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# Soleado

Promising Practices from the Field

## Balanced Literacy and Biliteracy: How do Writer's Workshop and other Balanced Literacy Routines Fit Into Biliteracy Instruction?

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It is well established in monolingual, general education, that balanced literacy, writer's workshop, guided reading, and other literacy routines are effective ways of organizing and planning for literacy instruction. However, it has also been established that balanced literacy routines are more effective within language education programs when implemented with additional strategies explicitly designed to build oral language in anticipation of the literacy activities (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; August & Shanahan, 2006; O'Day, 2009). In this article we will explore how balanced literacy

learning reflects a mindset in which the typical behaviors of bilinguals (such as using their two languages together as in "El perro está barqueando") are embraced and accepted.



Students in Dana Hardt's Kindergarten classroom in Washoe County School District, Reno, NV move from oracy (Total Physical Response) to Modeled/Shared Reading.

A monolingual perspective of language learning identifies and labels students by a dominant language or L1 (either Spanish or English dominant or dominant in some other language). This practice limits the view of a student's linguistic development (García, 2009; Palmer, Cervantes-Soon, & Heiman, 2017; Palmer & Martínez, 2013). A multilingual perspective, however, views all students

engaged in biliteracy as developing bilinguals. This multilingual perspective of learners is especially relevant given the recent demographic shift in population which has resulted in a significant increase in the number of English learners (ELs) who are U.S. born. In fact, U.S. born ELs make up 82% of ELs in the elementary schools and have been exposed to Spanish (or some other non-English language) and English from birth (Zong & Batalova, 2015). For these students, therefore, their first and dominant language is bilingual.

### A multilingual perspective

Successful language education programs reflect a multilingual perspective of learning (Escamilla et al., 2014; García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017; Howard et al., 2018). A multilingual perspective of

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Consequently, effective instruction for these developing bilinguals integrates language acquisition strategies with literacy and content in both Spanish and English, and moves from informal (or social) language to formal (or academic) language. Teaching for biliteracy requires the strategic use of Spanish, English, and the Bridge. This is also referred to as the three linguistic spaces of biliteracy instruction. At the instructional level, these linguistic spaces are organized by the Biliteracy Unit Framework (Beeman & Urow, 2013). Biliteracy units of instruction begin by building oracy and background knowledge around the essential understandings of the unit in one language (either Spanish or English), and then move to rigorous reading and writing in the same language. In order to reach deep levels of biliteracy, students need to be exposed to Spanish literacy and English literacy daily. Because of this daily use of both Spanish and English literacy blocks, the daily schedules, curriculum maps, unit design, assessment, and other instructional practices and structures look different in a biliteracy setting from those in a monolingual program. The sample instruction described below focuses on the integrated Spanish balanced literacy and social studies block.

### *Balanced Literacy*

Balanced literacy is a term used to describe literacy instruction that focuses on the three cueing systems used by proficient readers and writers: the semantic system (meaning), the syntactic (structure), and the graphophonic (visual) (Cloud et al., 2009). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) describe balanced literacy as a framework made up of three blocks: reading, writing, and word study/language. The authors emphasize that teachers and students should consistently make connections across the three blocks during the day. They also state that what students read and write should come from the content areas (science, social studies, health, math, and others) and that students benefit from connecting their reading and writing as much as possible. Oracy development (the academic oral language required for reading and writing) is infused in all parts of this framework.

The description below by Fountas and Pinnell (2001) highlights the flexibility of this three-block

framework and how it should be used for planning and the delivery of instruction.

This three-block structured framework will help you conceptualize the language arts curriculum, think about students' literacy learning, plan and organize instruction, and provide a high level of productivity and engagement. The framework is flexible. There are many possibilities for variation—in the content studied, the texts, the configurations of students (individuals, small groups, the whole class), and the daily time frames (p.13).

Many districts in the United States have adopted the components of balanced literacy as a way to plan, organize, and deliver optimal reading and writing instruction. Also known as routines, these components are flexible and carefully chosen based on unit design and performance tasks, and thus they vary throughout the unit. A description of these components, or routines, such as guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, modeled writing, and modeled/shared writing, can be found at the end of this article. This list of components represents the types of routines that contribute to successful balanced literacy instruction; they are not meant to all be used at all times, every day, with all students. Instead, their selection is to be made carefully based on the planned performance goals and where in the unit students require different types of instructional support.

### *Balanced Literacy and Biliteracy*

According to Beeman and Urow (2013):

A comprehensive approach to literacy instruction integrates content, literacy, and language instruction and connects reading [comprehension] with oral language and writing. Effective biliteracy instruction enables bilingual learners to use reading, writing, listening, and speaking for a wide range of purposes in two languages (p. 2).

The challenge in implementing balanced literacy within a biliteracy construct is two-fold: 1) the constraint of time (planning for two literacy periods instead of one), and 2) the need to protect the pedagogical spirit of a balanced literacy philosophy which is inherently student-driven, flexible, and fluid.

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Therefore, to implement a balanced literacy approach to biliteracy, it is critical to consider the following principles in planning for biliteracy:

1. Students should experience daily literacy time in both languages.
2. Unit designs should integrate language, literacy, and content, and they should reflect the program's language and content allocation plan. Literacy components are identified as part of the unit design and they change from the beginning of the unit, the middle of the unit, and the end of the unit, and reflect a gradual release of responsibility approach as the unit progresses.
3. Selection of components/routines should be guided by student performance data, the standards upon which the unit is based, and the summative assessment/performance outcomes of the unit. These literacy components can be used in both language arts classes.

Below is an example of a performance task based on Susan Pryor's First Grade Biliteracy Unit Framework (BUF) titled *Self/Story of My Life*. The entire unit can be found at <http://www.teachingforbiliteracy.com/samples/>.

**Performance Task/Unit Summative Assessment:** At the end of the unit, all students will be able to show their learning by successfully completing the task described below:

**Task:** Students will write a personal narrative about how a student has grown from a baby to a big girl/boy, including details that describe key features of each stage (what they could do or objects they used and what they did during each stage).

**Measurement tool:** Teacher-created rubric

**Student Configuration:** Independent work

*Plan for Literacy Components or Routines Throughout the 1st Grade Unit*

**Unit Design Example**

The unit example that follows is organized around standards, big ideas (or essential understandings), and content and language objectives. These three areas of focus are captured in the unit's performance task, or summative assessment. In the Biliteracy Unit Framework (Beeman & Urow, 2013), the performance task is used by teachers to backwards plan the specific mini-lessons that will lead to all students successfully completing the summative assessment, or performance task.

Beginning-of-the-Unit Components/Routines: Build Oracy and Background Knowledge	Middle-of-the-Unit Routines	End-of-the-Unit Routines
<p><b>Whole-Group Experiences:</b> Total Physical Response (TPR), Concept Attainment, Dramatic Play</p> <p><b>Shared Language/Literacy</b></p> <p><b>Shared Reading (Adapted Reader's Theater)</b></p> <p><b>Story dictation:</b> a strategy that provides a link between the oracy-heavy beginning and the more literacy-heavy middle of the unit. Students talk and teachers write what they say, a kind of modeled writing, heavily reliant on oral language. Although this routine is usually open, i.e., "What's your story today?", it could be used as part of a unit if the question is tailored to the content of the unit, i.e., "Tell me a story about when you were little." using a photo as a reference.</p>	<p><b>Whole-Group Experiences:</b></p> <p><b>Read Aloud</b> with turn to your partner – provides many opportunities to practice the oracy developed during beginning-of-the-unit experiences.</p> <p><b>Language Experience Approach - modeled writing</b> that elicits oral language responses and models how to encode it.</p> <p><b>Shared Writing</b> - sharing the pen with students: scaffolded encoding by students.</p> <p><b>Language/Word Study</b> begins at this point, and uses word and phrases from the unit (the oral language developed at the beginning of the unit). The <b>dictado</b> starts here (Beeman, K. &amp; Urow, C. 2013).</p> <p><b>Small-Group Experiences</b>  <b>Small-Group Reading Instruction/Guided Reading</b> - targeted and differentiated</p>	<p><b>Independent Reading/Readers' Workshop</b> (personal narratives)</p> <p><b>Independent Writing/Writers' Workshop</b> (personal narratives)</p> <p>Opportunities to share projects: a formal presentation or share with older grade buddy 1:1 using the oral language students have practiced; working on speaking and listening standards related to the presentation. The oracy comes full circle when approached this way.</p>

Note: Balanced literacy routines are defined at the end of this article on page 11. Additional information on biliteracy strategies can be found here: <http://bit.ly/biliteracystrategies>

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### Guided Reading and Writer's Workshop

As illustrated in the example above, guided reading can be an essential component in a biliteracy program, but its place and time are carefully planned at the unit level so that students have the oracy needed to be successful and the teaching goals in the guided reading or small group instruction meet their needs. Students do not engage in guided reading at the beginning of the unit because that routine does not match their needs.

Writer's and reader's workshop are part of this unit, but they also occur toward the end of the unit when students are able to work independently as readers and writers and will benefit from the structures that the workshop model brings: mini-lessons, modeling, independent practice, and others. However, to start the unit with these routines would not be appropriate as students will not yet have the oracy they need for literacy—either reading or writing (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). O'Day (2009) notes that the benefits of balanced literacy routines for language learners are diminished when they do not have sufficient oracy to access the full meaning of the text or the discussions around the text. In addition, during writing instruction, without first building oracy, students might either choose to write in the other language or not at all.

### Conclusion

This article has attempted to answer the following questions: Can monolingual constructs such as writer's workshop and guided reading fit within a biliteracy framework? When looked at from a balanced literacy perspective in which the routines are carefully selected based on the students' needs, the unit's goals and the place within the unit, the answer is yes. But, if looked at as daily routines that are followed “a la monolingual”, the answer is no.

Then how do we use these routines in biliteracy? We do so by using a multilingual perspective of learning. We create units that include a balance between reading, writing, and word study and are anchored in the meaningful context that comes from science or social studies standards or a universal theme (like “relationships” or “justice”). These units are carefully organized so that students first develop oracy and background knowledge around the unit's essential understandings (or big ideas).

As the unit continues and students develop the academic oral language and knowledge needed for success with guided reading and writer's workshop, these types of routines are added to the middle and end of the unit. Balanced literacy routines can fit into biliteracy when carefully selected and intentionally planned for the developing bilingual.

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*Balanced Literacy Routines* (Fountas, I. & Pinnell, G. 2001)

Shared Language /Literacy	A group meeting where a brief, focused experience intended to expand students' language and/or literacy skills is presented by the teacher. Examples include: having students talk about a topic for 2-3 minutes in small groups then share key ideas that surfaced with the whole class; building vocabulary by reading a paragraph that features one or more new words and then talk about what they mean.
Interactive Edit	A brief activity (no more than 5-minutes long) focusing on conventions. One way of doing this might be to dictate one or two sentences that present challenges in spelling, grammar, punctuation, word choice, etc. Students write the sentences, edit with a partner or individually, and then discuss the reasons for using the conventions.
Handwriting	A 5-minute mini-lesson once a week on letter formation. After the mini-lesson, guided and independent practice needs to be provided.
Word Study	A whole group mini-lesson on a strategy or principle related to ongoing word study that is within small group instruction.
Modeled/ Shared Reading	The teacher reads a text to students and models specific thinking about a text along the way. The teacher and the students all have a copy of the same text (or the text is visually displayed for all students to see). Students follow along while the teacher reads and models active thinking skills while reading. Every so often, students are provided the opportunity to practice the kind of thinking that was modeled by the teacher.
Modeled/ Shared Writing	The teacher and the students work together to compose a common text. As the teacher writes the text on a chart for all students to see, the teacher models specific thinking associated with the written text s/he is modeling. Every so often, students are provided the opportunity to practice the kind of thinking that was modeled by the teacher. When appropriate, the student suggestions can be added to the chart by the teacher.
Interactive Read Aloud	The teacher reads a text aloud to the students and stops at significant points during the text to ask for comments or facilitate a discussion about what is happening in the text.
Choral Reading	A group of students (can be a small group or whole group) reread an already familiar text for the purpose of increased fluency.
Mini-lesson	A short lesson focused on a specific principle or procedure that most students need help learning. In a mini-lesson, the teacher focuses on something important about reading or writing and demonstrates an aspect of the reading or writing process. Mini-lessons should interactively engage students and can focus on management, strategy or skill, or craft. A mini-lesson is specific and succinct, lasting between 5-15 minutes.
Independent Reading	Students independently read a variety of texts and prepare periodic written responses. While students read independently, they practice applying what they learned during the mini-lesson provided by the teacher. During independent reading time, the teacher also confers with individuals to support and assess reading as well as to teach to individual needs. The reading is usually followed by a form of sharing and evaluation.
Guided Reading	The teacher pulls together small, <u>temporary</u> groups to explicitly teach effective reading strategies for processing a variety of literary and informational texts. <b>Its central focus is to teach for the comprehension of texts.</b> The group is homogeneous in that all students in the group have similar reading behaviors and needs. The teacher introduces the text and readers read it independently. The teacher selects teaching points based on readers' needs and sometimes assigns oral and/or written response tasks. Word work may follow.
Literature Study	The teacher and students set up assigned reading/writing tasks and agree on meeting times. The group is heterogeneous in nature as students may all exhibit different reading behaviors, but all students are reading or listening to the same text. When they meet, the group engages in in-depth discussions about a text. The teacher is generally with the group for discussion, though the students take turns facilitating. The teacher, in consultation with the group, devises written responses.
Group Share and Evaluation	A 5- to 10-minute opportunity to close the writing or reading time where students share how they applied the teaching point discussed in the mini-lesson.
Independent Writing	Students engage in the writing process applying the teaching point learned during the mini-lesson. During this time, the teacher confers with individuals to support and address writing needs.
Guided Writing	The teacher pulls together small, <u>temporary</u> groups of writers to provide explicit teaching based on the writers' needs at a particular point in time. Sometimes the teacher has noticed students' needs and forms the groups; at other times, the students request group help with some aspect of writing. The teacher explicitly and efficiently works with students to teach the writer's craft, strategies, and skills.
On-Going Word Study	During this time, the teacher provides an opportunity for individuals or small groups to pay close attention to the structure of words to help students become aware of letter patterns and word parts. While this study of words is done in isolation, students are familiar with the words and their meaning. The purpose is to teach students efficient strategies to solve words and discover the inner workings of words.