The Bridge is an instructional element designed to take advantage of the dynamic bilingualism of students in dual language (one-way and two-way) and transitional bilingual programs of instruction. In our book, *Teaching for Biliteracy: Strengthening Bridges between Languages* (Beeman & Urow, 2013), we define the Bridge as “… the instructional moment when teachers purposefully bring the two languages together, strategically guiding bilingual learners to

- transfer the academic content they have learned in one language to the other,
- engage in contrastive analysis of the two languages, ... and
- develop ‘metalinguistic awareness’” (back cover).

Based on this definition and the longer description and examples in the text, we have worked with teachers around the country who have begun to use the Bridge in their classrooms. While there is no one right way to implement the Bridge, and its implementation will reflect both the students and the structure of each bilingual program in which it is used, there are some basic elements of the Bridge to keep in mind that ensure the successful use of this instructional tool.

The focus of the Bridge is language—specifically, the metalinguistic analysis of language.

Research in the field of biliteracy finds that bilinguals who recognize, understand, and can articulate the similarities and differences between their languages reach higher levels of academic achievement and higher levels of language development in both languages

(Cummins et al., 2005; DeJong, 2011; Dressler, Carlo, Snow, August, & White, 2011; Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1996). And while the research demonstrates the need for students to have the opportunity to engage in contrastive analysis of their languages (in other words, to compare and contrast languages), the question for teachers is how to provide students with this opportunity while simultaneously maintaining the separation of languages—a critical programmatic element of dual language (Rogers, 2009).

The Bridge is a response to that question. In the past, dual language teachers and programs have worked to establish the strict separation of languages, while currently, the field has moved to the strategic separation of languages (Escamilla et al., 2014; Thomas & Collier, 2012). In programs that include the Bridge, classroom teachers continue to maintain the language of instruction

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The Bridge is designed to optimize transfer and reduce redundancy.

Once a list of learned terms has been provided, the teacher then helps students to “cross the Bridge” by providing the key terms in the other language. In the math example in this article and in the science example in the Kindergarten video, the Bridge goes from content learned in Spanish to English. So, in these examples, in order to help students cross the Bridge, the teacher provides the terms in English. But it is important to note that the Bridge is bidirectional. The Bridge also goes from content learned in English to Spanish, following the same steps. Each district’s language and content allocation plan and biliteracy maps determine the direction of the Bridge (for examples of plans that include Bridges, go to http://www.teachingforbiliteracy.com/infrastructure-supports/, and for tips on how to create biliteracy maps, go to http://www.teachingforbiliteracy.com/tips-on-writing-bufs/).

After providing the terms in the other language, the teacher gives students the time to practice using these terms. In the math example, after crossing the Bridge, the students would be practicing math terms in English. In the video, you can see the Kindergarten students practice describing insects in English, after having studied insects in Spanish for several weeks and subsequently “going across the Bridge” to English with the teacher’s support. These students do not need to study insects again in English to be able to articulate their understanding of insects in English, thus reducing redundancy in instruction.

**The Bridge is pre-planned by the teacher.**

As in the both the math example and the science example, the Bridge was planned ahead of time by the teacher. The Bridge did not occur randomly, or in order to clarify concepts for students, or to translate information for students. Rather, the Bridge was planned for the end of the unit, once the students had...
learned the concepts and were ready to focus on the contrastive analysis of their languages.

After having time to practice the terms in the new language, these terms are matched to the terms in the language of instruction. At this point, the math Bridge would look like the Bridge in Figure 2, and the focus of the Bridge becomes metalinguistic. Because the purpose of the Bridge is two-fold—both to help students transfer content learned in one language to the other language and to engage in contrastive analysis of their languages—a side-by-side Bridge will produce two anchor charts. The first chart is the Bridge itself (Figure 2) and focuses on transfer. The second chart is the metalinguistic chart (Figure 3) and focuses on one area of similarity or difference between the two languages.

In the math example illustrated above, the metalinguistic focus chosen by the teacher is word order, or syntax. In the metalinguistic chart, the teacher has begun by taking terms from the Bridge chart and highlighting, in this case, the difference between noun-adjective word order in Spanish and in English. After beginning with examples from the Bridge, the metalinguistic chart becomes a living chart with a permanent place in the classroom, inviting students to add additional examples of this difference between Spanish and English. To see more about how the metalinguistic chart is used in the classroom as a living chart, see https://www.facebook.com/teachingforbiliteracy/videos/1468087206585542/.

References