

Literacy Instruction for Bilingual Latino Students: Teachers' Experiences and Knowledge

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Abstract

To date, the on-going debate concerning beginning reading instruction primarily has involved federal government officials and selected reading researchers without including teachers' voices. In this report, we present the results of a series of focus group interviews with teachers of Latino children in three urban centers with significant Latino representation: Chicago, El Paso, Washington DC. We approached this task from a critical educational and a literacy sociocultural stance. Thirty K-5 teachers from three school districts with an extensive record of innovation in bilingual education participated in this research. We employed a semi-structured interview protocol that probed teachers' perspectives on five pre-determined domains: curriculum, instruction, assessment, home-school connections, and research. For each data set, the two researchers jointly read the transcript to identify key topics that fell within and outside of the five domains. As a result of our analysis, we concluded that our participating teachers rejected the widespread belief that the literacy education of Latino students is an intractable problem requiring services of a remedial nature. Far from obsessing about instructional methods, they explicitly stated that they were ready and willing to "do whatever it takes" to make sure their students succeed. As a result they crafted learning experiences that were coherent, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive. In other words, their approach was oriented towards future learning, not re-teaching irrelevant and useless skills. In their words, the ultimate goal was to create "better people" not just students who could pass tests.

Introduction

Until recently, the on-going debate concerning early childhood reading instruction primarily has involved federal government officials and selected reading researchers (Allington & Woodside-Jiron, 1999; Gee, 1999; Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1999; Snow et al., 1998). Teachers' voices have not been at the center of this discussion (Reading Today, 2000). In particular, teachers of linguistically diverse students have not figured prominently in policy discussions and decisions (Jiménez et al., 1999). In this report, we present the results of a series of focus group interviews with teachers of Latino children in three urban centers with significant Latino representation: Chicago, El Paso, and Washington, DC. We sought these teachers' knowledge and understanding of school literacy practices that maximize success for this group of students.

Latino youth currently constitute the largest group of racial/ethnic minority students in U.S. schools, calculated at 13.5% of the total (NCES, 1998a). Latino students also comprise three out of four of the approximately 10 million students from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1996; NCES, 1997; NAEP, 2000). They continue,

however, to demonstrate depressed levels of literacy development in comparison to students from mainstream backgrounds (NCES, 1998b). Lemberger (1997) has pointed out that “bilingual teachers, as cultural liaisons, are in an important position to communicate across the family, school, community, and society contexts.” In part, this point underscores the unique position that bilingual education teachers have that other educational parties such as school administrators, external researchers, or educational policymakers, do not have, and that can serve teachers in identifying literacy practices that work and make educational sense for Latino students. These teachers’ perspectives and voices are grounded in the everyday, complex realities of schooling, and thus they have significant potential for informing us about how to make schools and literacy instruction better for Latino students.

It is also important to keep in mind that the majority of teachers working with Latino students are European American and novices who have not received training for working with children from diverse backgrounds (de la Rosa, Maw & Yzaguirre, 1990; National Education Association, 1990; Zimpher, 1989; Zimpher & Yessayan, 1987). With this information in mind, and taking into consideration that teachers generally have the best interests of their students at heart, we believed that information with the potential to improve the literacy learning and instruction of Latino students would be appreciated particularly by teachers from mainstream backgrounds.

In the following sections of this report, we selectively review the literature related to literacy instruction for Latino students in the elementary grades, with a focus on classroom practices. We specifically look at research from the effective schooling tradition, studies of literacy instruction, and studies on the literacy practices Latino families. These sections are followed by two other sections; one, a presentation of the findings from the focus group interviews and, the other, a discussion of our analysis. We end with our identification of research questions that emerged from this analysis, as well as a few concluding comments.

Review of Related Research

In the past three decades of bilingual schooling in the United States, the research on school literacy instruction for Latino students has comprised a relatively small, albeit heterogeneous, body of studies. Before presenting the data from our focus interviews, we would like to briefly review what this body of research reveals about literacy instructional practices in Grades K-6 so that this information can help serve as an interpretive backdrop for readers of this report. Three strands from the extant research served to inform our investigation: (a) studies on “effective practices” with bilingual Latino students, (b) studies on literacy instruction for bilingual Latino students, and (c) studies on literacy practices among bilingual Latino families.

Studies on “Effective Schooling” of Bilingual Latino Students

The research to date on effective bilingual schooling and teachers allows us to view practitioners in a variety of educational scenarios, serving Latino students from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, geographic locations, and grade levels, within different types of bilingual education (and transition) program models, and utilizing different literacy instructional methodologies. Of interest is that, except for the Tikunoff study (1985), all of the available

research focuses on a limited number of teachers (Carter and Chatfield, 1986; García, 1988, 1992; Gersten, 1996; Gersten & Jiménez, 1994; Jiménez, Gersten, and Rivera, 1996; Jiménez and Gersten, 1999; Moll, 1988; Pease-Alvarez, García, and Espinosa, 1991; Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999); Rutherford (1999). However, an examination of this literature revealed that all of the teachers sought to strike a balance between the role of meaning and skills in their instructional practice. They did this by either infusing meaning into skill-based instruction or skills into meaning-based teaching. These studies also revealed a common instructional mind-set among the teachers that included a belief in children's ability to learn and high expectations for their achievement. This mind-set extended to include positive perceptions of children's language, culture, families, and communities, which were viewed as potential resources, not problems. The research identified the alternation of native language and second language by the teachers and students as a recurrent attribute of effective practice. Finally, the theme of effective home-school connections with a particular emphasis on building and maintaining a strong relationship between the classroom teacher and the children's parents was pervasive within this literature.

Studies of Literacy Instruction for Bilingual Latino Students

Beyond the effective schooling research, studies of classroom literacy instruction for bilingual Latino students are few in number and address a limited range of topics. The result is a sketchy picture of optimal and proven literacy practices for bilingual Latino students. The majority of the studies address Spanish reading and/or writing instruction in the primary grades (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Delgado-Gaitán, 1991; Edelsky, 1986; Goldenberg, 1994; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Mulhern, 1997; Muñoz-Swicegood, 1994; Pérez, 1994; Zecker, Pappas, and Cohen, 1998). Some of the studies also deal with English reading and/or writing instruction in the primary grades (Battle, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1999; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Padrón, 1992; Padrón, 1994; Reyes (1991a, 1991b). One study dealt with reading in both English and Spanish (Calderón, Tinajero, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1992). Studies of literacy instruction beyond this grade level, either in Spanish or English, are less represented, however. The primary-grade Spanish literacy studies reveal a strong code-emphasis in Spanish reading instruction in the focal classrooms and point to a tension between meaning and form in Spanish writing instruction, specifically in process writing (Reyes, 1991a, 1991b; Zecker, Pappas, and Cohen, 1998). Effective practices for teaching emergent/beginning English literacy to bilingual Latino students are explored in a couple of studies (Gómez, Parker, Lara-Alecio, and Gómez, 1996; Reyes, 1991a, 1991b). In the studies of literacy instruction in grades 3-5, the research emphasis is on comprehension and strategy instruction, both in Spanish and English (Muñoz-Swicegood, 1994; Padrón, 1994). Some ongoing instructional issues that surface in the studies as a whole include code-switching, cross-linguistic transfer, and cultural relevance. There are a few examples of sustained inquiry of particular topics by the same or different researchers, e.g., of early Spanish reading instruction and of process writing.

Studies on Literacy Practices Among Bilingual Latino Families

Researchers have challenged traditional stereotypical views concerning Latino parents. On the basis of considerable empirical evidence, researchers have asserted that Latino parents do indeed hold positive values about the education and school achievement of their children

Delgado-Gaitán, 1991, 1992; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Goldenberg, 1987, 1991; Soto, 1988, 1997; Valdés, 1996; Vásquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994). A second insight derived from research is that Latino families of low socioeconomic backgrounds are able to draw from significant cultural and shared knowledge from their own families as well as their communities (Guerra, 1998; Moll, 1992). Knowledge of this information could be used to support Latino children's schooling if schools and educators would only tap this source. Finally, researchers have critiqued and dismissed the deficit view that the homes of Latino students are devoid of oral and written language (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Pease-Alvarez & Vásquez, 1994; Vásquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994). These conclusions have been qualified, though, by the understanding that there is considerable variability in how and how much Latino parents are able to support their children's school experience at home (Paratore et al., 1999). Homework was shown to play an important role in terms of how school literacy enters the homes of Latino students (Paratore, Homza, Krol-Sinclair, Lewis-Barrow, Melzi, Stergis, & Haynes, 1995; Ramírez, 1992). Also, Latino parents have been found to rely on their own literacy learning experiences, which by and large were traditional and reductionistic for making sense of their children's literacy instruction (Goldenberg, Reese, & Gallimore, 1992). In terms of reading, parents tend to focus on sound-letter relationships and on blending letters into syllables. For writing, they tend to emphasize correct letter formation (Goldenberg, 1987; Goldenberg, Reese & Gallimore, 1992; Valdés 1996).

Synthesis

Across all three strands of research—effective practices, literacy instructional methods, and literacy practices among Latino families—the state of the research is incomplete and far from convergent. We describe it as such because it seems to raise more questions than it provides answers and because it does not yet deal with all of the relevant topics or the multiplicity of issues, trends, and developments pertinent to Latino students. Examples would be the paucity of research studies on instruction in dual language programs, instruction in early childhood settings, literacy tutoring for bilingual/second language students, the informal teaching methods of parents/families. These are only the larger arenas of possible research activity. Micro-topics such as instruction of phonological awareness, vocabulary teaching, and word identification instructional strategies have yet to be addressed. Another important way that the research is incomplete is that the field of literacy instruction still clings to a monolingual macro-model of literacy learning, both for English and Spanish literacy under the assumption that one has no influence on the other. In effect, this research resembles a patchwork quilt of disparate pieces more than it does an integrated tapestry of ideas or a propositional network that would lead us to an efficacious theory for teaching Latino students.

Methods

Participants: We sought to interview teachers working in long-established and/or recognized Kindergartens, preferably with assignments in Kindergarten and first grade where initial literacy instruction typically occurs. In Chicago, we interviewed 11 teachers from one PreK-8 campus, Rachel Carson Elementary, a school featured in the “Portraits of Success” list produced by the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory (www.lab.brown.edu/public). In El Paso, we talked with 9 teachers representing five K-5

schools in the El Paso Independent School District, a system with a long track record in bilingual education. In Washington, we met with 10 teachers representing three PreK-3 schools in the District of Columbia Public Schools system, among them Oyster Elementary, an internationally-acclaimed bilingual education site with an extensive history of innovation.

Teacher background characteristics: Among the Carson teachers, prior teaching experience ranged from 1 to 12 years. One teacher had been trained in Mexico; most of the others in several colleges/universities in Illinois. One teacher had taught in Texas prior to moving to the state. A number of them had been teaching assistants prior to being certified. The majority had, or were pursuing, master's degrees. Two of the teachers were male; the rest female. All but one was of Latino background. This last teacher was a fluent Spanish-speaker. Prior teaching experience for the El Paso teachers ranged from 1 to 22 years. Most had done their professional studies at the local university, and some had been colleagues while pursuing their master's degrees in a special graduate program. A number of them were interested in pursuing doctoral studies. The third-grade teacher in the group was a former bilingual education teacher currently assigned to a monolingual-English classroom. All the teachers were female; and with the exception of one, all Latinas. The non-Latino teacher was a fluent speaker of Spanish. The Washington, DC teachers reflected prior teaching experience that ranged from 5 to 28 years, with the most senior teacher having spent all her time at Oyster Elementary. Two teachers had been trained outside the U.S., one in Peru, the other in Puerto Rico. A number of them had taught in other states. Two of the Pre-K teachers team-taught at Oyster, as did two of the 1st grade teachers. All the teachers were female; all but three were Latinas. The Anglo teachers were fluent Spanish-speakers.

Student and program characteristics: At Carson, the teachers in Pre-K and K were in a fledgling two-way program while the rest of the teachers were part of the school's transitional bilingual education (TBE) program, which exited students at the end of third grade. Carson Elementary has an enrollment of about 1200 students, of whom 92% are of Spanish-speaking background, representing various ethnicities and countries of origin, but mostly of Mexican origin. Only about 40% of the students are enrolled in TBE. In El Paso, participating teachers came from 5 of the district's 50 elementary (PK-5) schools, specifically Cielo Vista, Clendenin, Johnson, Rusk, and Wainwright. The percent of limited English proficient learners at these schools ranged from 22- 63%, most of them of Mexican American or Mexican immigrant background, while their proportion of minority students ranged from 82-97%. The El Paso ISD has about 12,000 students in its bilingual education program, which encompasses both dual-language instruction and transitional bilingual education with exit at the end of fifth grade. The total district enrollment is more than 63,000 students, of which 84% are minority and 32% are LEP. In Washington, DC, our focal teachers were from 3 of the 104 elementary schools in the District of Columbia Public Schools system: Cleveland, Meyer, and Oyster. Cleveland had a transitional bilingual education program model in place, and Meyer Elementary, also TBE, was starting a two-way bilingual education program based on the Oyster School model in Kindergarten, but without two teachers in one classroom or the smaller class sizes found at Oyster. Oyster's socioeconomically-diverse enrollment is 60% Latino, 30% Anglo, and 10% African American. The DCPS system has more than 117 different languages represented. Latino students comprise more than 8% of the district's 71,000 enrollment and represent more than 21 Hispanic/Latino countries.

Interview Sessions: Procedures for focus group interviews by Vaughn (1996) served to guide our data collection. The interviews ran from 1 1/2 to 2 hours, with a semi-structured format aimed at exploring five topics in the following order: curriculum, instruction, assessment, home-school connections, and research. The basic stimulus questions were: What do you find effective for Latino students' literacy learning in terms of the curriculum? Instruction? Assessment? Home-school relations?

Analysis: Each taped interview was transcribed in its entirety by a doctoral student who was proficient in Spanish and English. Then the transcripts were read and checked for thoroughness and accuracy by one of the researchers. The final transcripts were read both individually and jointly by the researchers. Data reduction and analysis procedures adapted from Vaughn (1996) and McCracken (1988) were applied in the following manner. During the readings, topics were highlighted on the transcripts and, after the readings, the identified topics were discussed in order to form higher-level propositions. Next, the propositions were reorganized into listings by interview site and topic. The listing for each site served as a guide for the construction of a summary of that particular interview session. After listings were established, they were then checked again by rereading the transcripts to verify their accuracy. Finally, the researchers reviewed the resultant listings and distilled and refined them for "goodness of fit" with the data. Then, the first author wrote an initial draft of the findings while, at the same time, she consulted with the second author.

Discussion: This section contains four parts: (a) a cross-case analysis of the interview data, with delineation of similarities and differences in responses across sites, (b) conclusions about the findings in relation to previous relevant research results, (c) research questions emerging from the present study, and (d) closing remarks.

Cross-Interview Analysis

Curriculum: Across all three sites, there were two aspects of curriculum which focal teachers consistently spoke about as helping to advance Latino children's literacy learning, not only at the emergent and beginning phases, but also into advanced levels: curricular integration and children's literature/trade books. Integration within the language arts and across the curriculum was being achieved primarily through thematic units. Such integration was explained as mutually beneficial for students and teachers. Within the language arts, linkages from reading to writing were mentioned most often, and writing was cited as a growing curricular emphasis. Integration with the content areas of science, social studies, and mathematics was mentioned in relation to reading and writing primarily, not the other language arts, that is, listening, speaking, and viewing. The fine arts--song, music, art, drama, dance, and poetry--were touted as a powerful means for motivating and supporting children's emergent and beginning literacy learning. At each site, teachers consistently cited children's literature as an important curricular ingredient for enhancing the literacy learning of Latino students. Teachers talked about children's literature in two forms: within instructional materials (or the basal reading programs in use at each site) and in trade books. In relation to the former, there were repeated references to the basal anthologies and literature sets currently in use. Children's literature in trade book format was identified as a useful means for supplementing otherwise unsuitable curriculum

materials, both in Spanish and English, whether in the content areas or in the basal anthology itself. Teachers in all three sites stressed the need for children's literature (both in Spanish and English) that reflects the experiences of the different Latino students served by them, namely, that provides meaningful, culturally-relevant content, a requirement they stated goes unmet by Spanish translations of mainstream, English-language content.

Instruction: Teachers comments about instructional matters that make a difference in Latino children's literacy learning were far-ranging and diverse; however, two themes seemed to prevail: one, writing as a motivational and instructional device, or teaching tool, and two, the teacher's mediational role in both L1 and L2 instruction. There were repeated references to the power of writing, particularly "journaling," to stimulate children toward wanting to write initially and to write more. Although teachers did not explicitly link the concept of scaffolding to writing, they did point to the power of writing as a tool for learning language in general, for learning to make sense of print literacy, and for exploring content across the curriculum.

The interview responses made it clear that a significant role played by bilingual education teachers is as mediator of texts and lessons used for L1 and L2 literacy instruction. Some of teachers' mediational behaviors are in response to more-or-less optimal L1 and L2 materials and lessons, whose content and language is comprehensible to young Latino learners. Such mediation includes "generic" teaching strategies typically suggested for all learners, such as building on children's prior knowledge, encouraging children's predictions during reading, helping children make intertextual connections, and others. However, other reported mediational behaviors apparently are "induced" by inappropriate texts and lessons, whose unfamiliar content and language makes undue demands on Latino students in both L1 and L2 learning. These include extensive translation and the use of extra-linguistic behaviors by the teacher, such as gestures and actions, to mediate, or rather, compensate for, unfamiliar text vocabulary and overly challenging text content, in both L1 and L2 materials and lessons.

Assessment: There was virtual unanimity across the three sites that Latino students' literacy learning would be better served if multiple forms of assessment were employed across the grade levels, allowing students various ways of expressing their understandings and comprehension, both in Spanish and English. Teachers in the early grade levels, Pre-K, K, and 1st, were particularly vocal about the need for flexibility and variety in assessing young learners, strongly advocating for informal, naturalistic, and ongoing means of assessment and decrying standardized high-stakes testing. Although during the interviews, none of the teachers used the terms "alternative," "authentic," or "performance-based" in relation to assessment, they made it clear that assessing children's learning ought to be done in creative, non-contrived, and dynamic ways. Teachers also called for assessments that are sensitive to the dual-language knowledge and abilities of bilingual learners, for example, citing the importance of allowing children to use their native language in second-language assessment and of monitoring their progress and achievement both in Spanish and English.

Home-School Relations: Across the three sites, two common threads in the teachers' talk about aspects of home-school relations that serve to strengthen Latino children's literacy learning were systematic communication with parents and getting parents into classrooms to observe and undertake instructional activities. Teachers stressed establishing contact with parents early on in

the school year and maintaining relations through multiple forms of communication, including phone calls, newsletters, conferences, journals, among others, all done bilingually. They also emphasized the ongoing need to involve more parents in school activities and to secure their cooperation in supporting school literacy at home, especially during children's emergent and beginning reading development.

All the focal teachers were of like mind about the importance of having parents in the classroom to better inform them about the nature of schoolwork in general and their children's instructional activities in particular. They recognized that Latino parents as a whole desire to support their children's school work but sometimes do not know how to do so, especially if they themselves are not schooled or do not know how to read and write. Teachers repeatedly mentioned the necessity and power of "modeling" or demonstrating actual teaching strategies for parents – in the classroom -- so that these could later be emulated by them in volunteer tutorial work at school or at home with their children.

Differences: A different mix of schooling factors at each interview site appeared to differentially influence the contexts for literacy teaching and learning reported by the teachers, giving each interview a "distinctive flavor." In Chicago, the dominant issue/concern appeared to be a push for reading achievement and to a lesser degree, writing achievement particularly in English, to satisfy the demands of an early-exit transitional bilingual education model and high-stakes testing at the end of third grade. In El Paso, the dominant issue/concern seemed to be one of improving literacy instruction for all Latino students across monolingual and bilingual classrooms, with teachers noting that the high degree of homogeneity among the district's Mexicano-origin Latinos meant that similar student needs existed across all classrooms. In Washington, the dominant issue/concern appeared to be the need to elevate the status of Spanish among Spanish and English speakers, even in two-way bilingual immersion schools, such that English L2 literacy could be better supported by a solid base of native-language ability.

Conclusions

In this section, we discuss how the findings from the present study relate to insights gained from the existing research reviewed earlier in this report, that is, whether they confirm or disconfirm extant results. We also consider any new or emerging aspects of instructional practice for bilingual students highlighted by the present study.

Most obvious is the high degree of concordance between the findings of this study and those of the effectiveness practices research of the past decade and a half, particularly in the areas of curriculum and instruction. The focal teachers repeatedly echoed the importance to bilingual Latino students of practices such as curricular integration, thematic teaching, use of culturally relevant curriculum materials, hands-on activities, and cooperative grouping. All such practices figure prominently in the effective schooling literature (e.g., García, 1988; Pease-Alvarez et al., 1991; Reyes et al., 1999). The need for teachers to be caring but informed about bilingual Latino children's learning needs underlay much of their comments. Again, this is a consistent finding in the effective practice research conducted to date (Tikunoff, 1985; Carter & Chatfield, 1986; García, 1992). Teachers repeatedly called attention to the affective dimension,

both teachers' and children's attitudes, as influential to language and literacy learning and teaching.

While strongly supportive of bilingual education, the focal teachers nonetheless spoke candidly about the demanding work of bilingual teachers overall, much like the participants in Lemberger's studies (1996; 1997), specifically the work and resources required to create effective language and literacy instruction for bilingual Latino students. For example, they described the considerable mediation that is required in bilingual literacy instruction, both L1 and L2, and which they must carry out in order to be effective and responsive to children's learning needs. They echoed instructional strategies for mediating second-language reading tasks found in the existing research (e.g., Moll, 1988; Battle, 1993), noting the use of the native language as support for L2 reading. Unlike the existing research which has paid relatively little systematic attention to the texts used in instructing bilingual Latino students, the focal teachers gave considerable emphasis to the use of suitable children's literature as effective practice for bilingual Latino students. They noted the usefulness of culturally-relevant trade books, especially picture books, as mediating, supportive resources for learners all along the developmental continuum.

Part of the challenging work in language and literacy teaching with bilingual Latino students, particularly in transitional Kindergartens, was described by the focal teachers as ethical, political, and affective in nature, facets touched upon mostly by Lemberger (1996; 1997) in the existing research. Teachers described ethical dilemmas in literacy teaching and assessment such as being required to move students into second language reading when they were not yet proficient enough in English, or having to prepare students for inappropriate testing. Teachers also reported political conflicts with their monolingual peers over the use of instruction, assessment, and interaction methods that reportedly fail to take into account the language and cultural background of bilingual Latino students. Teachers pointed to the affective demands of having to combat continuing resistance on the part of monolingual teachers as well as some parents toward native-language instruction.

Significantly, misunderstandings of parents and children with regard to language appeared to surface during all three interview sessions. Congruent with results from recent research in family literacy (e.g., Paratore et al., 1999; Krol-Sinclair, 1998) of limited bi-directional influence between schools and home/communities, mainly school-centric views of parental involvement and families were revealed during the interviews. In general, parents apparently are respected and valued, but the full potential of their role in their children's language and literacy learning and development appears to be only partly understood. Vestiges of deficit views of family language and literacy became apparent at several points in the interviews.

From all three sessions, we gained renewed appreciation for the work that bilingual teachers must do to meet the needs of their students. As former bilingual education teachers, we agree with the veteran teacher who pointed out that much has changed for the better in the bilingual instructional arena in the quarter century of federally-mandated bilingual education. However, we were disturbed to hear of a concomitant lack of change, attested to by the number of long-standing instructional woes that continue to plague the literacy education of bilingual

Latino students, such as the lack of suitable curriculum materials for L1 and L2 reading and appropriate assessment measures for bilingual-biliterate learners. We found compelling two contradictions cited by the teachers as compromising their current practice and professional integrity, apparently borne out of uninformed and/or misdirected policies. One is their pursuit of a rich and varied curriculum that encourages multiple ways of knowing and expressing knowledge but the widespread mandated imposition of a singular way to assess bilingual Latino children. Two is their dedication to better understand and respond to the language and literacy needs of bilingual Latino children but a continuing tendency and push within the larger education community to treat these children as monolingual, monocultural individuals. In large part, such contradictions are an important reminder that much research and development still needs to occur in the assessment of bilingualism and biliteracy of young learners. In the next section, we identify several research questions that emerged during the course of this study.

Emergent Research Questions

From the findings and conclusions of the present study emerged a number of research questions pertinent to the design and improvement of classroom literacy instruction for bilingual Latino students. Educators and researchers would do well to consider such questions in this critical time of agenda setting and policy making relative to the literacy education of our nation's children. These questions are expressed below in broad and general terms:

Curriculum

The school-centric literacy curriculum traditionally has not been responsive to the learning needs of U.S. Latino students because it has excluded content that is familiar and meaningful to them. What does a culturally responsive, community-based literacy curriculum aligned with current reading/language arts standards look like?

Reading textbooks and trade books traditionally have not included content and images that reflect the life and heritage of U.S. Latino students. How do Latino children respond, cognitively and affectively, to culturally specific/authentic children's literature in Spanish and English?

Instruction

Vocabulary difficulties typically are associated with the English second-language reading of Latino students. How effectively and efficiently do Latino students process new vocabulary in second-language texts reflecting culturally familiar content vs. texts with culturally unfamiliar content?

Although the term *lecto-escritura* implies a symbiotic relationship for literacy (reading and writing) in Spanish, the traditional approach to Spanish literacy instruction for U.S. Latino students has emphasized reading over writing. How effectively and efficiently would Latino students become literate in instruction that sought to co-develop reading and writing ability?

Spanish orthography has a more consistent phoneme-grapheme correspondence than does English. What influence does this orthographic feature have on U.S. Latino children's writing and spelling development? What role(s) should phonics play in beginning reading in Spanish? What role(s) should phonics play in beginning writing in Spanish? Just as importantly, how do these roles for phonics in Spanish differ from those applicable to reading and writing in English.

Assessment

U.S. bilingual Latino children have been expected to grow and develop in language and literacy much like monolinguals. What are key language and literacy developmental characteristics of children becoming bilingual and biliterate in early childhood?

Bilingual Latino children growing up bilingually and biliterate have usually been assessed according to monolingual standards for language and literacy development. What does an assessment approach sensitive to simultaneous development in two languages (Spanish and English) and two modes (oracy and literacy) look like?

Home-School Relations

Parental storybook reading during the preschool years has been identified as an important contributor to children's success in school literacy. How do Latino parents from different ethno-linguistic and socioeconomic groups support their children's emergent literacy (reading and writing in Spanish and English) during the preschool years?

Reading and writing homework reflects particular literacy theoretical orientations and seeks to develop particular literacy understandings. How do Latino parents from different ethno-linguistic and socioeconomic groups mediate instructional tasks, specifically homework, that require literacy beyond their own cultural and academic experience?

Closing Remarks

We believe that this report makes a significant contribution to the field at an opportune time because in it we bring together two new pieces of scholarship. The first is a much needed literature review that synthesizes the instructional research in bilingual literacy, both reading and writing in the elementary grades. The second is an empirically derived study of elementary bilingual teachers' perspectives on what makes for effective literacy instruction for bilingual Latino students. Jointly these two pieces constitute a viable knowledge base for generating necessary research questions and for pointing to potential educational reform, even in terms of preparation of teachers. While we found the extant research base to be fragmented the teacher data we collected through the focus interviews allowed us to contextualize our understanding of the major issues involved in teaching literacy to bilingual Latino children.

We remain convinced that teacher voices and perspectives must be considered in a thoughtful, respectful, and rigorously systematic fashion. These voices and perspectives are

legitimate and valid sources of information not only for informing classroom practice but also for informing research and public policy. We hope that this report has accorded teachers their due role as the valuable professionals they are, particularly now as education becomes an issue of greater prominence at the national level as well as the state and local levels.

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