



EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF READING TO INCLUDE MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

THE OFFICE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND WORLD LANGUAGES
BRIEF 1



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Introduction

“There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.” (Lau v Nichols, 1974)

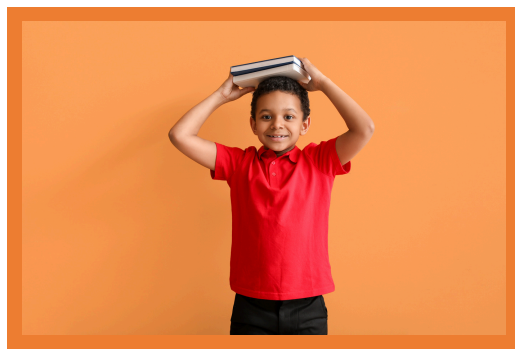
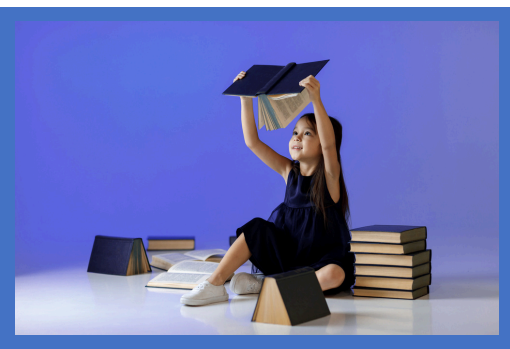
Introduction

Currently, 10% of all K–12 students in U.S. schools (11% in New York State) are labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs) (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2023).

This group of students is linguistically, culturally, experientially, and economically diverse, and it is growing. While the vast majority (85%) of these ELLs are U.S. born and have been exposed to two languages from an early age, the past few years have seen a significant growth in the number of newly arrived ELLs in U.S. schools with differing levels of proficiency in their home languages, and with low proficiency or no proficiency in English. Unlike their U.S. born peers, these students are acquiring two languages sequentially.

Providing these five million students with equitable and effective opportunities to learn, especially in language and literacy, is both a legal and moral imperative. ELLs are entitled to targeted instruction that meets their unique needs. Research has found that it is of utmost value to ELLs’ academic success when their needs for learning English and the assets of home languages, cultures, and life experiences are incorporated in their learning. In addition, this instruction can be used to benefit multilingual learners (MLs) which include ELLs, Former/Ever ELLs, and heritage language learners, who are not ELLs but speak another language at home. The lessons in this brief can also be helpful for preschool teachers of students whose home language is other than English, known as Early Multilingual Learners (EMLs).

English Language Learner (ELL)	Multilingual Learner (ML)
A student who speaks or understands language(s) other than English and is developing English language skills, and who scores below a State-designated level of proficiency on the English Language Proficiency Assessment.	Multilingual Learner refers to all students who speak or are learning one or more language(s) other than English, including current ELLs, students who were once ELLs but have exited out ELL status, students who were never ELLs but are heritage speakers of a language other than English, and World Languages students.



The most prevalent instructional practices for teaching literacy across the US are based in research commonly referred to as the Science of Reading (SoR). SoR was initially developed largely from two reports, namely the National Research Council's Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998) and the National Reading Panel's Teaching Children to Read (2000). See findings below:

Neither report reviewed studies of second language acquisition, bilingualism, or biliteracy, and therefore, they do not address issues specifically relevant to literacy development among multilingual youth (García & Nañez, 2011).

A substantial amount of new research has provided an enhanced understanding of the cognitive development of ELLs, which will impact the design of any literacy program created for these students (Gottlieb, 2023; NASEM, 2017).

Given the above, in addition to salient and research-based practices for teaching monolingual English students, it is critical that instructional practice related to teaching literacy include practices to address the linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs and MLs (including but not limited to scaffolds).

This brief will address:

Methods to ensure that teaching of reading is inclusive of ELLs and MLs, including a short description of the ontological differences between ELLs and MLs and monolingual English learners.

How to address these ontological differences in the classroom.

How an expanded scope is critical to academic success for ELLs and MLs.



Bilingual vs. Monolingual Ontological Differences

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Briefly defined, ontology refers to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.

The nature of being bilingual (no matter what the two languages) is different than being monolingual because two languages (rather than one) interact in a student's brain linguistically, psychologically, culturally, cognitively, and emotionally. This phenomenon has been referred to as the "bilingual brain." As Costa and Sebastián-Gallés (2014) found, a larger area of the brains in bilingual individuals is implicated in language control than it is for monolingual students. This occurs due to the higher language-related activities required for learning multiple languages, including the opportunities to use and learn the two languages inside and outside of school. Additionally, this difference may be further influenced by the different experiences of ELLs and MLs due to the societal attitudes about the languages they speak.

Our challenge is to realize the value of these differences in ontology as assets, and to decide how we support students' differing needs in our schools and programs, particularly in the development of instructional practices related to the teaching of reading.

Figure 1 (next page) provides a more detailed comparison of the potential ontological differences between monolingual English and ELL and ML learners in U.S. schools. While the experiences listed below do not necessarily apply to all students, this information is offered to convey some of the inherent advantages available to students whose home language is the same as their language of instruction, and to illustrate the need for expanding the scope of current reading policies and practices to provide enhanced and more effective learning opportunities for ELLs and MLs.

Figure 1: Ontological Differences Between Monolingual English Learners’ and English Language Learners’ and Multilingual Learners’ School Experiences

Monolingual English Learners	English Language Learners and Multilingual Learners
Enter school having had years of oral language development in English to build the vocabulary, syntax, morphology, and semantic system that matches the language of instruction in the school and in the reading program.	Enter school with varying proficiencies in home languages, but without oral language proficiency in English, thereby needing to learn to speak English concurrently with learning to read and write in English
Enter school speaking and are learning to read and write in the language of power and privilege.	Speak non-English languages that may be stigmatized and marginalized, and that may not be included in instruction or discourse in schools.
Becoming bilingual and biliterate may be an option added to the curriculum. Can drop out of bilingual development at any time.	Becoming bilingual is a necessity. Biliteracy may be an option in a few cases, but learning to navigate, communicate, and solve problems of communication in their new language is not optional.
Draw upon one language for learning and literacy.	Need to negotiate different linguistic resources from both languages when listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
Live primarily in an English language world – at home and school.	Live in a two-language world. Hear and use two (or more) languages – English at school, home language at home. Both languages are needed, though not always for the same purpose.
Are assessed and judged on monolingual assessments and tests that were developed and normed for speakers of their home language.	May be assessed and judged on tests that were not normed for them and that, even when accommodations are used, frequently underestimate what they know, thereby lending credence to the achievement “gap”, assignment to lower reading groups, and costly interventions.
Cultural references in curriculum and texts are often aligned to their lived experiences (e.g., historical context).	May face invisibility and cultural bias in texts.
Classroom management and instruction is delivered in the language which the students best understand.	Must learn to understand teacher instructions and norms for classroom management, an unfamiliar language, and unfamiliar cultural references.

The above illustrates the ontological differences in the way that instructional practice affects monolingual English students and ELLs and MLs, and it also indicates the need for additional practices to be successful with ELL and ML students.



Ms. Cunningham's Lesson: A Snippet and Analysis from an ELL Point of View

Ms. Cunningham's Lesson: A Snippet and Analysis from an ELL Point of View

The following snippet of a lesson in phonological awareness is presented to highlight how the ontological differences described above impact instruction of monolingual English learners and ELLs and MLs in English literacy instruction.

Ms. Cunningham's first grade class is learning how phonemes combine to make words and that words have meaning. It is important to note that Ms. Cunningham thinks that this lesson, which is direct from a commercial reading program that her district has adopted, fully aligns with SoR research. She may believe that her lesson follows best practices, but—as the analysis shows—she only has half the picture, as the lesson overlooks important needs of her ELLs and MLs.

Figure 2 provides an in-depth analysis of the opening sentence of Ms. Cunningham's lesson to illustrate the challenges faced by ELLs and MLs when they are learning to read in English at the same time they are still learning to understand and speak the language. It demonstrates the ontological differences in ELLs and MLs that often are overlooked in the narrow scope of reading instruction currently prevalent in U.S. early elementary classrooms.



At the start of the lesson, Ms. Cunningham says the following to her class:
"Ok, my friends, let's clap the number of sounds we hear in the word 'sofa.' How many sounds are there? Who can tell me what a sofa is?"





Ms. Cunningham's Lesson: A Snippet and Analysis from an ELL Point of View

Ms. Cunningham's Instructional Practices	Potential Challenges to this Lesson for ELL and ML Students
"Ok, my friends"	- Students must understand that Ms. Cunningham is trying to get their attention with a management phrase that is a classroom code for "pay attention." - Students also must be aware that this is a mandate and not an invitation – it is not optional.
"Let's clap the number of sounds we hear in the word 'sofa.'"	- Students must understand that "Let's clap" is not an invitation, it is a command to perform by the teacher. It is also not random clapping – it has an instructional purpose. - Students must understand the concept of a sound in a word. They must also understand that sounds go together to make words. - Students must understand that the teacher is talking about an individual letter sound and not a syllable, as is commonly used in Spanish literacy. (Using syllables would mean 2 claps, not 4). - Students must understand both the vocabulary words ("clap," "number," "sounds," and "sofa") and also the sentence as connected discourse.
Teacher and students clap "s-o-f-a"	Students must understand that when they clap the individual sounds in "s-o-f-a," these sounds collectively go together to make the word "sofa."
"How many sounds are there?"	Students must know how to count in English in order to conclude that there are 4 sounds in "sofa."
"Who can tell me what a sofa is?"	- Students must be able to articulate that a sofa is a piece of furniture usually found in a living room or a family room in a house—and perhaps that a sofa is also called a couch. - Importantly, for this phrase, a picture of a sofa would be very helpful. - Also, if children are Spanish-speaking, they might be told that "sofa" is a cognate (meaning, a word that has the same spelling and meaning in both English and Spanish) for the Spanish word "sofá." However, to do this, the teacher must know that the words are cognates.

From this analysis, it is obvious that instruction must account for the extensive learning load required for ELLs and MLs based on their ontological needs, even when learning the most basic foundational skills. Research on literacy and teaching ELLs and MLs has been clear that comprehension, not decoding, presents the major challenge in learning to read (August & Shanahan, 2006; Pearson, et. al., 2020).

AUGUST & SHANAHAN (2006)	PEARSON ET. AL. (2020)
CONTEXT	
The work was funded by the federal government to convene a panel of experts to synthesize the knowledge base in the field and provide recommendations for future research. The purpose of the meta-analysis was to identify, assess, and synthesize research on the education of English Language Learners with regard to literacy attainment. The panel reviewed and evaluated over 2,000 research studies.	Conducted a two-year study synthesizing the research on the development of student reading comprehension. This report was funded by the US Institute for Educational Science.
CONCLUSION	
They concluded that word-level literacy skills (decoding, word recognition, and spelling) are attained in comparable levels by monolingual English speakers and ELLs and MLs, yet comprehension and writing are areas of struggle	In addition to decoding, language drives every facet of comprehension, that knowledge shapes comprehension and comprehension shapes knowledge, and that reading is an inherently cultural activity. Importantly, they found that “Early on, in kindergarten through grade 2, subword processes like letter-sound knowledge and phonemic awareness tend to explain the majority of the variance in reading achievement, while more meaning-based language variables, including receptive and expressive vocabulary, explain increasing proportions of the variance as students move into grades 2 and 3.” (pg. 3) In the future much more of our work on comprehension needs to be directed toward populations currently underserved in the US, and “at the top of the list should be emergent bilingual learners, a growing but still underserved population.” (pg. 7)

As this research shows, it is critical for us to expand the scope of current reading instruction if we are to provide equal opportunities to our ever-growing population of ELLs and MLs.



Conclusion and Recommendations

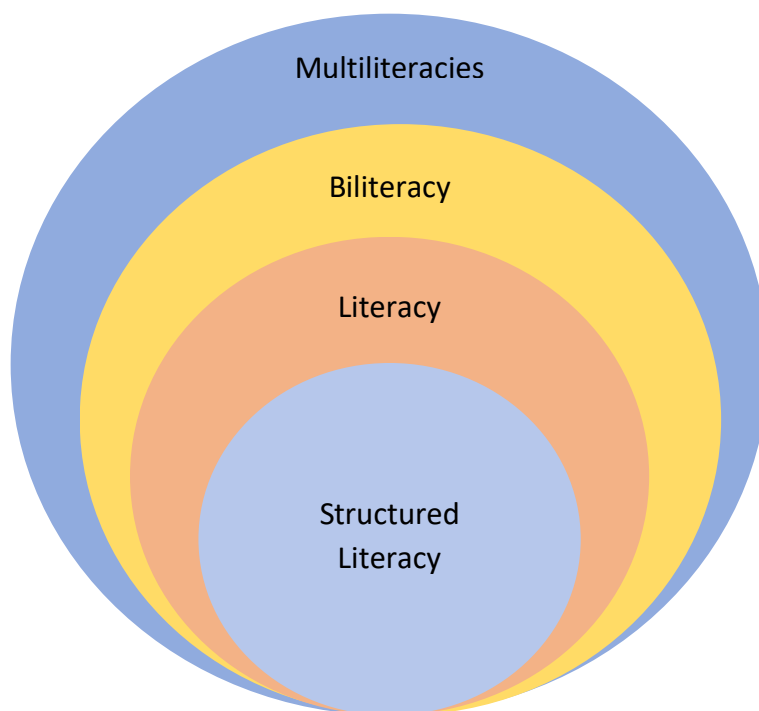
Conclusion and Recommendations

This brief ends with two concrete suggestions the ensuring that reading instruction is inclusive of ELLs and MLs. As stated previously, there is no argument with the need to teach foundation skills; however, the limitations of this focus when teaching ELLs and MLs need to be understood.

A monograph by Margo Gottlieb (2023), adapted in Figure 3 (below), situates structured reading instruction as part of a larger framework for the development of an expanded literacy experience for ELLs and MLs that may also be beneficial for monolingual English learners.

Figure 3 expands from structured literacy to a more robust practice of literacy, thereby encompassing writing, oral language, and metalinguistic development into the scope of instructional frameworks. The circle is then once again expanded to encompass biliteracy as a more robust opportunity to learn, particularly for ELLs and MLs, and expands once more to show multiliteracies as the most expansive version in the scope.

Figure 3 – The Expanded Scope: From Reading to Multiliteracies



Adapted from Gottlieb, M. (2023). Right from the start: Enriching learning experiences for multilingual learners through multiliteracies. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

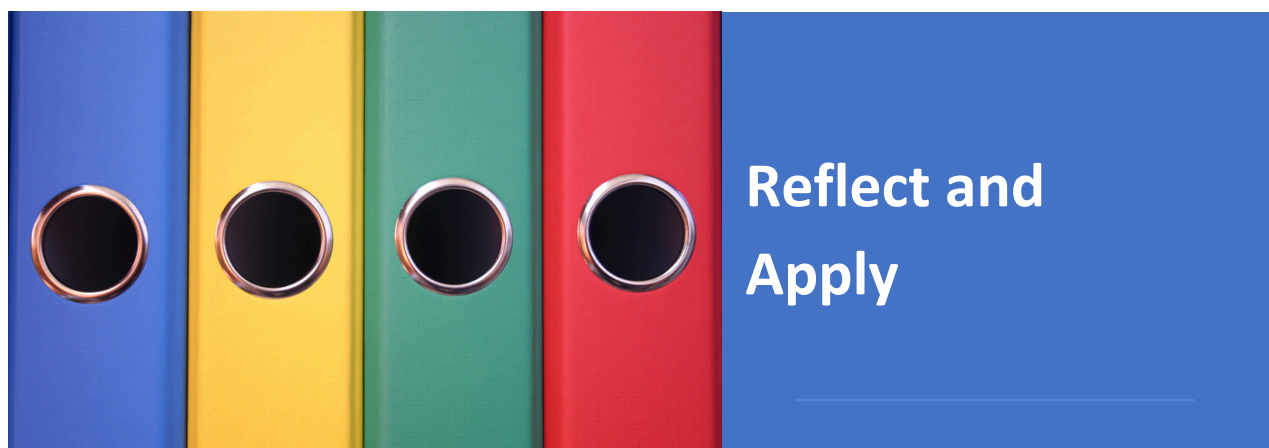
A more detailed component-by-component explanation of an expanded scope of reading is also presented in Olsen’s (2022) white paper titled, “Comprehensive Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners.”

An adapted table from this paper is presented below. The reader should note the differences between monolingual literacy components and those suggested for English Learners.

Figure 4 – Essential Components for Comprehensive (Bi)Literacy Instruction for Monolingual English Literacy Programs, for English Development Programs for ELLs and MLs, and Bilingual Education Programs

Comprehensive (Bi)Literacy Approach Elements	Monolingual English	ELLs in English Development	ELLs and MLs in Bilingual Education
Oral language/Oracy	in a known language	in English as a New Language	in non-English language and in English as a New Language
Reading Foundational Skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension)	in a known language	in English as a New Language	in non-English Language and in English as a New Language
Writing	in a known language	in English as a New Language	in non-English language and in English as a New Language
English Language Development		in English as a New Language	in English as a New Language
Metalinguistic Development		in a new language	in non-English language and in English as a New Language
Cross-Language Connections			between non-English language and English as a New Language
Social Justice Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	in a known language	in a new language	in non-English language and in English as a New Language

As shown above, the knowledge and research exists to expand the scope of reading instructional practices to ensure that our ELLs and MLs experience success in literacy development.



Reflect and Apply

As you think on what you have learned in this chap, reflect on the following questions:

- In what ways might I unintentionally rely on monolingual assumptions when teaching foundational reading skills (phonemic awareness, decoding)?
- How am I currently leveraging the home languages and cultural assets of my ELLs and MLs to enhance their academic success?
- How should ontological differences between monolingual and multilingual learners (lived experiences, language exposure, and social contexts) influence the way I plan and deliver reading instruction?
- How can I make my instructional materials and assessments culturally relevant and linguistically accessible for ELLs and MLs?
- How can I redesign reading lessons to reflect a multiliteracies approach that goes beyond structured phonics?
- How can I assess reading comprehension for multilingual learners in a way that accounts for their developing English proficiency?



Key References & Resources

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