wal	It took us a while.	Child writes random strings of letters—unreadable.	This reflects the need to be able to interpret emerging biliteracy in context and with a bilingual lens.

Figure 1.2. Examples of "interference"/assets.

learned that it is not solely a matter of what children produce that determines whether we judge the writing to be proficient; it is a matter of interpretation by the person reading the work. In this case, teachers were interpreting the work through an interference lens rather than a cross-language lens or asset-based framework.

The writing sample of Manuel, a fourth-grade student in a Literacy Squared school in the early stages of the program, further illustrates the interference/asset contrast. The sample included in Figure 1.3 is further problematic in that the child's writing was assessed through his English writing alone, without the benefit of a Spanish sample, and assessed through the lens of what he could not do rather than what he could do.

As assessed by teachers at his school, Manuel's writing sample (as he wrote it) was scored as unreadable and unsatisfactory. Unreadable writing samples are thought to be those where the student writes random strings of letters and does not show that their writing is rule-governed. The reader is unable to discern that he has strategies to help him write words or thoughts. Further, scorers noted that he seemed to lack fine motor skills and control of his writing and he was likely in need of "special help." Notice, even though the readers determined that the message was unreadable (a matter of interpretation), we were able to use a bilingual lens to understand the message the student wished to communicate. However, in Manuel's case, deficit-based observations then become the basis for questionable interventions such as those described below, which teachers in the school offered, using the rhetoric that these are data-driven observations that come directly from Manuel's writing.

4th grade      2008-09

6384-E

**If you could be someone else for a day, who would you be? Why would you want to be that person?**

I wub be kwankarlos i wud like to be  
 hem be kuse hes is profisint imat I was  
 mosiy the bumist kib but as the yer went by  
 I gat smort r naw im <sup>bak</sup> the wer i was all ovr  
 ugen. I rily hayt that be kuse IM rily stupid plus  
 IM a mih parsory profisint imath and heran is in  
 profisint in math and. I am vha kktor in riting and riding.  
 hem to but hes qat smort r ven my im stupidist  
 in the hol intir <sup>school</sup> ~~stet~~ thats the truth thats wy I  
 want to be hem this is the trut. I v hirt to lde anybody  
 this I havit told asol.

**Manuel's sample (written in standard English with conventional spelling)**

I would be Juan Carlos. I would like to be him because he is proficient in math. I was mostly the dumbest kid, but as the year went by I got smarter. Now I'm back where I was all over again. I really hate that because I'm really stupid, plus I am partially proficient in math and Juan is proficient in math. And, I am unsatisfactory in writing and reading, him too but he's a lot smarter than me. I'm the stupidest in the whole entire school. That's the truth. That's why I want to be him. This is the truth. I've never told anybody this. I haven't told a soul.

**Figure 1.3.** English writing sample for a fourth-grade boy.

### Manuel: A Prescription for Remediation

A remediative, English-centric approach to Manuel's writing emphasized the following:

- Approximations like *kwankarlos* for *Juan Carlos*; *hem* for *him*; *rily* for *really*; and *ugen* for *again* indicated to teachers a need for more intensive *phonological awareness and phonics* instruction.
- Approximations of words like *proficint* for *proficient* might indicate to teachers a need for more *phonics* or *spelling*.
- Approximations for words like *bak/back*; *biy* might indicate *Spanish interference*, maybe bilingual instruction is too hard for him, and teachers felt the school should perhaps put him in an English only classroom—he needs to focus on English.
- All of the above are necessary *before* teachers look at the content of his writing.

From the above, we see the clarion call for foundational skills (phonics, phonemic awareness, etc.), but no attention to figuring out the content of the child's writing. Below, we offer a more holistic bilingual interpretation of Manuel's writing, unfortunately one that is often not taken up in schools with large numbers of EB learners.

### **Manuel: An Asset-Based, Holistic, Bilingual Interpretation**

An asset-based, holistic, bilingual approach to Manuel's writing would emphasize points such as

- Manuel has a strong voice in his writing.
- He knows how to express himself in complete thoughts.
- He uses sophisticated phrases and vocabulary.
- His spelling is *not* Spanish interference but utilization of multiple strategies that come from both of his languages (e.g., HwanKarlos).
- He is quite aware of his status in the school.

To be clear, the above discussion is not intended to demonize the teachers in this school or their observations of Manuel and his needs. They have been taught and are using an English-centric language lens to assess his writing and to prescribe an instructional strategy. We have seen thousands of examples like this in *Literacy Squared*, and if we are to improve writing and writing assessment for EB learners, we need to improve not only children's writing, but the lenses through which educators observe, assess, and instruct children in two languages. We propose that if our observations are wrong or misinformed because of the utilization of monolingual frameworks, then the proposed instructional interventions are also not likely to be effective (Hopewell & Escamilla, 2014). Through our work, we have introduced the following ideas (Soltero-González et al., 2012):

1. Rather than interference, the above examples represent normal stages in the development of writing in EB Spanish/English children.
2. In fact, what they are doing is making cross-language connections that go from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish that we need to better study and understand.

Over time, we have worked hard to dispel the deficit notions described above, and we do not write about them here as a way of disparaging our teachers, for all too often these views are shared by school leaders, policy makers, and even some of our university colleagues. We do, however, hope through this book to illustrate the need to challenge these chronic misperceptions and replace them with more positive orientations for developing and assessing Spanish/English biliterate writing. Throughout the book, we present frameworks and assessment practices across grades K–5 that are aimed at normalizing the development of biliteracy in writing. We will demonstrate how we can use the formative assessment tools in our [Literacy Squared Writing Rubric](#) (Escamilla et. al., 2014; the rubric is provided as an appendix to this chapter) to engage in dialogues about children's writing that begin with observations of what children *can do* and how we can build on their strengths when teaching writing. We will also argue that students can and do have important information to share via writing if only we provide them with the opportunities.

Clearly there is a need for educators to understand more about how writing, when learned in Spanish and English simultaneously by EB children, develops and changes across time. There is a concomitant need to develop interpretive lenses that seek to understand this development from an asset-based perspective and to help policy makers and practitioners see potential rather than the problems.

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS TO GUIDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY SQUARED**

At its inception, *Literacy Squared* created a biliterate writing rubric for teachers in our *Literacy Squared* schools to use to assess children's developing writing in Spanish and English in a side-by-side manner. The side-by-side assessment was meant to enable teachers and others to see what children produced in each language and how children were using what they knew in one language to inform writing in another language. (See the [Chapter 1 Appendix](#).) When creating

this rubric, we intentionally created a system wherein the content portion of the rubric was weighted more heavily than the structural elements or spelling. We did so because we had observed previously that student ideas in both languages emerged before structural elements and spelling, and we wanted children to be credited with what they *can do*, again a focus on asset-based perspectives. The Literacy Squared Writing Rubric is provided as an appendix to this chapter, and it is explained in detail in our first book (Escamilla, et. al., 2014). The purpose of this book is to move from the assessment to applications of our assessment results to practice.

Our research efforts in emerging EB Spanish/English biliteracy have included descriptive aggregate results from technical reports from our school sites as well as empirical quantitative and qualitative studies. Findings from several of these studies include the following:

1. There are cumulative effects for teaching Spanish and English writing across time.
2. Significant information about what children can do in writing is lost if children are only assessed in English.
3. Learning to write in two languages simultaneously does not delay acquisition of English Literacy.
4. Literacy Squared enhances biliterate writing acquisition.

These findings are discussed in depth below, along with evidence that they provide for biliterate writing assessment and instruction.

### Cumulative Effects for Teaching Spanish and English Writing Across Time

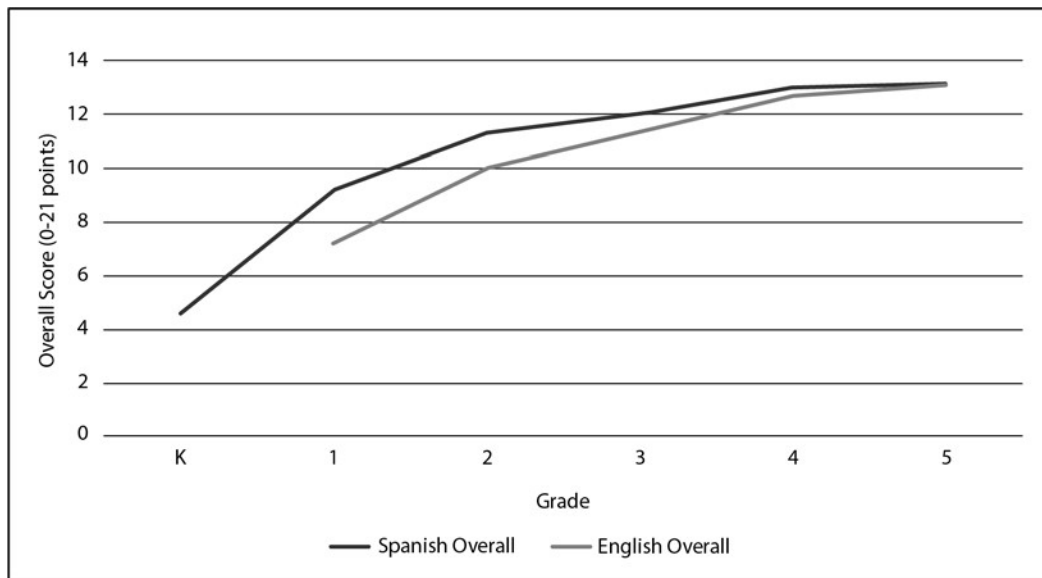
We hypothesized that for EB children coming to school from Spanish-speaking homes, their academic outcomes in Spanish would likely be higher in the beginning elementary years than their English outcomes, but that across time, and with consistent bilingual paired literacy instruction and focused attention on writing, their Spanish and English outcomes would more closely match.

The results in [Table 1.1](#) illustrate an aggregate snapshot analysis by grade level for students participating in the Literacy Squared Research Project from 2009 to 2015. We aggregated data from 19 schools in four school districts (Boulder Valley School District [CO], Denver Public Schools [CO], Hillsboro School District [OR], and Salem-Keizer Public Schools [OR]) during this time. From first grade through third grade, students have higher mean scores in all constructs in Spanish when compared to English. In the fourth and fifth grades though, students have comparable scores in all constructs across languages. The line graph presented in [Figure 1.4](#) illustrates this trend with the mean overall scores in both Spanish and English and includes a very healthy sample of 11,463 students.

**Table 1.1.** Aggregate snapshot analysis by grade level for students participating in the Literacy Squared Research Project from 2009 to 2015.

Grade	n	Spanish					English					
		Content	SE	Spell	Overall	SD	Content	SE	Spell	Overall	SD	
K	2601	2	0.8	1.8	4.6	3.3	n/a					
1	2622	4.2	1.6	3.5	9.2	3.4	3.4	1.5	2.4	7.2	3.4	
2	2412	5.1	2	4.2	11.3	2.5	4.7	1.9	3.4	10	2.7	
3	2116	5.4	2.3	4.3	12	2.3	5.3	2.2	3.8	11.3	2.7	
4	1500	6	2.6	4.5	13	2.4	5.8	2.6	4.3	12.7	2.7	
5	772	6	2.7	4.4	13.1	2.6	5.9	2.8	4.4	13.1	2.6	

Key: SE, Structural Elements; SD, standard deviation



**Figure 1.4.** Mean overall scores by grade level for students participating in the Literacy Squared Research Project from 2009 to 2015.

### Loss of Information If Children Are Only Assessed in English

Research conducted on Literacy Squared has illuminated on several occasions the limitations of English-only assessments to examine the writing growth and development of EB children on either formative or summative assessments. A study conducted by Escamilla et al. (2017) examined the writing skills of 44 EB fourth and fifth graders. All 44 of the study students had been determined to be unsatisfactory in their writing development as a result of the state's English only high-stakes writing assessment. The purpose of this study was to compare and correlate various writing outcomes as measured by the state's high-stakes writing assessment, English language proficiency writing assessment, and the Literacy Squared Writing Rubric. Results indicated that when students' Spanish and English outcomes are considered holistically, students' outcomes in Spanish surpassed English for the majority of students. In fact, these students were proficient writers but were not yet proficient in English. Findings indicate the potential for a writing assessment protocol that is intentionally biliterate and that displays Spanish and English together as a part of the assessment process.

In a recently completed study, we examined three different sets of writing samples for 29 EB children who had previously been tested on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) reading assessment (Good & Kaminski, 2002) and had been determined to be below or significantly below benchmark outcomes on the DIBELS (Butvilofsky et al., 2021). Using principles outlined in the Literacy Squared Writing Rubric, children's writing samples in Spanish and English were examined across an entire school year and each pair of samples represented three distinct points in time. It is significant to note that outcomes for these students on DIBELS did not change over the course of the school year. Despite this, an examination of writing in Spanish and English showed a great deal of growth across the school year. Through the qualitative analysis of children's writing, we were able to document how children's understandings grew in terms of how texts are organized, punctuated, expressed with standard syntax, as well as in terms of phonological and phonemic knowledge across languages. Essentially, their writing indicated that they were making progress in any number of skills that are ultimately relatable to reading (and foundational skills). The work suggests that assessment of biliterate writing provides a means of assessment that is broader in scope and is appropriate for assessing what children can do across languages as well as within languages in their literacy development.

## **No Delay in English Literacy Acquisition Due to Learning Writing in Two Languages**

Hopewell and Butvilofsky (2016) examined the extent to which writing instruction in two languages delayed or advantaged students educated in paired biliteracy instruction as compared to those who only had access to English literacy instruction. In this quasi-experimental study, the authors used the Literacy Squared Writing Rubric to compare the biliterate writing outcomes of EB students who participated in Literacy Squared ( $n = 108$ ) to those of EB learners who participated in English-only literacy instruction ( $n = 92$ ). Findings indicated that learning to write in two languages simultaneously, as in the case of Literacy Squared, resulted in students becoming equally proficient in writing in Spanish and English by the fifth grade and that paired literacy instruction in Literacy Squared did not delay English writing acquisition. In fact, the English writing acquisition outcomes for Literacy Squared students were comparable to those of students in English-only classrooms. Notably, students in Literacy Squared had the added advantage of becoming biliterate.

In a similar study, Escamilla, Fine, and Hopewell (2019) examined the biliterate writing growth of students participating in one-way Spanish/English dual language programs using two different models. Literacy Squared was the treatment model, and a different biliteracy model was the control. The study utilized a longitudinal study design that examined growth in students' writing in Spanish and English in Grades 1–3 from a quantitative perspective ( $n=38$  in the Literacy Squared group,  $n= 72$  in the control group). Results of the quantitative analysis indicated a statistically significant difference between the Literacy Squared program and control group students in Spanish/English writing outcomes. Fortunately, students in both groups were becoming biliterate; however, in the Literacy Squared schools, students were outperforming control school students.

Results of these various studies indicate to us the potential of not only the Literacy Squared Holistic Biliteracy Model to successfully develop Spanish and English biliteracy in EB students, but also the Literacy Squared Writing Rubric as a formative and summative assessment tool to illustrate students' cross-grade level writing growth in paired literacy and other types of bilingual programs.

## **THE NEED FOR A BOOK ON SPANISH–ENGLISH BILITERACY**

The need for this book is further demonstrated by the current state of the teaching of writing in U.S. elementary schools. This situation can best be described as a hodgepodge. In the over 50 school districts we have worked with in Literacy Squared, we have found that many districts do not have a writing curriculum at all, even for English-only classrooms. This is quite a contrast from the teaching of reading, which, in most districts, is highly prescriptive in both Spanish and English and, if not prescriptive, at least well-defined across grade levels with appropriate texts and other resources. The fragmented and poorly defined nature of writing curriculum in general becomes exacerbated in bilingual/dual language programs when there is also a poorly defined curriculum, and often no curriculum, in Spanish. In the same districts in which we have worked, it is quite common for teachers to be told to use the same curriculum in Spanish as they use in English to teach writing, including the same assessments, and often are told to just “translate” English to Spanish. Further, most bilingual/dual language programs do not include curricula or approaches to developing biliteracy, and rarely provide guidance for teachers on how to help students make cross-linguistic connections. In a very informal national survey, we recently posed a question asking bilingual teachers and program directors what curriculum they were using to teach writing in Spanish. There were only 44 responses; however, they represented several large districts in large states (e.g., California, New York, and Texas). Overwhelmingly, the responses indicated that English writing strategies were used to teach writing in Spanish and that teachers are expected to do translations or modifications with little or no support. They also expressed concern that this is extra work for teachers and that there is little professional development for teachers in teaching writing in Spanish. Spanish writing curricula that were named were translations or recreations from English, and some titles of programs had not even been changed from



English to Spanish. For example, one title was “English writing program en Español.” Finally, it is noteworthy that many respondents say that they use readers’ and writers’ workshops to teach writing in Spanish and English. Workshop approaches are just that, approaches, and are not curriculum programs or materials, and likely best represent the dearth in the field of quality writing curricula and programs to guide schools and teachers in the teaching of writing in Spanish.

We, along with others, have advocated for direct and explicit teaching in oracy, reading, writing and the teaching of metalinguistic development (Escamilla et. al., 2014; Genesee & Riches, 2006). It is the intent of this book to give teachers insights via analyses of writing into how to view the writing of EB students as assets to be developed instead of problems to be remediated. We hope to also provide some suggestions for teaching writing at various grade levels, including not just the tools of writing but the use of writing to teach for social justice.

The importance of this book is even more pronounced when one considers exciting advances in policy in the field of bilingual/dual language education in the past few years. In 2016, with the passage of Proposition 58, the state of California lifted the ban on bilingual education, thereby creating new opportunities and challenges for teaching biliteracy and implementing new and innovative bilingual and dual language programs. Similar policy changes have occurred in Massachusetts and Arizona, creating similar needs for books such as this one. Finally, the Seal of Biliteracy is now available in 21 states ([www.sealofbiliteracy.org](http://www.sealofbiliteracy.org)). This Seal is offered to students who have studied and obtained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. Proficiency in writing in Spanish and English will assist students and schools desiring to pursue this Seal.

## SUMMARY AND PREVIEW: BILITERATE CHILDREN, BILITERATE WRITERS

This book is about developing biliteracy in Spanish and English with a focus on writing. Using an asset-based perspective, we begin from the assumption that, with the appropriate instructional support, children are quite capable of becoming biliterate beginning in kindergarten, and that the simultaneous learning of literacy in two languages provides a scaffold to learning, not a source of interference.

[Chapter 2](#) of this book illustrates further the need for the creation of a biliterate pedagogy. This chapter looks specifically at the connection between oracy and writing and how the foundational skills promoted by SOR can be integrated into biliteracy units that include direct and explicit attention to teaching the expressive skills of oracy and writing. A sample literacy unit is included in this chapter that also demonstrates how biliterate pedagogies can include teaching for social justice.

[Chapter 3](#) provides an in-depth examination of a strategy called the Dictado, which we advocate using to emphasize foundational writing skills and cross-language foci. It is a strategy with usefulness at all grade levels. Following this chapter, in [Chapter 4](#) we provide an examination of writing at the kindergarten level. We isolated kindergarten as we know that the developmental needs of kindergarten differ in important ways from the writing needs in first grade and beyond. [Chapter 5](#) focuses on Grade 1, further demonstrating how writing samples are evaluated through the use of the Literacy Squared Writing Rubric and then used to inform instruction. [Chapter 6](#) provides glimpses into genre-based applications of the Literacy Squared Framework for the intermediate grades utilizing the holistic biliteracy framework. Finally, [Chapter 7](#) provides a look at how teaching for social justice can be part and parcel of biliteracy teaching and uses an example of a plan to develop biliterate writing and specific cross-language connections in the fifth grade.

The goals of this book are ambitious. First and foremost, we hope that this book and others like it will help to shift the current discourse from a deficit-based discourse about the problems of emergent bilingual learners to a more asset-based discourse. From an existential level, it is our hope that one day work like ours, along with others’, will influence how biliteracy is viewed, to the point where monolingual word processing programs no longer identify the word *biliteracy* as a misspelled word in the English spell-check system (accompanied by a suggestion to change the word from *biliteracy* to *illiteracy*) and instead recognize the word *biliteracy* as a legitimate word in the English language. On a theoretical level, we hope that our book helps to promote the

theory that biliteracy is a higher form of literacy than monoliteracy, and that it is distinct from the literacy experiences and process of monolinguals (Bauer & Gort, 2011). Most importantly, on a practical level, we hope that this book will help teachers come to see the many strengths that their EB children have in their two languages, and to see the instructional and assessment strategies posed in this book as tools to create instructional environments to nurture biliteracy development.

Throughout our adventures over the years, we have created several slogans for biliteracy teaching. They include: “Biliteracy better not faster,” “English earlier and Spanish longer” and a new slogan just for this book, “*never ever, nunca, jamas* speak or write about children in deficit terms.” In this book we add a challenge to the field—“Juntos toward the creation of a biliterate pedagogy!”

### Questions for Reflection and Action

---

- ▶ What writing curriculum or program does your school offer for EBs in Spanish or English? What do you consider to be the advantages and disadvantages of your current program/curriculum?
- ▶ List all of the professional development (PD) opportunities you have had in the past 2–3 years that specifically focused on the teaching of writing. How many of these PD sessions were either offered bilingually or were focused on Spanish?
- ▶ How might you use the research designs and/or questions posed above to implement and examine a biliteracy program at your school?

# Literacy Squared® Writing Rubric

## Quantitative Rubric Assumptions

### GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS:

- The students' Spanish and English writing samples will be scored **side-by-side**.
- **Critical descriptors are cumulative.** To receive a 10 in Content, the student must exhibit all of the relevant indicators listed in the previous levels.
- All samples should be scored, but if the student **did not respond to the prompt**, this should be indicated at the top of the rubric.
- Samples written in a language other than the language of the prompt are scored as a 1 for Content. This score credits the child for demonstrating an understanding of the task and the topic. Additionally, it recognizes that bilingual students bring multiple linguistic resources to the learning environment. All other constructs are scored 0.
- Children are not penalized for nonstandard syntax (noun/adjective – *agua frio*; noun/article – *los serpiente*; verb/adjective—*están grande*).

### CONTENT

- **“Descriptive language (use of adjectives/adverbs at the word level)”** – This includes more than basic adjectives such as *my blue bike*. Instead, to be considered descriptive language, the student must include more extensive descriptions. For example, *I like my bunny that is white and soft* contains adjectives but is not considered descriptive language. *Me gusta el perro porque me obedece cuando le digo siéntate. También porque está bonito, tiene pelaje y lo puedo vestir como quiera*, is an example of descriptive language.
- **“Varied sentence structures”**—Just because each sentence starts a different way, this does not necessarily qualify as “varied sentence structures.” To be varied sentences, the composition should contain some combination of:
  - o *Simple sentences*—independent clause, contains a subject and verb, includes a complete thought.
  - o *Compound sentences*—two independent clauses connected by a coordinator: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*
  - o *Complex sentences*—independent clause joined by one or more dependent clauses, contains subordinators (*because, since, although, when*), relative pronouns (*that, who, which*), etc.

### STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

- **Structural elements** are those elements the writer uses to guide readers through the text. They include the use of capitalization, punctuation marks, and paragraphing. Punctuation marks include: periods, commas, question marks, *guiones*, quotation marks, exclamation points, apostrophes, hyphens.
- **Accent marks** are *not* considered punctuation—they are part of spelling.
- “Controls” in critical descriptor 3 means “mostly controls” (at least 85% or more).

### SPELLING

- Children are not penalized in the spelling section for approximated code-switches.
- **Majority** = at least 50%
- **Most** = at least 85% or more
- Reversed letters are counted as spelling approximations if the reversed letter is a different letter (b/d). However, if the reversed letter does not represent another letter (reversed letter c) is not counted as a spelling approximation.
- Words that are written with hyper- (*con migo/conmigo*, snow man/snowman) or hyposegmentation (*ala/a la*, alot/a lot) are counted as spelling approximations.

Rater ID:

Student ID:

Not to prompt  
(Circle)

Span | Eng

**Literacy Squared® Writing Rubric: Grades K, 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5**  
(Circle Grade)

SPANISH SCORE	CONTENT	ENGLISH SCORE
10	Focused composition, conveys emotion or uses figurative language, is engaging to the reader; clearly addresses the prompt; book language	10
9	Organization of composition includes effective transitions and vivid examples	9
8	Writing includes complex <i>sentence</i> structures and has a discernable, consistent structure	8
7	Sense of completeness—Clear introduction and clear conclusion	7
6	Includes descriptive language (use of adjectives, adverbs at the word level) or varied sentence structures	6
5	Main idea discernable with supporting details, or main idea can be inferred or stated explicitly, or repetitive vocabulary: may include unrelated ideas	5
4	Two ideas— <i>I like my bike <b>and/because</b> it is blue</i>	4
3	One idea expressed through a subject and predicate, subject may be implied ( <i>I like my bike, amo, or run</i> )	3
2	Label(s), list of words. May communicate an idea w/o subject & predicate	2
1	Prewriting: Picture only, not readable, or written in a language other than the prompt	1
0	The student did not prepare a sample	0
<b>STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS</b>		
5	Multiparagraph composition with accurate punctuation and capitalization	5
4	Controls most structural elements and includes paragraphing	4
3	Controls beginning and ending punctuation in ways that make sense and is attempting additional structural elements (commas, question marks, <i>guiones</i> , apostrophes, ellipses, parentheses, hyphens, and indentation)	3
2	Uses one or more of the structural elements <i>correctly</i>	2
1	Uses one or more of the structural elements <i>incorrectly</i>	1
0	Structural elements not evident	0
<b>SPELLING</b>		
6	Accurate spelling	6
5	Most words are spelled conventionally	5
4	Majority of high-frequency words are correct and child is approximating standardization in errors	4
3	Most words are not spelled conventionally but demonstrates an emerging knowledge of common spelling patterns	3
2	Represents most sounds in words and most high frequency words are spelled incorrectly	2
1	Represents some sounds in words	1
0	Message is not discernable	0

From Escamilla, K., Hopewell, S. Butvilofsky, S., Sparrow, W., Soltero-González, L. & Escamilla, M. (2014). *Biliteracy from the Start: Literacy Squared in Action. Biliterate Writing From the Start: The Literacy Squared Approach to Asset-Based Writing Instruction* by Sandra Butvilofsky, Kathy Escamilla, and Susan Hopewell. Copyright © 2023 Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved.

**Literacy Squared® Qualitative Analysis of Student Writing**  
Bilingual Strategies

	(Spanish → English)	(English → Spanish)	Spanish ↔ English (bidirectional)
<p><b>DISCOURSE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Rhetorical structures</b> (first, next, last)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Punctuation</b> (signals awareness of code-switches—<i>me gusta</i> “basketball,” or ¡Run fast!)</li> </ul>			
<p><b>SENTENCE/PHRASE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Syntax</b> (subject omission, word order- the bike of my sister)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Literal Translations</b> (<i>agarré todas bien</i>/I got them all right)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Code-switching</b> (<i>no puedo hablar</i> in just one language)</li> </ul>			
<p><b>WORD LEVEL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Code-switching</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Loan words</b> (soccer, mall)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Nativized words</b> (<i>spláchate</i>/splashed)</li> </ul>			
<p><b>PHONICS</b></p> <p>Spanish → English (<i>japi</i>/happy)            English → Spanish (<i>awua/agua</i>)            Spanish ↔ English            (<i>bihave</i>/behave, <i>lektura/lectura</i>)</p>			
<b>Developmental Language Specific Approximations</b>			
<b>SPANISH</b>		<b>ENGLISH</b>	
<b>Structural elements, syntax, spelling, hypo/hypersegmentation</b>		<b>Structural elements, syntax, spelling, hypo/hypersegmentation</b>	

From Escamilla, K., Hopewell, S., Butvilofsky, S., Sparrow, W., Soltero-González, L. & Escamilla, M. (2014). *Biliteracy from the Start: Literacy Squared in Action. Biliterate Writing From the Start: The Literacy Squared Approach to Asset-Based Writing Instruction* by Sandra Butvilofsky, Kathy Escamilla, and Susan Hopewell. Copyright © 2023 Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved.



**D**eveloped by highly respected experts through nearly two decades of research, this book shows bilingual educators **how to use the innovative Literacy Squared model to design effective writing instruction that places Spanish and English side by side.** Focusing on emerging bilinguals in Grades K–5, this research-based guide supports educators through every step of planning and implementing biliterate writing instruction and monitoring student progress. Educators will learn proven strategies for **teaching writing in tandem with other language arts skills,** and they'll get an invaluable **Literacy Squared Writing Rubric** to help them assess children's developing writing in both Spanish and English.

A must for teachers, administrators, and leadership teams, this book prepares readers to see biliteracy as an asset, build on children's strengths, and support students' writing skills in both languages—starting from the earliest years of school.

### Bilingual educators will:

- Discover how an **asset-based approach** to biliterate writing helps students' skills flourish in both languages
- Make **cross-language connections** to help students connect what they know in one language with what they're learning in another
- Learn how and why **explicit teaching of oracy** enhances writing development in Spanish and English
- Learn about a **highly effective strategy** for helping students develop **cross-language metalinguistic awareness**
- Get practical, **grade-specific guidance** for nurturing biliterate writing in kindergarten, Grades 1–2, and Grades 3–5
- Link writing standards to **Social Justice Standards** to help students problem solve, think critically, and advocate for positive change

### Includes Practical Materials!

- Key terms
- Guiding questions
- Reflection and action questions
- Sample biliteracy units
- Student work examples
- Lessons from real classrooms

“Bilingual educators rejoice! Finally, a book that focuses on the importance of biliterate writing...This is a must-read for district leaders and teachers in a bilingual or dual language setting.”

—Amy Mosquera,  
Adelante Educational  
Specialists Group,  
[www.adelantespecialists.com](http://www.adelantespecialists.com)

“Finally, a resource that dual language teachers have been waiting for... Its essential message continues to be loud and clear: Let's view biliteracy as the way to teach emerging bilinguals. ¡Ya es hora!”

—Mónica Lara, Ph.D.,  
COO and Senior Educational  
Consultant for Bilingualism  
and Biliteracy,  
Seidlitz Education

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: **Sandra Butvilofsky, Ph.D.**, is Biliteracy Instructional Coach at Escuela Bilingüe Pioneer, Boulder Valley School District. **Kathy Escamilla, Ph.D.**, is Professor Emeritus of Education in the Division of Equity, Bilingualism, and Biliteracy at the University of Colorado Boulder. **Susan Hopewell, Ph.D.**, is Associate Professor of Equity, Bilingualism, and Biliteracy at the University of Colorado Boulder.