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IN LITERACY EDUCATION**

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***Special Themed Issue:
Social Justice Issues in Literacy Education***

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***TJLE* Editorial Team 2022-2025**



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Editors' Introduction

Greetings TJLE Readers,

The theme of this issue is *Social Justice Issues in Literacy Education*. We hope that this latest issue makes you aware in the sense that literacy is not only an academic issue, but one of social justice and equity within our schools and classrooms here in Texas and beyond. Also in this issue, a complementary resource is shared, in which the author which reviews a recent book published about equity in reading assessment.

As we close out 2024, our wish for you is that you not only get rest, but you get to enjoy a good read (or two or three!) and take the opportunity to write and/or reflect. Continue to spread the joy and gift of literacy personally and professionally with your students, children, and in your community.

As we always do, the Texas Journal of Literacy Education (TJLE) editorial team wishes to thank everyone who was a part of this issue—authors/researchers, new reviewers, and our faithful reviewers who are always there for us (we couldn't produce this without you). As you browse through the scholarly and practitioner works in this issue, think about how the work shared can impact your classroom or someone you know. **SHARE** the journal contents with teachers, colleagues, and friends— but also consider sharing your expertise as well. Please see the Call for Manuscripts for our Spring 2025 issue, as well as the call for a new 2025-2028 TJLE Editing Team at the end of this publication. Our final publication as an editing team will be themed: *What's the Word? Current Topics in Texas Literacy Education* (see the Call for manuscripts on page 60).

Salute to all educators for completing one half the school year...Happy Holidays and have a Happy New Year!

Dr. Kamshia Childs (Lead Editor)

Dr. Laura Slay (Lead Editor)

Dr. Juan Araujo (Associate Editor)

Dr. Tami Morton (Associate Editor)

Dear TALE Members and Supporters,

As the year draws to a close, I want to take a moment to wish you all a peaceful and restorative holiday season. Your dedication to literacy education inspires everything we do at TALE, and we hope this season provides you with well-deserved time to recharge and reconnect.

We're thrilled to share updates about the **2025 TALE Annual Conference**, which will be held **February 21-22, 2025**, at the **Bush Convention Center in Midland, Texas**. This year's conference promises to be one of our best yet, featuring dynamic keynote speakers like **Gretchen Bernabei, Dr. Elsa Cadenas-Hagan, Chrissy Beltran, and Angela Henderson-Smith**. With engaging sessions, networking opportunities, and fresh ideas to bring back to your classrooms and communities, this event is not to be missed.

Why Register?

- Gain insights from leading voices in literacy education.
- Participate in innovative workshops and interactive sessions tailored for educators at all levels.
- Connect with colleagues from across the state who share your passion for teaching and learning.

Special Offer for High School Students

If you know a high school student in an education practicum program, don't forget to let them know about our special rate of **\$50 for full conference access!**

We also invite you to take the next step in your TALE journey by becoming more active in 2025. Whether it's presenting at a future conference, joining a committee, or sharing your expertise in a newsletter article, your involvement enriches our organization and the literacy education community as a whole.

Don't wait—**register for the conference today** and start the year with a commitment to your professional growth and the success of your students.

Finally, if you know of any business that might be interested in being a vendor for the conference, they can also register at texasreaders.org

From all of us at TALE, we wish you a joyful holiday season and look forward to seeing you in Midland this February. Together, let's make 2025 a year of connection, inspiration, and achievement!

Happy Reading!

Sara Ranzau, Ed.D.

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USING DIVERSE CHILDREN’S LITERATURE TO RAISE DISABILITY AWARENESS IN URBAN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

The student population in urban elementary classrooms has become increasingly diverse over the past two decades. While teachers have responded to this diversity, in part, by incorporating diverse texts related to race, culture, and language, few teachers have incorporated texts related to people with disabilities. Consequently, children have few opportunities to learn about people with disabilities in the world. Unfortunately, this often leads to biases, discrimination, alienation, and other negative outcomes. In this article, I argue that urban elementary teachers should incorporate diverse children’s literature with main characters with disabilities as a means of raising disability awareness. Next, using a critical literacy framework, I provide an example of teaching about disabilities during a 4-day instructional unit. Finally, I conclude with recommendations for selecting books with characters with disabilities.

Keywords: Diverse texts, disabilities, urban schools

Introduction

The student demographics in urban classrooms in the United States continue to become increasingly diverse regarding race, culture, language, socioeconomic status, and ability (NCES, 2019). Scholars (e.g., Gay, 2023; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2021) have argued for teachers to incorporate diverse perspectives into the curriculum as a means of creating responsive, affirming, and inclusive learning environments for all students. Although significant progress has been made regarding diversifying the curriculum along the lines of cultural, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic status, less progress has been made regarding incorporating diverse perspectives related to people living with disabilities into the curriculum that is taught in many urban elementary classrooms (Andrews, 2020). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2020), approximately 27% of U.S. adults have a disability. At the same time, roughly 16% of children in the U.S. have developmental disabilities. Although adults and children with disabilities make up a significant portion of the population in the United States, many urban elementary teachers are not incorporating children's literature with main characters who are classified as being disabled (Hansen et al., 2023). This lack of knowledge about people with disabilities often leads to negative outcomes for children with disabilities and children without disabilities alike (Bishop, 2012; Crisp, et al., 2016; Hughes, 2012; Koss, 2015). Given this lack of disability representation in the literature that is used and made available in many urban elementary classrooms today, the purposes of this article are threefold. First, I argue that urban elementary teachers should use diverse children's literature (that center the experiences of people with disabilities) to promote disability awareness and advocacy. I begin by briefly

discussing three reasons why it is important for urban elementary teachers to combat this issue in a forthright and explicit manner. Next, using a Critical Literacy framework (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Freire, 1970; Freire, & Slover, 1983; Janks, 2013), I discuss examples of how an urban elementary teacher might teach about disability in their classroom during a 4-day instructional unit on the topic of autism. Lastly, I discuss some considerations teachers should keep in mind when selecting diverse texts to facilitate these critical discussions.

Defining Disability, Disability Awareness, and Diverse Children's Literature

It is important to note that people living with disabilities are not monolithic in nature (Andrews, 2020). A disability can be both visible and invisible in nature. That is, a disability can be a physical, mental, and or neurological condition that limits a person's activities, movements, thinking, or sense (Andrews, 2020). For the purposes of this article, when I use the term disability, I draw from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (IDEA; P.L. 108-446,) typology of 13 categories of disability. These categories include: Autism, Deaf-Blindness, Deafness, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, Visual Impairment, and other health impairments (e.g., asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome) (IDEA, 2004).

In short, disability awareness as used in this article is defined as the process and practice of acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and appreciating a person's experiences related to living with a particular category of disability (Kemp, 2023). Developing disability awareness is important because it helps people develop an understanding of how disabilities affect people's lives. Moreover, developing disability awareness can help dismantle stereotypes and empower individuals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions need to combat injustices toward people with disabilities (Kemp, 2023; Lindsay & Edwards, 2013). In a systematic literature review of 1031 articles, Lindsay and Edwards (2013) identify five types of disability awareness efforts, initiatives, interventions, and or programs commonly found in schools. These are referred to as: (1) social contact, (2) simulation, (3) curriculum, (4) multimedia curriculum and (5) multiple components. For the purposes of this article, I draw from their notion of promoting disability awareness through a specific form of curriculum integration and or transformation.

For clarification purposes, when I use the term diverse children's literature in this article I draw from Galda, Sipe, Liang and Cullina's (2013) definition of multicultural literature. These scholars define multicultural literature as literature that includes and highlights the narratives, experiences, voices, frames of reference, and vantage points of historically underrepresented groups in society. Similarly, Bishop (1990) points out that multicultural children's literature is written with the express intent of providing "mirrors, windows, and sliding doors" for children. Concerning the notion of mirrors, Bishop points out that multicultural children's literature can and should be used to affirm the diverse identities, perspectives, language patterns, and experiences that diverse student populations bring to the classroom. Next, regarding the concept of windows, multicultural children's literature can and should be used with children from non-

minoritized backgrounds to provide insight into the lived experiences of people who do not share the same cultural identities, language systems, and frames of reference. Finally, regarding the concept of sliding doors, Bishop further points out that multicultural children's literature can and should be used with children across different cultural backgrounds to provide readers with access into social and cultural experiences and worlds they normally would not have access to experiencing or visiting. Furthermore, the focus on diverse children's literature in this article involves children's and young adult literature that center the experiences of people with disabilities.

It is important to note that it is not enough for urban elementary teachers to merely incorporate diverse children's literature in the classrooms that contain characters with disabilities. Instead, Prince and Hayden (2023) point out that it is vitally important for these diverse texts to have and portray protagonists with disabilities in positive and affirming manners for these texts to make a transformative impact in the lives of children. The protagonist is the main character in fictional works or the most prominent figure in a true-life text (McCabe et al., 2011). Accordingly, Table 1 provides examples of diverse picture books, with protagonists with disabilities, that might be used to raise disability awareness and advocacy in urban elementary classrooms.

Table 1:
Examples of Diverse Children's Literature with Main Characters with Disabilities

Year	Title of the Book	Author	Disability Emphasis
2021	A Bird Will Soar	Alison Green Myers	Autism
2019	Charlie and Frog: The Boney Hand	Karen Kane	Deaf
2019	Helen Keller: The World at Her Fingertips	Sarah Albee	Blindness
2012	A Dog Called Homeless	Sarah Lean	Emotional/Behavior Disorder
2016	Baxter Turns Down His Buzz: A Story for Little Kids About ADHD	James M. Foley	Neurodiversity (ADHD)
2019	A Slip of a Girl	Patricia Reilly Giff	Intellectual/Developmental Disability
2021	A Walk in the Words	Hudson Talbott	Learning Disability
2020	Fast Friends	Heather M. O'Connor	Multiple Disabilities

2016	A Whole New Ballgame	Phil Bildner	Physical Impairment
2012	Out of My Mind	Sharon Draper	Speech/Impairment Disability
2013	Brain Ride	Angela Welch Prusia	Traumatic Brain Injury
2016	As Brave As You	Jayson Reynolds	Visual Impairments

Discussing Disabilities with Urban Elementary Students

Researchers (e.g., Kerbel, 2023; Kingsbury, 2022; Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021) identify several important reasons why teachers should use diverse children's literature to discuss disabilities with elementary students. First, using diverse children's literature can provide spaces where children with disabilities can see themselves represented, reflected, and affirmed in the classroom (Kingsbury, 2022). Inasmuch as children from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds need to see themselves portrayed in the books they are reading, children with disabilities need to read and interact with diverse books with main characters with disabilities on a regular basis as well (Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021). Ultimately, this ongoing exposure and interaction with books that center the experiences of people with disabilities is likely to increase the overall levels of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence among students who are living with disabilities (Kingsbury, 2022). For example, a first-grade teacher who reads and discusses *Next Door* (Kerbel, 2023) and other books that foreground the experiences of people with hearing disabilities consistently is likely to create spaces in the classroom where deaf children feel celebrated, affirmed, and included.

In addition to providing spaces in the classroom where children with disabilities feel affirmed and included, using diverse children's literature (with main characters who have disabilities) can work to disrupt and dismantle implicit biases toward people with disabilities (Hayden, & Prince, 2020; Kingsbury, 2022). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for children to often hold implicit biases toward people with disabilities (Kingsbury, 2022). Frequently, this bias is due to a lack of consistent exposure and interaction with people who are living with disabilities among children (Artman-Meeker, et al., 2016; Hayden, & Prince, 2020; Triandis et al., 1984). At other times, this bias is often a result of being exposed to stereotypical images and information about people with disabilities from various socializing agents in a child's life such as: television, images, peer interactions, and family interactions (Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021). Insofar as the media and these other socializing agents have the potential to engender and cultivate negative biases toward people with disabilities in children, Banks and Banks (2020) argue that these same socializing agents have the potential to disrupt and dismantle stereotypical biases and negative information children may be holding toward/about people with disabilities. Therefore, incorporating diverse children's literature (with main characters with disabilities) can provide opportunities for urban elementary teachers to disrupt and destroy any misconceptions,

misunderstandings, and biases children may be holding toward/about people living with disabilities (Ostrosky, et al., 2015; Pennell et al., 2018; Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021).

Using diverse children's literature (with main characters with disabilities) can work to promote healthy relationships and interactions between children who are living with disabilities and children who are not living with disabilities (Adomat, 2014; Artman-Meeker et al., 2016; Parsons, 2013). For example, Adomat (2014) found that the interactions and attitudes of children without disabilities changed in a positive manner after participating in ongoing language arts activities with content related to a wide range of disabilities such as autism, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and developmental disabilities. In short, this study involved 52 second and third graders who participated in a series of interactive read alouds, literature discussion activities, literature center activities, drama activities, and writing activities that centered the topic of disabilities. Not only did the researcher observe notable changes in attitudes among the children without disabilities toward the children with disabilities, many of the children without disabilities became motivated to take social action toward making the world a more equitable, humane, and just place for people living with disabilities. Furthermore, what this study suggests is that using diverse children's literature has the potential to produce positive outcomes for both children living with disabilities and children who are not living with disabilities.

Using a Critical Literacy Approach

For the purposes of this article, I draw from and apply Freebody and Luke's (1990) definition of critical literacy as an ideological and practical approach to literacy that embodies four dimensions: disrupting the commonplace, considering multiple viewpoints, focusing on the sociopolitical, and taking action to promote social justice. In short, the primary goal of critical literacy is to use literacy skills and processes to identify the ways in which various forms of power and oppression exist and work to marginalize and dehumanize specific groups of people within the policies, practices, and systems that are enacted in various facets of society (Freebody & Luke, 1990). A secondary goal of critical literacy is to then develop and implement social action to resist and combat these oppressive and dehumanizing policies, practices, and systems in schools and within the broader society. In the sections that follow, I describe how a hypothetical fourth grade teacher named Ms. Jackson might use diverse children's literature and apply these four dimensions of critical literacy while teaching a 4-day instructional unit on autism. Table 2 provides an overview and summary of the critical literacy activities that are included in this instructional unit. Furthermore, it is important to note here that this instructional unit can be used as a model for planning and teaching children about the experiences of people with disabilities. Wherever feasible, teachers should strive to incorporate lessons and literature related to the experiences of people with disabilities across the curriculum and beyond a singular instructional unit.

Table 2:
Instructional Unit on Autism

Unit Topic: Autism				
Grade Level: 4th				
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Dimension of Critical Literacy	Disrupting Commonplace	Incorporating Multiple Perspectives	Focusing on the Sociopolitical	Taking Social Action
Text(s) involved	We Move Together (Fritsch & McGuire, 2021)	Curated text sets related to autism	I See Things Differently: A First Look at Autism (Thomas, 2014) My Brother Charlie (Pete & Pete, 2010) Looking After Louis (Ely, 2004) A Boy Called Bat (Arnold, 2018)	A Manual for Marco (Abdullah, 2015)
Pre-Reading Activities	Complete and discuss K-W-L Chart	Scan the book and identify, define, and discuss any important vocabulary words	Students will complete a web graphic organizer after brainstorming and discussing some of the barriers and/or challenges that	Using a Venn Diagram graphic organizer, brainstorm, and document ways to take social action on behalf of people with autism in their

			people with autism might experience as they engage in daily life activities	school and local communities
During Reading Activities	Facilitate critical dialogue	Reflect on and document their learning in a Reader's Response journal	Students will look for and document connections (Text to Self, Text to Text, and Text to World) as they read independently	Read the book and discuss ways people who do not have autism might support and advocate for people with autism
Post-Reading Activities	Students will generate and document critical questions using a graphic organizer	Present their findings/learning as a group presentation	Students are encouraged to find two other people in the class who read different books during this period and to share their connections with these individuals	Students will work in pairs or small groups and select one of the advocacy activities to complete from the Venn Diagram

As mentioned previously, the first dimension of critical literacy involves disrupting the commonplace (Freebody & Luke, 1990). This dimension of critical literacy involves engaging students in learning opportunities that disrupt common and often problematic ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding a particular issue or group of people in society (Freebody & Luke, 1990). To activate prior knowledge on the topic and help students make connections to what they will learn in these subsequent lessons, Ms. Jackson might begin by dividing her students into pairs and having them complete a K-W-L chart related to the topic of autism. The goal of this pre-reading activity is to identify what students might currently know or understand about autism and the ways in which this knowledge base is problematic. Next, Ms. Jackson might read aloud *We Move Together* (Fritsch & McGuire, 2021) and facilitate an interactive discussion to build additional knowledge related to the topic of autism. During this dialogical process, Ms. Jackson might pose critical questions to encourage her students to problematize (Freire, 2000) their traditional understanding(s) of the topic. Finally, after reading the text, Ms. Jackson might ask

students to work in pairs and use a graphic organizer to generate at least three new questions related to issues of power, oppression, and autism.

The second dimension of critical literacy involves helping students examine the topic of autism from multiple viewpoints (Freebody & Luke, 1990). In keeping with this dimension, Ms. Jackson might divide her students into four or five literature circle groups. Each group is given a different text set (Lupo et al, 2018) and asked to read, discuss, and document what they learned about the topic of autism from these texts. In short, a text set is a collection of fiction and nonfiction books, speeches, poems, videos, web resources, news articles, podcasts, and images that center on a specific topic or theme (Lupo et al, 2018). Furthermore, each group will be asked to present their learning with the rest of the class in a format they deem most appropriate.

The third dimension of critical literacy involves focusing on the sociopolitical (Freebody & Luke, 1990). In keeping with this dimension, Ms. Jackson might strive to help students make connections between the content in the books they are reading and the larger policies, practices, and systems that contribute to marginalization for people with autism. Ms. Jackson might provide students with an opportunity to choose between four different picture books on the topic of autism to read independently. Students might then be encouraged to make and document the personal connections they make as they read their specific book. Ms. Jackson might provide a graphic organizer to guide students in making text to self, text to text, and text to world connections while they are reading. After a period of 30 minutes or so, Ms. Jackson might provide an opportunity for students to share their connections with students who read different books.

The fourth dimension of critical literacy involves taking social action (Freebody & Luke, 1990). In keeping with this dimension, Ms. Jackson might read *A Manual for Marco* (Abdullah, 2015) and discuss the importance of taking social action toward making the world a more just and human place for people with autism. While reading the book, Ms. Jackson might identify and discuss ways that people without autism might support and advocate for people with autism. After reading the book, Miss Jackson might encourage students to work in pairs or small groups to complete an autism advocacy project such as: writing a letter to a media outlet concerning autism rights; designing and implementing an autism awareness campaign at school; creating a podcast episode pertaining to autism awareness; organizing and participating in a local march related to autism; raising money to donate to autism research, etc. Ultimately, the goal of this final dimension of critical literacy is for students to move beyond the classroom and use what they have learned to make the world a more equitable, just, and humanizing place for both people with and without disabilities.

Conclusion

In short, student demographics in urban elementary classrooms are projected to continue to become even more diverse as we journey through the next two decades (NCES, 2020). This calls for urban elementary teachers to incorporate diverse and inclusive literature in their classrooms that reflect people with disabilities as a means of affirming all children and preparing students to live in a diverse and democratic society. Unfortunately, all books with main characters with disabilities are not equal in terms of themes, illustrations, and overall literary

quality (Welch, 2016). As such, urban elementary teachers should be mindful of three important considerations as they make book selections. First, teachers should prioritize using books that are written by people with disabilities over books that are not written by people with disabilities (Welch, 2016). Interestingly, many of the children's books (with main characters with disabilities) in publication are not written by authors with disabilities (Welch, 2016). Consequently, many of the nuanced experiences of people with disabilities are often missing from these texts. To provide a richer and more particularized understanding of the experiences of people with disabilities, it is important for teachers to prioritize texts that are written by authors with disabilities.

Notably, most of the main characters in books about people with disabilities are White (Paciga & Koss, 2022; Welch, 2016). Hence, urban elementary teachers should prioritize books (with main characters with disabilities) that also share the experiences of people of color. Demographic data remind us that urban classrooms are composed of large numbers of students from non-White racial backgrounds (NCES, 2020). Thus, it is necessary for teachers to incorporate books that share the experiences of people of color (with disabilities) whenever possible as a means of affirming and reflecting the multiple facets of students' identities.

Lastly, a significant number of children's books with disability characters communicate deficit-oriented narratives and messages that people with disabilities are broken and need to be helped or fixed by people without disabilities (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020). As a result, readers often develop the perception that people with disabilities should be pitied by others in the world. To avoid communicating such messages, teachers should scrutinize the books they decide to incorporate prior to using them. Teachers should look for and prioritize diverse texts that share non-deficit counternarratives about people with disabilities to avoid communicating and exacerbating these stereotypical and ableist notions to children (Curwood, 2013; Kleepkamp & Zapata, 2019). Ultimately, using children's books with deficit, demeaning, and degrading messages and content will work to further marginalize and dehumanize people with disabilities in schools and society.

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LESSONS LEARNED IN NEPANTLA: CRITICAL TRANSLANGUAGING LITERACY PEDAGOGY IN A DUAL LANGUAGE BILINGUAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

While the challenges that educators faced during the COVID-19 pandemic are widely acknowledged, there is little scholarship that highlights the positive lessons. This manuscript documents the experiences of an individual dual language bilingual education elementary teacher that was a part of a longitudinal qualitative study of United States educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. She named the ways that her literacy pedagogy in the emergency virtual learning portion of Spring of 2020 changed to reflect translanguaging pedagogy due to the suspension of monolingual standardized testing expectations. The teacher's experiences are a call to action to dismantle strict language barriers in dual language bilingual education in service of bi/multilingual children being able to draw on and develop their full linguistic repertoires.

Keywords: Biliteracy, Elementary, Dual Language

Introduction

While the challenges that educators faced during the COVID-19 pandemic are widely acknowledged (Onyema et al., 2020), there is little scholarship that highlights the positive lessons. Drawing on principles of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), we share the stories of one teacher out of a larger longitudinal study into the experiences of U.S. elementary teachers of multilingual learners during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021). We frame teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic as teaching in a space of nepantla (Anzaldúa, 2015). Anzaldúa conceptualizes nepantla as an in-between space where tensions and contradictions are embraced (Anzaldúa, 2015). In this case, the beginning of the pandemic is a space where teachers simultaneously were required to meet some pre-existing schooling expectations while also due to the cancellation of state standardized testing (TEA, 2020) unexpectedly found themselves in a place where they are freed from the monoglossic language ideologies embedded within standardized tests and the impact they have on their pedagogy. In this liminal space the spotlighted teacher enacted critical translanguaging pedagogy (García & Wei, 2014) in a way that previous monolingual testing expectations did not facilitate. In particular, we highlight the potential of translingual writing pedagogy and the impact it had on students in virtual learning in Spring 2020. We use the term translingual writing to represent the ways that students write across their linguistic repertoire (Horner et al., 2011). Bi/multilingual writers utilize their full

linguistic repertoire throughout the writing process (Velasco & García, 2014; Gort, 2012) and draw on writing strategies that are unique to bi/multilinguals (Cumming, 1990). Given this, we share how a 4th grade dual language bilingual education (DLBE) teacher in Texas, Sol, adapted her writing instruction during Spring 2020 in response to virtual learning and the decreased monolingual demands on teachers and students. We explore how she took advantage of the comparative freedom in the early stages of the pandemic to enact translanguaging pedagogy and highlight the composition possibilities and linguistic flexibility that Sol and her students demonstrated. We showcase how she can be used as a model for thinking expansively about language and learning from her students' full linguistic repertoires. We ask, what can be learned from a teacher's critical translanguaging literacy pedagogy in the space of nepantla in the initial phases of the COVID 19 pandemic?

Theoretical Framework

Nepantla

Nepantla, described by the Nahuatl people as “the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 237), is an Indigenous concept to describe spaces of disturbances and changes (Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Alemán, Jr., et al., 2013). Those who find themselves in these liminal spaces are ascribed as nepantleras/os as they “negotiate and shift between the overarching goals of the educational partnership and the everyday realities of parents, students, and institutional constraints” (Alemán, Jr., et al., 2013, p. 329). Nepantleras/os experience frustration and discomfort as worlds collide (Alemán, Jr., et al., 2013; Anzaldúa & Moraga, 2015). Through nepantla, Anzaldúa (2015) emphasizes the ability to “balance contemporary society's world views with the non-ordinary worldview, and to move between them to a space that simultaneously exists and does not exist” (p.28). Nepantla, as a conceptual tool, can transform into an epistemic space where teachers can “theorize the messiness” (Alemán, Jr. et al., 2013, p. 329) to find healing, validation, resiliency, and *conocimiento* among the frustrations and discomfort when perspectives clash (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). “As such nepantla is also a bridge to possibility, a bridge to aspirations; a bridge one crosses voluntarily and involuntarily to draw from the rivers of lived and learned experiences” (Burciaga, 2007, p. 147). In this sense, nepantla is a space, an instrument of “emancipation and empowerment” (Alemán, Jr., et al., 2013). Nepantla shapes our understanding of the possibilities that the in-between space of emergency virtual instruction during the COVID-19 provided because of the suspension of standardized testing in Spring 2020.

Translanguaging Pedagogy

Alongside, nepantla, we frame our work using García and Wei's (2014) understanding of translanguaging pedagogy as “building on students' language practices flexibly in order to develop new understandings and new language practices, including those deemed ‘academic standard’ practices,” (p.92). As a language theory, translanguaging makes sense of how bi/multilingual students utilize their full linguistic repertoire (García & Wei, 2014). It rejects the

idea that bi/multilingual individuals' linguistic repertoires are simply multiple monolingual repertoires and challenges notions of "standard" language, defined as a singular appropriate way to use language (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). García and colleagues (2017) identify three elements of translanguaging pedagogy: stance, design, and shifts. First, teachers who hold a translanguaging stance believe that bi/multilingual students' language practices are intertwined. Second, through translanguaging design, teachers develop units and assessments that support how students fluidly move across their linguistic repertoire. Finally, teachers make translanguaging shifts based on students in the moment languaging choices. In all, these three elements ground a way of thinking, planning, and acting in the classroom that sustains bi/multilingual children's language practices and identities. We used García et al.'s (2017) three tenets of translanguaging pedagogy (stance, design, shifts) to understand the teacher's specific actions and frame our findings around how these three tenets are present in this space of nepantla (Anzaldúa, 2015) that COVID-19 provided.

Literature Review

The temporal location of this study (Spring 2020 to Fall 2020) was defined by "dual pandemics" (Yeh et. al., 2022) and it is vital to understand how they impacted education. First, in March, COVID-19 largely transitioned educational and work activities to remote platforms (Chamberlain et al., 2020). Second, in May, the killing of George Floyd at the hands of a White police officer, along with hate crimes and micro-aggressions against Asian American Pacific Islander communities ignited an exigence for racial justice (Cheng & Conca-Cheng, 2020; Endo, 2020). Ladson-Billings (2021a) adds nuance to the "dual pandemics" characterization and adds economic and environmental pandemics to generate "four pandemics." Against this backdrop, teachers and students were challenged to continue teaching, learning and engaging from home. Aside from inequitable access to technological infrastructure, engagement from home was impacted by motivation, familial obligations, financial stress, feelings of isolation, worry and fear (e.g. Audrain & Basile, 2024; Yeh et. al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted dismal flaws in our educational system, yet also offered an opportunity for a "hard re-set" propelled by elements of culturally relevant pedagogy: student learning, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2021b). While White normed definitions of knowledge acquisition often took a deficit orientation to the learning that occurred in the home and made way for concerns about declining academic performance through narratives of "learning loss" (e.g. Bomer, 2021; Robbins & Cipollone, 2023); there is cause for hope (Ladson-Billings, 2021b). For instance, Robbins and Cipollone (2023) argued for a community engaged pedagogies and restorative justice as authentic mediums toward a hard re-set. Within the context of Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE), scholars such as Fránquiz et al., (2021) re-positioned the focus on "learning loss" to argue that this was a generative time to reimagine schooling and learn from the "innovation and resilience of teachers, parents, and educational stakeholders" (p.1). Oliveira and Kentor (2023) took up this charge through a qualitative exploration of how educators redefined their work through their intersectional identities by operationalizing care and empathy. Other scholars highlight how DLBE educators facilitated communication, support, and linguistic access to target language students and families (Flavin et.

al., 2024). Hamman-Ortiz (2024) argues that the actions that took place at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic constructed a “critical translanguaging space.” We argue that critical translanguaging spaces can serve as fertile ground for Ladson-Billings’ (2021b) “hard re-set” and our study adds to this knowledge base.

Translanguaging as a Pedagogy

Across the past two decades, the field of education has become increasingly familiar with translanguaging, both as a language theory and a pedagogy (e.g. Baker, 2011; Cangarajah, 2011; García et al., 2017; MacSwan, 2017; Salmerón, 2022; Williams, 1994). While translanguaging pedagogy has become popularized, at times the impact has been diluted as some work focuses more on the mechanics of translanguaging as a pedagogy, at the expense of highlighting the critical epistemological implications of translanguaging (e.g. Mendoza et al., 2024). For example, consider Infante and Licona’s (2021) qualitative exploration of translanguaging as a pedagogy in a bilingual middle school science classroom using ethnographically informed data collection alongside discourse analysis. Infante and Licona (2021) highlight translanguaging as a linguistically responsive teaching strategy (Lucas & Villegas, 2013) to facilitate emergent bilinguals’ acquisition of science knowledge and practices and do not emphasize the ideology implicit in the teacher’s choices or the sociocultural context of their instruction. While such studies make important contributions to what translanguaging pedagogy looks like in practice, there is a danger that their findings will be interpreted as apolitical in nature. Given this, there has been a call to (re)center criticality in research on translanguaging pedagogy by explicitly addressing issues of power and ideology and not primarily focusing on the language of instruction (Qin & Llosa, 2023). Our study takes up this call by showcasing how a teacher was able to subvert the traditional linguistic demands that were placed on her students and herself because of the power of monolingual standardized testing. We highlight how the critical nature of her translanguaging pedagogy challenged rigid notions of language separation and assumptions about what counts as “academic language.” We pay particular attention to the affordances of the unique sociopolitical context within this space of nepantla and contrast them with past challenges to translanguaging pedagogy.

Methods

Context

We draw from a subset of data from a longitudinal interview-based study of elementary educators of multilingual learners during the COVID-19 pandemic in Texas, Georgia, New York, and Maryland (Spring 2020 to Spring 2021). Specifically, we focus on Sol, a Texas 4th grade dual language teacher who is a Spanish English bilingual first generation immigrant from Mexico who identifies as queer and Latinx. Sol had been a teacher in Texas for 10 years when the COVID-19 pandemic started. We chose to highlight Sol because of the unique way that translanguaging pedagogy was present in her interviews. One reason for this could have been her prior experiences. The first author observed her grade team planning meetings in the Fall of

2018. As a part of this study, the first author provided professional development on translanguaging pedagogy to the grade team. This topic was initiated based on the 4th grade teachers' interests. The professional development was adapted from materials available through the CUNY NYSIEB Initiative on Emerging Bilinguals. In particular, "Translanguaging: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators" (Celice & Seltzer, 2013) was used to frame how translanguaging pedagogy is applicable for teachers in DLBE and English dominant settings. The professional development focused on fostering a multilingual ecology and designing instruction that promotes translanguaging. Sol's interviews reflect the degree that she was able to implement translanguaging pedagogy in the following years.

Sol's geopolitical context had implications on her experiences as a Latinx educator teaching primarily linguistically marginalized learners. Sol taught at an elementary school in one of the largest urban districts in Texas. The 20 students in her fourth-grade one-way dual language education classroom were a diverse group of transnational Latin American students (Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Cuba), in addition to first and second generation Mexican Americans who were born in Texas. Texas has a rich history of bilingual education and requires K-8 teachers in transitional and dual language programs to have a bilingual generalist certification that demonstrates their biliteracy skills (Sikes & Villanueva, 2021). In addition, Texas has a bilingual testing policy, offering the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STARR) for Spanish Language Arts and STARR assessments in Spanish for science and mathematics (Sikes & Villanueva, 2021; Tabaku et al., 2018). In Spring 2020, as part of its pandemic response, the STAAR standardized assessment was canceled (Texas Education Agency, 2020). This is a critical change that paved the way for major shifts in Sol's pedagogy.

Data Sources & Analysis

In a virtual two-hour semi-structured interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2015) in the Fall of 2020, Sol shared how she experienced the emergency virtual learning portion of Spring of 2020. The interview began with broad questions that addressed Sol's personal identity and how she views herself as a teacher (i.e. teaching trajectory, motivation for teaching, philosophy of literacy instruction). The next part of the interview began with the open-ended prompt of "Talk us through the spring 2020 semester." This allowed Sol to shape the story she told based on her self-driven priorities. The follow-up questions we asked focused on her literacy instruction, critical conversations with her students, the role of technology, teacher collaboration, and sustaining her classroom community. In the final part of the interview Sol reflected on her goals for the fall 2020 semester. Sol was interviewed two more times in the 2020-2021 school year. Given the unique impact of the lack of standardized tests in Spring 2020, this analysis focused on that time period. See Appendix A for the interview protocol.

For data analysis, we integrated principles of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clanadin, 1990) and thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2015), and engaged in recursive cycles of in vivo, inductive, concept, and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2015). From the analysis of a larger set of teachers, we identified major themes across how the teachers experienced the initial phases of the pandemic. These themes represent humanizing and dehumanizing actions and can be found in a separate analysis. Within those themes, the theme of translanguaging was present in Sol's

interview. To engage in a micro-analysis of the role of translanguaging in Sol's experience, the first author re-coded her interview using García et al.'s (2017) three components of translanguaging pedagogy: stance, design, and shifts. Concluding this analysis, the data was re-read through the lens of nepantla, and additional nuance was added to the conceptualization of translanguaging pedagogy in this unique context. The final analysis phase was ensuring that Sol felt well-represented through member checking. Sol responded "Well, you just made me cry in public. Thank you so much for making me a part of this. Gracias, gracias, gracias for seeing and hearing me."

Researchers' Positionalities

The first author is an early career professor at a public minority-serving institution. She is a former teacher of elementary multilingual learners and prepares teachers to meet their students' diverse needs. She taught online during the COVID-19 pandemic and was a mother to a young emergent bilingual child. On one level, she can understand the challenges that emergency online instruction presented to the lives of educators, parents and students. However, it is vital to recognize that the flexible structure of her position in higher education resulted in her having an experience that vastly differed from the realities of the public elementary teachers in this study. She is a bilingual third generation Texan (English & Spanish) who identifies as being bicultural, Mexican American and White. She has known Sol for six years. This position as an insider/outsider informed her deep respect and empathy for Sol's plight and her determination to tell her stories.

The second author identifies as Mexican/Chicano, born and raised in the New Latinx South. A former dual language bilingual education teacher, he is a doctoral candidate at the same public minority-serving institution as the first author, where he coaches and instructs pre-service and in-service teachers in literacy and dual language bilingual education. At the wake of the pandemic, the second author lived in a multi-generational home with his family where he experienced first-hand how his sisters and their children transitioned to emergency online instruction. As a first-year doctoral student, he experienced the sudden shift from face-to-face instruction to virtual classes. As a coach, he saw how pre-service and in-service teachers navigated and contended with the abruptness, nuances, and successes/triumphs of teaching virtually.

The third author shares an affiliation with the aforementioned public minority-serving institution as a doctoral student while simultaneously serving as a dual-language immersion bilingual educator. Like the second author, she identifies as Mexican/Chicana and originates from the New Latinx South. Her student teaching experience was suddenly disrupted in March 2020, just as she was about to begin her teaching career, significantly influencing how she prepared for her first year in the classroom. Simultaneously, she entered a graduate program, facing the same uncertainties and challenges described in this study, both as an educator and a student. The shift to virtual teaching demanded rapid adaptation to new instructional methods and virtual engagement with her community. Today, she continues to navigate the ongoing changes and dialogues in the post-pandemic teaching landscape, drawing on the resilience and adaptability developed during that challenging period.

Findings

In the context of emergency remote instruction during COVID-19, both Sol and her students experienced freedom to transcend monoglossic ideologies of linguistic purism and separation that were previously upheld by testing and firmly at odds with the linguistic complexity of their worlds. Sol's translanguaging pedagogy nurtured a community of translingual writers that honored her students' linguistic brilliance and potential in a time riddled with uncertainty and loss. Her pandemic pedagogy not only facilitated her students' linguistic flexibility and creativity, but in turn also offered healing from both the trauma of school sanctioned language loss and the trauma caused by the pandemic. She did so by engaging in translanguaging practices in three ways: through her stance, in the moment shifts in her practice, and through her instructional design. We elaborate on each of these dimensions below. It is important to note that often the examples do not neatly fit into just one of the three categories. We acknowledge this complexity and in such cases we made the choice about how to frame Sol's actions.

Translanguaging Stance

Sol's translanguaging stance was initially visible in an anecdote she shared from Fall 2020 where she challenged the school's policy of assessing students in math in English, regardless of their linguistic repertoire. In this case the school assessed a newcomer from Mexico and determined that "he's super low in math. Like his math is just bad." She took the initiative to test the student in Spanish and he scored 100%. She talked to the administration and said "Listen, this student is not low in math. This student doesn't know any English." She was told that she still needed to give math instruction in English and found ways to subvert this policy by previewing English lessons in Spanish. In the spring of 2020, she took advantage of the decreased oversight to follow her intuition as a teacher. She explained that

In the transition in the spring, I was like, 'I don't care what language you wanna use. We're just—we're gonna talk through the lesson and, like, the content—the little bit of content that we still managed to do is what we're gonna focus on, not on the language of instruction, per se.' That's how I approached it in-in my online classroom."

Sol's approach reflects a deep understanding of the need to draw on students' full linguistic repertoires as they develop their competencies across languages.

Translanguaging stance is also visible in Sol's conceptualization of the language choices that authors make in their writing. For example, she reflected that "some writing needs to be in one language or the other or however. But for writer's workshop in fourth grade, it should be however the writer can communicate the idea that it wants to communicate." When Sol emphasized "however the writer can communicate the idea," she was highlighting the importance of linguistic flexibility to composition. Sol also had a keen understanding of the importance of students' conceptualizing the role of the audience of their writing. While it is vital that students recognize the monolingual demands of certain writing pieces, this does not mean that all writing should be monolingual.

Translanguaging Shifts

Reflective of her translanguaging stance, Sol made subconscious shifts in her languaging in this space of nepantla where she found herself suddenly unencumbered by traditional monolingual demands that were related to standardized testing preparation. Sol noted that she was “usually pretty good at this [binding her languaging by the target language].” At this point in the year, students had selected to take their fourth-grade standardized tests either in English or Spanish. Their selection influenced how they were prepared such that the class was divided into the “English” kids and the “Español” kids. Sol recalled the influence of removing that binary:

So it was—it was really interesting, going back to removing the STAAR. It was like, okay. Then we are gonna—you're gonna speak in whatever language you wanna speak. So then it was a lot more of a mix of language. Like translanguaging. You know? Like, they would just talk however, they wanted to talk. I caught myself doing it more too.

Translanguaging was an act of resistance towards dominant monolingual expectations in schooling. It is imperative to note that Sol associates with her students when she described how both of their language practices shifted to include more translanguaging. In considering the impact of this space of nepantla, Sol reflected that “we created this space online where throwing in whatever language we wanted to say was validated and was honored...the importance of any language is to communicate. So if you're communicating, you're communicating correctly and strongly.” In the past Sol had faced strict linguistic expectations for instruction. Virtual learning was a space for Sol to engage in normally unsanctioned activity to foster students’ intellectual growth and positive self-conceptions. In this space of nepantla, the students no longer felt shamed for their languaging, rather, they received the clear message that all language is valued.

Translanguaging Design

Finally, translanguaging design was evident in how Sol took advantage of the latitude afforded by the cancellation of the state standardized test to plan ways for her students to use their full linguistic repertoire. As a dual language teacher, the removal of monolingual standardized testing requirements presented a unique opportunity for her to design instruction that sustained her students’ complex linguistic repertoires. Sol reflected, “Once we learned that they were not gonna have to take the test. I was like, “Okay. You're gonna pick your genre. You're just gonna write.” Moving beyond the difference in genre flexibility, this transformation also facilitated linguistic flexibility. Sol shared that her students would “throw full sentences [in English], and then the next sentence in Spanish, and then a random word and then the whole explanation in the other language.” One way her students used this newfound linguistic freedom opportunity was through crafting plays. Sol described them as “actually very powerful. Like, one was about teen pregnancy. One was about ICE deportations. Very powerful pieces that I was not focused at all anymore on, like, the grammar or the this or the that. It was, like, more, like...the context of the stories.” Throughout these shifts, Sol remained faithful to the writing process and

planned her instruction around a recursive cycle of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. She elaborated that “it was really interesting to see how their writing flow was better because they were able to use both languages.” Her students wrote differently from when, despite their writing’s audience, they were required to compose monolingually. Sol had a holistic understanding of developing her students as writers in a way that focused on their craft, not a limited focus on their monolingual language proficiency. Fostering her students’ translingual writing explicitly challenged monoglossic language ideologies that are pervasive in schooling. As a result of these shifts, Sol found that writers’ and readers’ workshop felt qualitatively different. She recounted that,

Writers’ workshop and readers’ workshop transformed to something different, but it gave us space to really escape reality, right, both with the reading and the writing...with writing, it’s, like, create or say or whatever. So they were both good spaces for disconnecting a little bit from everything that was happening around us.

Positioning writers’ and readers’ workshops as a “space to really escape reality” is indicative of the possibilities that were present in this space of nepantla. It functioned as a bridge for us to be able to see what is possible when both teachers and students are given greater autonomy in their languaging.

Conclusion

Sol’s online translanguaging pedagogy interrogated monoglossic language ideologies that are endemic within schooling. We found that in terms of translanguaging stance (García et al., 2017), Sol challenged dominant language ideologies by valuing written and oral translanguaging that was previously unaccepted. Translanguaging shifts (García et al., 2017) were evident through in the moment examples of how Sol fostered her students’ translingual writing and engaged in translanguaging herself. Finally, through translanguaging design (García et al., 2017), Sol focused her pedagogy on developing her students as writers in a way that prioritized their craft, not a limited emphasis on their monolingual language proficiency that was dictated by a student’s standardized test language selection. Sol’s enactment of translanguaging pedagogy within this space of nepantla (Anzaldúa, 2015) exemplifies a commitment to critical translanguaging pedagogy that reflects a focus on honoring and sustaining children’s full linguistic repertoires.

Our study contributes to the gap of research on translanguaging pedagogy within the affordances and constraints of the emergency virtual learning phase of the pandemic. While we acknowledge the limitations of focusing on a single teacher in terms of being able to determine how representative her beliefs/practices are in the broader context of dual language bilingual education teachers, such generalizability was not our goal. Rather, we frame Sol’s experiences as a call to action to dismantle strict language barriers in dual language bilingual education in service of bi/multilingual children being able to draw on and develop their full linguistic repertoires while sustaining positive self-conceptions. It is important to note that one rationale behind strict language barriers is preparing children for the monolingual linguistic demands of

standardized testing. In the context of Ladson-Billings' (2021b) call for a "hard reset" on education, we encourage the field to review what it means to assess students. There are a myriad of issues inherent to standardized testing, such as the lack of objectivity, exacerbation of existing educational inequalities, and the facilitation of surveillance of teachers and students for adherence to limited notions of teaching and learning (e.g. Au, 2022; Bach, 2020). In her interview Sol imagined proponents of standardized tests staunchly resisting changes with questions such as "How else are you gonna measure what the kids know?" or "How else are you gonna measure how good a teacher is if you don't test?" She concluded that "It's not about you [teachers]. And it's not about what they [students] know." She recognized that standardized testing was not serving its stated purpose and contributed a great more harm than good.

We see our current moment as an opportunity to learn from this previously unimaginable suspension of standardized tests to holistically support students' language and literacy development within dual language bilingual education. In the school context, we envision shifts in how writing is conceptualized. While we acknowledge that students must be prepared to write monolingual products, we echo the myriads of scholars who emphasize the importance of students writing for authentic audiences and the value of translanguaging throughout the writing process (e.g. Durán, 2016; Salmerón, 2022; Velasco & García, 2014). At a practical level, this could look like teachers planning writing units with translingual audiences in mind and supporting students' translingual writing with translingual mentor texts. Teachers could also give students assignments that explicitly require them to authentically represent their home language practices. For instance, students could write "Where I'm from" poems where they are encouraged to include examples of authentic languaging from their homes. Such practices could also be modeled at the pre-service teacher education level to prepare students with a translingual orientation towards literacy pedagogy. All educational stakeholders have a role to play and we urge the reader to consider what actions they could take.

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ENHANCING EMERGENT BILINGUAL (EB) LEARNERS PERFORMANCE ON THE STAAR TEST: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS WITH CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE QUESTIONS (CRQS)

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Abstract

This study explores the performance of two emergent bilingual (EB) learners—a fifth-grade girl from refugee parents and a seventh-grade boy with university professor parents—on Constructed Response Questions (CRQs) in the STAAR test. Using qualitative methods such as interviews and writing sample analysis, the research evaluates their responses based on the STAAR rubric, focusing on idea development and language conventions. The study introduces strategies to support EB learners, including outlining, thesis formulation, logical flow, looping, word association games, and peer editing. Structured approaches like the RACE (Restate, Answer, Cite, Explain), STAR (Scan, Target, Actively read, Respond), and RAPP (Restate, Answer, Prove, Provide) strategies are also recommended to enhance writing skills. Key factors influencing writing proficiency, such as home environments and school support, are highlighted. The study offers four recommendations for CRQ preparation: understanding the test format and rubric, analyzing prompts and examples, planning responses strategically, and managing time effectively. By applying these targeted strategies and practicing consistently, EB learners can overcome challenges, improve writing skills, and approach CRQ assessments with confidence, leading to academic success.

Keywords: *Constructive Response Questions (CRQs), STAAR test, Emergent Bilingual (EB) learners, Instructional strategies, Rubric evaluation, Academic progress*

Emergent Bilingual (EB) is a term used to describe students who are learning English while also developing their home language (Renaissance Edwords, 2024). Enhancing the writing performance of Emergent Bilingual within the context of Constructive Response Questions (CRQ) on the STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) test is a multifaceted endeavor crucial to their academic success. EB students face distinctive challenges, grappling with linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural disparities when articulating responses in English. The necessity to optimize their writing skills not only aligns with educational standards but also underscores the imperative to provide tailored support and strategies that empower these learners to navigate the complexities of written expression effectively.

The STAAR test, particularly its Constructive Response Essay section, demands a unique set of skills—requiring students to synthesize information, articulate coherent responses, and provide textual evidence to support their viewpoints (Wilson, 2018). For EB, mastering these elements while accounting for language proficiency disparities poses a significant hurdle. Therefore, an exploration of targeted methodologies and instructional approaches becomes

pivotal in honing the writing abilities of EBs, ensuring their capacity to perform proficiently within the parameters of the STAAR test's writing components.

The study concentrated on assessing the writing proficiency of two students who were emergent bilingual learners. Its objective was to pinpoint crucial strategies, especially those fostering writing skills beneficial for excelling in the Constructive Response Questions section of the STAAR exam. This research delved into key factors influencing their learning journey, specifically during the writing stages, with the intent of devising effective strategies to enhance these students' writing competencies.

Theoretical framework

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023), the percentage of public school students in the United States who were English learners (ELs) was higher in fall 2020 (10.3 percent, or 5.0 million students) than in fall 2010 (9.2 percent, or 4.5 million students). In fall 2020, the percentage of public school students who were ELs ranged from 0.7 percent in West Virginia to 20.1 percent in Texas. Meanwhile, the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2021) reported that in the 2019-2020 school year, Texas had approximately 1,636,000 English learners (ELs) enrolled in public schools. These students accounted for roughly 19.6% of the total student population in the state. The majority of ELs in Texas were Hispanic (1,619,845 students, or 87.3%), followed by Asian (90,845 students, or 4.9%), African American (43,070 students, or 2.3%) and White (36,863 students, or 2%).

Corujo (2023) revealed that EL students often face challenges in perceiving cognitive and linguistic deficiencies as well as sociocultural differences when learning to write in English. She further argued that addressing these challenges requires providing direct instruction in topics such as grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Additionally, Corujo emphasized the significance of considering students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds to establish meaningful connections between languages. How can teachers effectively equip EL students with the skills to become confident and capable writers? According to Corujo's findings (2023), it involves not only delivering direct instruction in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary but also integrating students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds into the learning process to bridge the gap between languages and enhance their writing abilities.

In her 2018 study, Wilson outlined a comprehensive approach to STAAR writing, structured around a five-step process aimed at optimizing student performance. The process begins with two rounds of pre-writing, each lasting 10 minutes, during which brainstorming techniques such as idea webs, listing, and outlining are utilized to generate and organize ideas. Wilson emphasizes that the initial draft need not be perfect, urging students to prioritize structure and content over polish. Strategies for enhancing the introduction, reason paragraphs, and conclusion are provided, emphasizing the importance of clarity and coherence. During the revising phase, attention is directed towards incorporating transitions, varying sentence structures, and expanding on supporting points. The editing process focuses on refining mechanics such as capitalization, usage, punctuation, and spelling. Finally, in preparing the final draft, students are guided through formatting considerations and urged to conduct a thorough

review before submission. Wilson's approach offers a systematic framework for tackling STAAR writing tasks, promoting both efficiency and effectiveness in student writing endeavors.

Liborio (2022) underscored the importance of incorporating textual evidence in responses as mandated by the TEKS standards in Texas. They delineated two types of essay questions: the short-constructed response (SCR), typically focusing on a paragraph or section, and the extended constructed response. Liborio proposed utilizing the SCR planner, employing the RAC (Restate, Answer, and Cite) method with distinct colors to effectively tackle SCR questions. Evaluation of SCR questions utilizes a 3-point scoring system, with points awarded based on the correctness of the answer and the relevance of supporting textual evidence. Liborio offered examples of SCR prompts, such as inferring reasons for character nicknames, with accompanying recommendations for scaffolding strategies to support student comprehension and response skills. Practical tips included starting with fiction, progressing through various genres, and employing techniques such as underlining key words and practicing SCRs regularly through read-alouds and independent work, fostering gradual independence and proficiency.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary influences on CRQ performance for emergent bilingual learners?
2. To what extent does the STAAR rubric aid in assessing students' writing skills?
3. What advantages can classroom teachers gain from examining CRQ samples of their students?
4. Which strategies prove most effective for enhancing development of ideas and language conventions?
5. What advice can be provided for children undertaking the STAAR CRQ test overall?

Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to examine the writing proficiency of two emergent bilingual students, identify their most struggling areas, and offer effective strategies for improving their writing skills, particularly in constructed response essays. Suzi, one of twin sisters in the fifth grade, is participating in the English Learners (EL) program at her school. Their parents came to the United States as refugees from Myanmar and she was born in the U.S. Suzi can speak three languages: Karen, Karenni, and English. They communicate with their parents in Karen and Karenni at home and she has limited reading and writing skills in her native languages. During an interview, she used gestures paired with a word or two when asking questions. It was observed that Suzi spoke only when necessary with her friends at recess. She seemed afraid to initiate conversation with peers or adults around her. Suzi shared a common circle of friends with her twin sister at school and maintained strong connections with her parents and other siblings within their family.

The school where Suzi was enrolled is highly diverse, comprising 47% Asian students, primarily refugees, along with 27% Hispanic students and 22% Black students (Hwang, et al., 2023). In contrast, the demographic makeup of the entire state of Texas in 2021-2022 consisted of 52% Hispanic, 28% White, 13% Black, and 4% Asian populations. Among the students at the

school, 40% spoke languages such as Karen (13%), Burmese (15%), Karenni (10%), and Poe Karen (2%), all originating from Myanmar.

The study also collected writing samples from a 7th-grade boy who speaks three languages like Suzi. This student, Kevin, was born in Japan and moved to the U.S. when he entered school in Hawaii. As soon as he began his schooling, he enrolled in the EL program. Both of his parents were Korean American, and they encouraged him to practice Korean at home. He loved to read and write in Japanese, Korean, and English. The school where Kevin was enrolled is primarily Caucasian and he was usually the only Asian student at his school.

Writing Proficiency Analysis

Suzi wasn't particularly daunted by the writing task, but she made numerous mistakes and seemed to struggle to grasp the purpose of the assignment. Among the challenges faced by Suzi, her writing proficiency emerged as the weakest area requiring immediate attention. She exhibited a limited vocabulary in her writing and lacked smooth transitions between sentences. Her responses were often brief and simplistic, failing to delve into the text in detail. Consequently, her writing lacked the depth required for effective communication with readers.

The study utilized the writing rubric from the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2022) to assess students' writing skills. This rubric focused on two key categories: idea development and language conventions. To achieve full credits in idea development, students needed to fully develop a central idea and provide sufficient explanation of supporting evidence. For language conventions, student writing was expected to demonstrate consistent mastery of grade-level standards, including proper sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and spelling. The study employed genuine STAAR questions for realistic practice and evaluated samples according to the writing rubric recommended by the TEA. The instruction provided was as follows:

Read the poem "One Saturday." Based on the details in the poem, write a response to the following: Explain how the speaker's feelings about the grandparents change as they spend time together. Write a well-organized essay that uses specific evidence from the poem to support your response.

One Saturday

My grandparents are both really great,
But I've never stayed with them alone.
And so I'm nervous as I leave the car,
Keeping my voice a steady, even tone.

My parents told me to be good,
And I vowed to do my best:
Be good, help out, obey the rules,
And try not to get stressed.

Grandma's kiss brushed my cheek
Like the wings of a butterfly
As Mom and Dad drove away,
Waving their goodbye.

"We're going to have some fun, you know,"
My winking Grandpa said
As his giant bear-paw hand
Ruffled the hair upon my head.

A woodland hike exposed a lake
Ringed with massive trees;
The deep blue water shimmered with
The whisper of a breeze.

Back at home, Gram drafted me
To help her make our dinner,
Which, compared to mac and cheese,
Would be the proven winner.

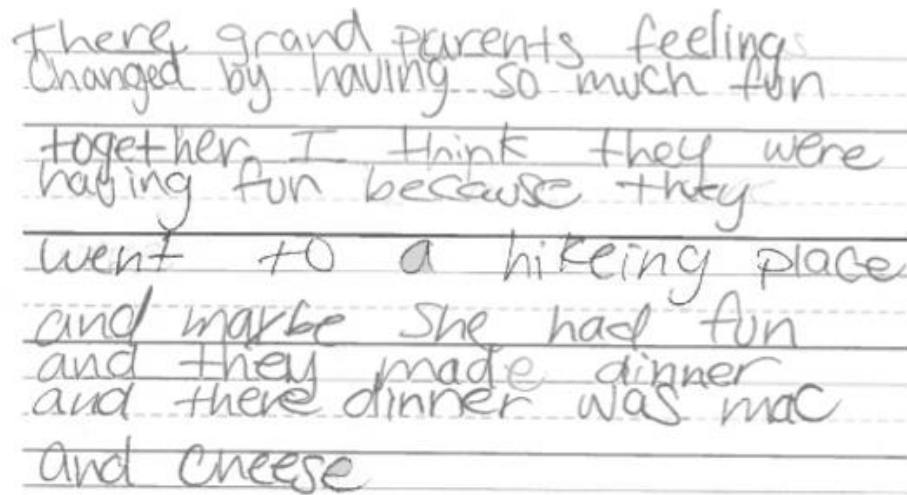
When dark of night draped the sky,
The three of us lay down
Outside on blankets spread upon
The green grass-cushioned ground.

"Black velvet studded with bright jewels,"
Grandma uttered with a sigh.
"That's the picture that I see
When gazing at night's sky."

The gems that sparkle in MY life,
I can touch as well as see;
They're lying on their back right now
On either side of me.

Figure 1 displays Suzi's STAAR CRQ essay response from the poem "One Saturday."

Figure 1: Suzi's Writing Sample



there grand parents feelings
changed by having so much fun
together, I think they were
having fun because they
went to a hiking place
and maybe she had fun
and they made dinner
and there dinner was mac
and cheese

(Student Writing Source: Mo, 2023)

The assessment of her essay was conducted using the TEA-recommended CRQ writing rubric, which encompasses two categories: Idea Development and Language Conventions. Figure 2 summarizes each score point description for these two categories.

Figure 2: Rubric for Idea Development and Language Conventions

Idea Development		Language Conventions	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea is clear and fully developed • Selection and explanation of evidence is sufficient and relevant • Organization is effective • Expression of ideas is clear • Full awareness of purpose for writing and of audience 	2	<p>Student writing demonstrates <u>consistent command</u> of grade-level appropriate conventions, including correct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentence construction • punctuation • capitalization • grammar usage • spelling
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea is present and somewhat developed • Selection and explanation of evidence is limited and possibly irrelevant • Organization is limited • Expression of ideas is basic • Partial awareness of purpose for writing and of audience 	1	<p>Student writing demonstrates <u>inconsistent command</u> of grade-level appropriate conventions, including limited use of correct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentence construction • punctuation • capitalization • grammar usage • spelling
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central idea is not evident or not developed • Selection and explanation of evidence is insufficient and/or irrelevant • Organization is minimal or not present • Expression of ideas is poor • Minimal to no awareness of purpose for writing and audience 	0	<p>Student writing demonstrates <u>little to no command</u> of grade-level appropriate conventions, including infrequent use of or no evidence of correct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentence construction • punctuation • capitalization • grammar usage • spelling
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Idea is not evident or is inappropriate to the task • Selection and explanation of evidence is lacking or irrelevant • Organization is not evident • Expression of ideas is poor and/or incoherent • No awareness of purpose for writing and of audience 		

Suzi’s performance in the category of idea development warrants a score of 1, primarily due to the lack of a clear central idea and insufficient explanation of evidence. While she does introduce relevant ideas, she fails to elaborate on them adequately or establish smooth transitions between them. Her writing suffers from disruptions caused by repetition and excessive wordiness, hindering the coherence between ideas. This verbosity and repetition impede the flow of transitions, resulting in overall poor coherence. Suzi’s comprehension of the text appears limited, and the absence of thorough explanation hampers the development of her ideas. Furthermore, her choice of words tends to be vague and constrained, and the adoption of an overly expository tone further obscures the clarity of her message.

Additionally, Suzi’s writing comprises a single extended, run-on sentence devoid of proper punctuation. Furthermore, a spelling error is evident in the term “hikeing,” and the execution of grammar is inadequate. Moreover, many essential components required for forming complete sentences, such as adverbs, adjectives, and transitional words, are absent. Moreover, Suzi’s writing displays shortcomings in grammar and punctuation, alongside a spelling mistake and an incorrect response. Consequently, Suzi merits a score of 1 in the language conventions category.

The CRQ essay sample was also collected from Kevin and evaluated according to the same STAAR rubric. The writing prompt that Kevin was working on was as follows:

READ the following quotation.

If you run into a wall, don’t turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.
—Michael Jordan

THINK about the following statement.

No one can achieve success without overcoming obstacles.

WRITE an essay explaining the importance of never giving up.

Kevin’s Writing Sample Analysis

Kevin merits a score point of 2 in the category of organization and idea development. His ideas are closely tied to the central idea of the significance of perseverance. Subsequently, the student elaborated on these concepts by exemplifying the importance of perseverance through the lens of a historical figure like Martin Luther King Jr. Furthermore, the student incorporated a personal anecdote involving chess. Nevertheless, the essay predominantly consists of simplistic sentences and redundant phrases. It is imperative for the student to diversify sentence structures and include a conclusive statement to enhance the overall strength of the essay.

Figure 3: Sample Analysis on Idea Development

Introduction		Idea Development		
<p>"If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it." This is the mindset required to win at life, according to Michael Jordan. If you fall down in a race, you cannot afford to stay down and cry, because if you do, your competitors will beat you. You have to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, suck up the pain, and finish the race.</p> <p>No one has a perfectly smooth life. A famous quote by Martin Luther King Jr. states, "If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. Whatever you do, keep moving forward." Martin Luther King Jr.'s life was filled with adversity. In an era before the Civil Rights Movement, an era of racism and segregation toward African Americans, he paved the way forward equality and integration of his people into the U.S.</p> <p>Life is tough. Sometimes the goal seems very far away, but you have to believe it is there, and strive to achieve it through dedication and indefatigability. You will feel tired, you will feel pain. You have to push through and once you achieve the goal, you will feel proud of your achievement.</p> <p>In class, it does not matter how lost of a position you have, the only thing you can try to do is the next best move.</p>	Clear Claim	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is clear and fully developed Selection and explanation of evidence is sufficient and relevant Organization is effective Expression of ideas is clear Full awareness of purpose for writing and of audience 	
	Quoted Evidence	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is present and somewhat developed Selection and explanation of evidence is limited and possibly irrelevant Organization is limited Expression of ideas is basic Partial awareness of purpose for writing and of audience 	
	Grouping ideas into paragraphs	Transitions ?	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is not evident or not developed Selection and explanation of evidence is insufficient and/or irrelevant Organization is minimal or not present Expression of ideas is poor Minimal to no awareness of purpose for writing and audience
	Basic Expression (Word Choice)	Organization is limited.	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central idea is not evident or is inappropriate to the task Selection and explanation of evidence is lacking or irrelevant Organization is not evident Expression of ideas is poor and/or incoherent No awareness of purpose for writing and of audience
	No Conclusion ?			

(Student Writing Source: Han, 2024)

Kevin demonstrated proficient language skills in dissecting the prompt. He exhibited a diverse vocabulary while maintaining clarity and conciseness in his expression. His essay predominantly featured a single type of sentence structure and certain sections of the essay revealed Kevin's struggles with punctuation, particularly involving commas and run-on sentences. While employing sophisticated vocabulary to bolster his arguments, he encountered spelling errors, notably with words such as "indefitigueability" instead of "indefatigability". While his word selection was commendable, refining transitional phrases could further enhance the cohesion of his writing. Since he lacked precision in punctuation and grammar usage, Kevin merits a score of 1 in the category of language conventions. The writing demonstrates an inconsistent command of grade-level-appropriate conventions.

The essay, overall, exhibited strong writing, showcasing Kevin's adept organizational skills, particularly evident in his inclusion of respected figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and the quote used. The handwriting remained excellent until halfway through but appeared rushed

and less polished afterward, possibly due to time constraints. While there's room for improvement in execution, Kevin demonstrated a clear understanding in delivering his message.

Figure 4: Sample Analysis on Language Conventions

Language Conventions	
2	<p>Student writing demonstrates consistent command of grade-level appropriate conventions, including correct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentence construction • punctuation • capitalization • grammar usage • spelling
1	<p>Student writing demonstrates inconsistent command of grade-level appropriate conventions, including limited use of correct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentence construction • punctuation • capitalization • grammar usage • spelling
0	<p>Student writing demonstrates little to no command of grade-level appropriate conventions, including infrequent use of or no evidence of correct:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sentence construction • punctuation • capitalization • grammar usage • spelling

2	<p>Sentence construction</p> <p>"If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it." This is the mindset required to win at life, according to Michael Jordan. If you fall down in a race, you cannot afford to stay down and cry, because if you do, your competitors will beat you. You have to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, suck up the pain, and finish the race.</p> <p>No one has a perfectly smooth life. A famous quote by Martin Luther King Jr. states, "If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. Whatever you do, keep moving forward." Martin Luther King Jr.'s life was filled with adversity. In an era before the Civil Rights Movement, an era of racism and segregation toward African Americans, he paved the way forward equality and integration of his people into the U.S.</p> <p>Life is tough. Sometimes the goal seems very far away, but you have to believe it is there and strive to achieve it through dedication and indelible ability. You will feel tired, you will feel pain. You have to push through and once you achieve the goal, you will feel proud of your achievement.</p> <p>In class, it does not matter how lost of a position you have, the only thing you can try to do is the next best move.</p>
1	<p>Capitalization</p> <p>Punctuation</p> <p>Spelling errors</p> <p>Grammar usage</p>

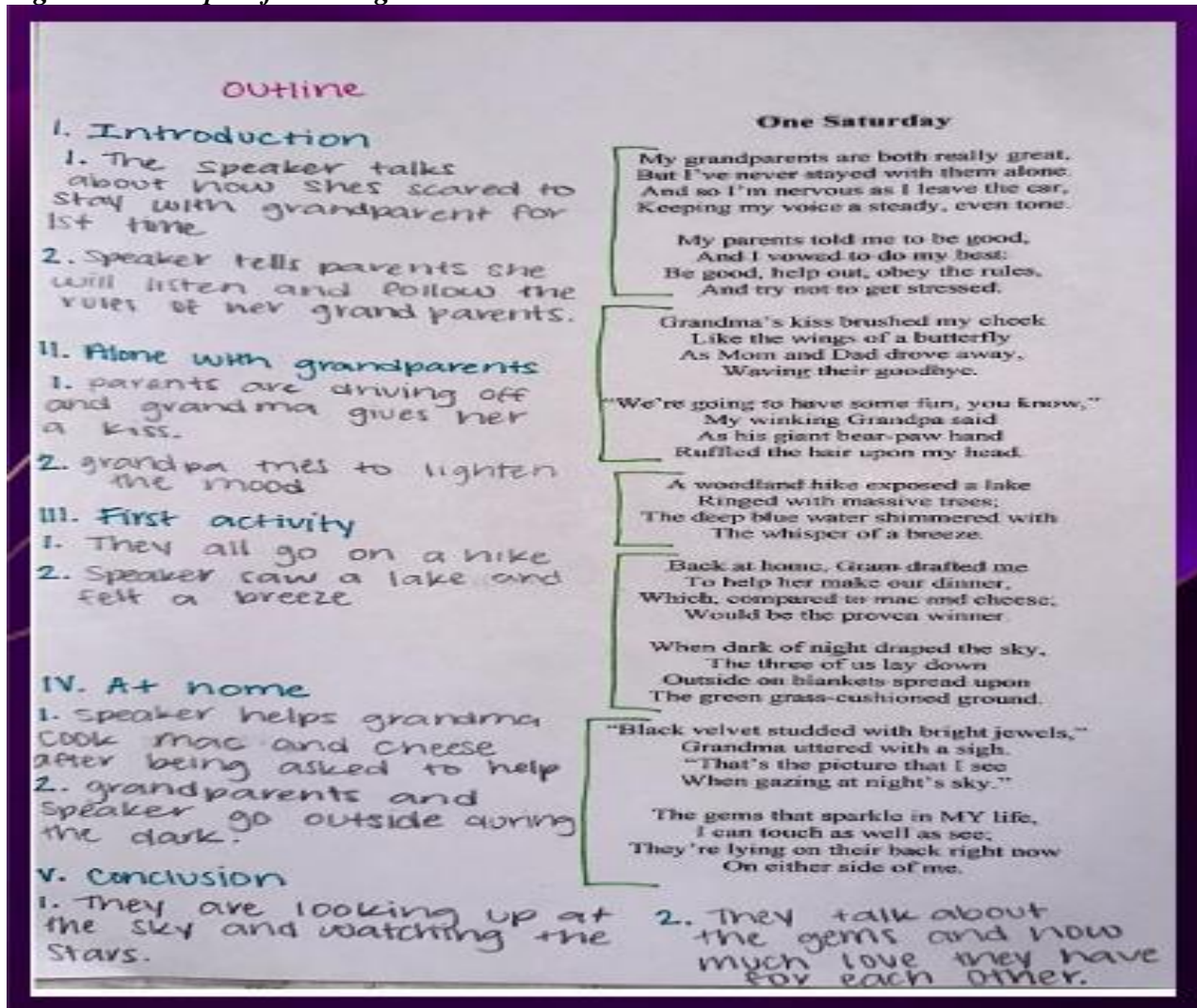
Practical Strategies for Improving Writing CRQ Essays

Suzi's writing proficiency significantly falls short across all three categories: organization/progression, development of ideas, and use of language/convention while Kevin reserves room for improvement in his writing capacity to reach the full score point. To enhance their writing performance, these students must focus on targeted strategies tailored to each category's improvement. The study provided various writing strategies specific to organization/progression, development of ideas, and use of language/conventions that could benefit both students in their writing endeavors.

1. Strategies for the category of organization/idea development

Often, students encounter difficulties initiating their writing process, feeling overwhelmed soon after they begin. Engaging with the prompt triggers an influx of ideas, causing them to overthink and lose sight of their intended focus (Hindman & Hwang, 2024). To navigate this, students grappling with numerous ideas should jot down their thoughts until their stream of consciousness exhausts. Following this, they can proceed to organize these thoughts systematically by grouping them under main points. Lastly, students should refine their ideas, selecting the most pertinent ones to guide their writing process. Creating an outline serves as an effective strategy to hone organization and progression skills (Zote, 2020). It aids in structuring thoughts, saving time, and mitigating writer's block. Outlines enhance clarity, offering a clearer perspective on the writing process, while also providing a structured framework that ensures lucid communication. They contribute significantly to smoother writing, establishing a robust foundation for ideas and the actual writing process. Engaging in outlining is highly recommended as it notably facilitates the final stages of progress. Creating an outline may begin with jotting down all emerging ideas in a list format until all thoughts are exhausted (Zote, 2020). Subsequently, review the list to eliminate irrelevant ideas that won't contribute to addressing the prompt. Retain the most pertinent ones that could substantiate an introduction, two or three paragraphs, and a concluding segment, ensuring sufficient content for each section.

Figure 5: Example of Creating an Outline



(Source: McGaughy, 2024)

For emergent bilingual learners, this strategy can be implemented by starting with a captivating introduction that grabs the reader's attention and focuses on elements relevant to the prompt, such as an engaging narrative, a thought-provoking question, or a pertinent quotation. (Mondays Made Easy, 2023). A well-crafted outline places the thesis prominently and elaborates on each aspect of the paper in a clear manner. Once the introduction is developed, it sets the tone for the rest of the essay. Moreover, the outline serves as a tool for students to structure their thoughts and introductions effectively, enhancing their work and bolstering their confidence in crafting compelling papers (Mondays Made Easy, 2023).

Generating thesis statements is another strategy for organization and progression. These statements serve as navigational tools, offering students a framework to craft their papers

proficiently (Fifteen worksheets.com, 2023). Serving as the cornerstone of any paper, thesis statements concentrate the paper's direction and arrangement. Typically situated in the introductory segment of a paper, a thesis statement serves as a compass, guiding the reader through the author's intended argument.

For emergent bilingual learners, this strategy can be applied by encouraging self-inquiry about the topic and exploring their own perspectives on the issue (The Writing Center of Princeton, 2017). By crafting a thesis statement, students can create a solid foundation for their essay, supporting the development and organization of their ideas. This approach not only enhances critical thinking but also empowers learners to express their thoughts with clarity and confidence.

A robust thesis statement furnishes writers with a clear direction for their essay, providing the necessary framework and concentration to further develop their papers. According to Fifteen worksheets.com (2023), thesis statements function as a roadmap, empowering students to compose their papers with clarity and efficiency. Acting as a linchpin, thesis statements concentrate the paper's focus and arrangement, allowing students to ground their essays and elaborate on their concepts. A robust thesis statement furnishes writers with a precise delineation of their essay's scope, thereby bestowing structure and direction as they further develop their papers.

Figure 6: Example of Thesis Statements

<p>What is your topic? _____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Explain how the speaker's feelings about the grandparents change as they spend time together.</p>	
<p>What question do you have about your topic?</p>	<p>How do the speaker's feelings change as they spend time together?</p>
<p>What is the answer to your question?</p>	<p>The speaker's feelings change from feelings of nervousness to feelings of appreciation.</p>
<p>What is your opinion?</p>	<p>The feelings change because the grandparents spend quality time with the speaker. Quality time allows the speaker to feel more connected to their grandparents.</p>
<p>Write your working thesis: _____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Over the course of "One Saturday," the speakers change from feelings of nervousness to appreciation as the speaker spends quality time with their grandparents.</p>	

(Source: Liborio, 2022)

To ensure coherence and advancement in writing, students can opt for employing logical flow to effectively link sentences and foster cohesive structure. Logical flow is the seamless progression of ideas within a piece of writing, ensuring that each paragraph builds upon the

previous one and leads smoothly into the next (Wang, 2018). For emergent bilingual learners, this can be achieved by using transition words and phrases, such as *however*, *in addition*, and *as a result*, to signal relationships between ideas. Additionally, outlining their main points before drafting can help students organize their thoughts and maintain a clear focus throughout their writing. Regular practice in identifying and correcting gaps or inconsistencies in their writing can further refine their ability to create a logically connected essay. This coherence allows readers to follow the argument or narrative effortlessly, enhancing understanding and engagement. Achieving logical flow requires careful organization and the use of transitional words and phrases to connect thoughts and maintain coherence.

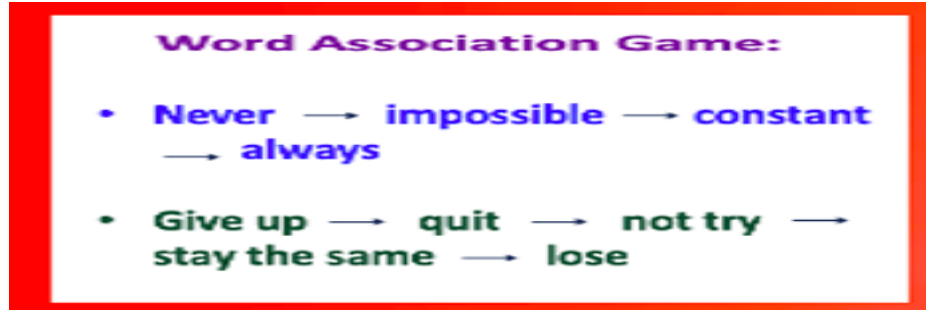
The University Academic Support Centers (2024) recommended using Listing and Looping as prewriting techniques. When listing ideas, students start with broad concepts and then expand on them using bullet points to add more details. After listing, students can pick out a main idea and start freewriting from there. They continue to loop their freewriting, circling new topics, ideas, phrases, or sentences each time. After four or five rounds of looping, students will have specific information that reflects their thoughts on a particular topic.

For emergent bilingual learners, these techniques are particularly useful as they encourage brainstorming in a structured yet flexible way. Listing helps students visually organize their thoughts, making it easier to identify connections between ideas. Looping, on the other hand, fosters deeper exploration and refinement of these ideas, allowing learners to develop a richer understanding of the topic. These methods can also alleviate the pressure of writing a perfect draft on the first attempt, giving learners the freedom to experiment and build confidence in their writing process.

Games4esl (2024) introduced a word association game designed for English learners. In this game, a student is given a word and must respond with an associated word or phrase. These activities prove valuable in helping students strengthen their existing vocabulary and enhance their English language proficiency. For example, if the teacher presents the word "Never," a student might reply with associated words like "impossible," "constant," or "always." Similarly, if the teacher presents the phrase "Give up," the student might respond with "quit," "not try," "stay the same," or "lose." Such exercises encourage active engagement and deepen understanding of word meanings and relationships.

For emergent bilingual learners, word association games can serve as an effective tool to build connections between new vocabulary and prior knowledge. These activities stimulate critical thinking and creativity by prompting learners to explore different contexts in which words can be used. Teachers can further enhance the activity by incorporating themes or topics related to classroom content, making the practice more relevant and meaningful. Additionally, pairing students in small groups or teams can foster collaboration and peer learning, creating an interactive and supportive environment for language development.

Figure 7: Example of Word Association



(Source: McGaughy, 2024)

2. Strategies for language conventions

Both Kevin and Suzi in the study struggled in the category of language conventions. Incorporating regular writing exercises is a highly effective strategy to improve students' language conventions. Writing a paragraph on various topics several times a week could help condition their minds and enhance their writing skills to achieve suitable essay lengths and conventions (Hindman & Hwang, 2024). Proofreading, peer-editing, revising, crafting complete sentences, and varying sentence structure are some of recommendations for Kevin and Suzi to improve the language usage.

Following consistent practice, Kevin and Suzi could engage in peer editing using a checklist. Pairing up, they can mutually revise drafts, refining ideas and rectifying mechanical errors such as misspelled words and incorrect punctuation before finalizing their drafts. Jessica (2023) asserts that explicit instruction in peer editing is crucial within the writing process. Wedderburn (2023) introduced a peer editing checklist designed for the revising and editing process. This checklist serves as a valuable tool, enabling students to obtain constructive feedback from their peers. Engaging in peer editing often proves more comfortable for students as they can readily accept suggestions for changes from their peers which might be more challenging if received directly from a teacher.

In the study, Kevin's essay predominantly featured a single type of sentence structure. To improve this issue, employing transition words is recommended to help create coherence in flow by connecting ideas, sentences, or paragraphs. They serve as bridges between distinct parts of text, guiding readers smoothly from one point to the next (Doyle, 2024). Transition words can be used to indicate sequence, contrast, comparison, cause and effect, addition, and more.

Snowden (2019) proposed the RACE strategy as a method for practicing STAAR constructed response questions. This strategy involves restating the question, providing an answer, citing evidence from the text, and explaining the response. For instance, when considering the topic "The importance of never giving up," Snowden offers the following steps: 1) Restate the question: Why is it crucial to persevere even when facing challenges? 2) Answer the question: Perseverance is vital because it empowers individuals to overcome obstacles and

achieve their objectives despite setbacks. 3) Cite evidence from the text: According to a study by psychologist Angela Duckworth, perseverance, often termed "grit," emerges as a stronger predictor of success than talent or intelligence alone. 4) Explain your answer: This evidence highlights the pivotal role of resilience and determination in accomplishing success. Through persisting in the face of adversity, individuals demonstrate their unwavering commitment and readiness to endure hardships in pursuit of their goals. When integrated, these steps underscore the critical significance of perseverance in confronting life's challenges and realizing success.

Similarly, in *Custom Classroom* by Angela (2022), four steps of employing the STAR strategy are presented, including Scan, Target text, Actively read, and Respond. She suggests:

1. Scanning the questions by asking, "Is the question whole or part?"
2. Targeting text by reading all the text carefully.
3. Actively reading by taking notes while rereading the text.
4. Responding to questions by answering using text evidence.

For the topic, "The importance of never giving up," the STAR strategy can be employed as follows: Begin by scanning the text to identify key points or arguments related to the importance of perseverance and not giving up. Look for phrases or sentences that emphasize resilience, overcoming challenges, or achieving goals despite obstacles. Then, identify a specific passage or quote that encapsulates the main idea of the importance of never giving up. Afterward, engage with the text by reading it carefully and critically. Pay attention to the author's arguments, supporting evidence, and any rhetorical devices used to convey the message about perseverance. After actively reading the text, formulate a response that synthesizes your understanding of the importance of never giving up. You might write a reflection on personal experiences where perseverance has led to success or discuss how the message of the text resonates with you and inspires you to overcome challenges in your own life.

Findings

The study advocates for prioritizing equity over equality, emphasizing the customization of support to meet the unique needs of everyone rather than offering identical support to all (Hindman & Hwang, 2024). While equality aims to provide the same resources and opportunities to every individual or group, equity recognizes the individual's unique circumstances, requiring tailored resources and opportunities to achieve equal outcomes (Drew, 2023). As an illustration, Suzi encountered significant challenges across all criteria. She earned a score of 1 in the development of ideas and scored 1 in language conventions. In contrast, Kevin received a score of 2 in the development of ideas and a score of 1 in language conventions. It's evident that both students require additional support in the use of language category.

Through interviews and interactions with these students, the study observed several factors that significantly impacted their performance on the CRQ. Firstly, their home environments played a pivotal role. Suzi's parents, refugees from Myanmar, worked in a meat factory, whereas Kevin's parents were both university professors who encouraged

multilingualism at home, fostering a language-rich environment. Additionally, their personalities played a role; Suzi was notably reserved, rarely initiating conversations, while Kevin was outgoing and positive about learning, demonstrating intrinsic motivation. This self-motivation proved crucial to Kevin's performance on the CRQ. Furthermore, the school atmosphere also influenced their performance. Suzi attended a highly diverse school, mainly comprising refugee children, whereas Kevin's school was predominantly Caucasian, with him being the sole Asian student, which could have impacted their sense of belonging and engagement.

The study found that the STAAR rubric was instrumental in assessing students' writing skills in various ways. It provided a structured framework for evaluating different facets of students' writing, such as organization, clarity, coherence, and language usage. Additionally, it offered clear criteria and descriptors that aided teachers and assessors in understanding the expectations for different proficiency levels, thus facilitating more consistent and objective assessment practices. Moreover, the rubric allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of students' writing abilities, encompassing both content and language proficiency, which could offer valuable insights into areas of strength and areas needing improvement. Furthermore, by aligning with state standards and curriculum objectives, the STAAR rubric ensured that assessments remained relevant and reflective of what students were expected to learn and demonstrate in their writing.

Examining CRQ samples benefits classroom teachers in multiple ways. Firstly, it provides insights into student comprehension, helping teachers gauge understanding and application of taught concepts. Additionally, it allows for targeted feedback, enabling personalized guidance for students to enhance writing skills. Analyzing CRQ samples informs instructional decisions, guiding effective teaching strategies. They also serve as a tool for tracking student progress over time. Lastly, it fosters professional development by facilitating collaborative discussions and workshops, enhancing teachers' ability to support student learning in writing.

The study unveiled effective strategies for improving the development of ideas and language conventions. Regarding idea development, it recommended creating outlines, formulating thesis statements, ensuring logical flow, employing peer editing, and diversifying sentence structures. It highlighted the RACE strategy (Restate the question, Answer the question, Cite evidence from the text, & Explain your answer) and the STAR strategy (Scan, Target text, Actively read, and Respond).

For emergent bilingual learners, these strategies provide a structured approach to mastering academic writing while supporting their language acquisition journey. By combining these methods with regular practice and tailored feedback, learners can gain confidence in expressing their thoughts clearly and effectively. Ultimately, these approaches empower students to succeed academically while building critical skills that extend beyond the classroom.

Discussion

While the study may have its constraints in focusing solely on the writing proficiency of two emergent bilingual learners, it nonetheless puts forward five valuable recommendations

aimed at enhancing CRQ (Constructed Response Question) essay preparation for children undergoing the STAAR (State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness) test and beyond. These recommendations serve as actionable strategies to improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of essay writing for young test-takers.

1. Get acquainted with the test format and familiarize yourself with the rubric (Soucy, 2024): Practicing writing skills using the STAAR test format can help alleviate anxiety on test day. Teachers can provide prompts in a similar style and difficulty level, along with comparable time limits and expectations. Additionally, review the rubric thoroughly to understand what the graders are looking for.
2. Understand the prompt and examine the samples (Custom Classroom by Angela, 2022): Guarantee that children grasp the essay prompt completely. This entails simplifying complex instructions, offering examples, and clarifying any unclear language to avoid confusion and promote precise responses. Also, analyze the samples provided by TEA to understand the expected standards.
3. Strategize your response with a plan (Soucy, 2024): Encourage students to adopt a structured approach to their essay responses by supporting arguments with evidence from the text or relevant examples for stronger explanations. This study presents some plans, including the RACE strategy (Restate the question, Answer the question, Cite evidence from the text, and Explain your answer), the STAR strategy (Scan, Target text, Actively read, and Respond), and the RAPP strategy (Restate the question, Answer the question by clearly stating my idea, Prove my idea by thoroughly explaining how the evidence proves it, and Proofread and edit my answer). It's essential to emphasize the importance of practicing these strategies regularly to enhance proficiency and confidence in essay writing.
4. Manage time efficiently (Ariav, 2024): Enhance time management skills (Ariav, 2024): Encourage students to engage with the passage actively by reading it twice: once for comprehension and then to extract main ideas and details. Ensure efficient use of time by prompting students to swiftly outline their thoughts with concise words or phrases before commencing their essays. Reserve dedicated time for proofreading at the conclusion, avoiding overthinking, as this could consume unnecessary time.

With consistent practice and application of these strategies, students can approach CRQ assessments with greater confidence and achieve success in their writing endeavors.

Conclusions

Based on the findings and discussion presented, it is evident that prioritizing equity over equality is essential in educational contexts, particularly when it comes to supporting students with diverse needs. The study underscores the importance of tailored support to address individual circumstances rather than applying identical measures across the board. This approach acknowledges the inherent differences among students and aims to provide equitable opportunities for all.

Through examining CRQ samples and understanding the factors influencing students' performance, valuable insights emerge for both educators and students. Although there is a limitation on examining two language learners' case study, this study recommends top strategies for children preparing for the STAAR CRQ test. Additionally, the effectiveness of the STAAR rubric in assessing writing skills and providing structured feedback is underscored, offering a roadmap for educators to comprehensively evaluate and enhance students' writing proficiency.

For emergent bilingual learners, the findings highlight the importance of individualized instruction and culturally responsive teaching practices. By integrating these strategies, educators can create an inclusive learning environment that promotes equity and fosters academic growth. In conclusion, recognizing and addressing individual needs, leveraging effective strategies, and utilizing nuanced assessments are critical steps toward empowering emergent bilingual learners to excel in their writing and overall academic achievement.

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In the fall of 2024, Dr. Hwang was appointed as the Lanna and Bob Hatton Professor of Education. Her primary research interests include educating refugee students and their families, addressing challenges in multilingual education, developing strategies grounded in the Science of Teaching Reading, implementing early intervention programs, and exploring effective methodologies for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

COMPLEMENTARY RESOURCE

A CRITIQUE OF “READING ASSESSMENT TO PROMOTE EQUITABLE LEARNING”

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Book review of Elish-Piper, L., Matthews, M. W., & Risko, V. (2022). *Reading assessment to promote equitable learning: An empowering approach for grades K-5*. The Guilford Press.

Introduction

Assessment is indeed a hot topic in the world of education today as it provides a projection into the future of education and holds schools accountable for what is being taught and whether students have learned it. Because assessments can give educators the data they need to guide academic decisions, it is a useful and necessary tool for helping educators to meet the needs of all students and guide the next steps for instruction and intervention. Additionally, assessments can help educators gain background knowledge about their students including measuring motivation, strengths, and weaknesses that ultimately helps to foster meaningful learning in the classroom. Assessment must be meaningful, accurate, and equitable for all students in order for the results to give an accurate representation of students' abilities.

The book *Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning: An empowering approach for grades K-5* (2022) by Laurie Elish-Piper, Mona Matthews, and Victoria Risko, supports an authentic and equitable approach to assessment. This book review provides an evaluation of the text and a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the assessments included in the book. This critique aims to inform the reader about an authentic and equitable approach to assessment in the early literacy classroom and how this foundation for assessment can help educators better understand their students and meet their needs. The article will allow the reader to gain new insight on what components can be used in the current classroom to ensure that students are receiving quality assessments. Significant for all 21st century educators, it provides a framework for what components of assessment are helpful for gaining valuable knowledge about students that is meaningful, authentic, equitable and has the potential to help educators best meet the individual needs of all students.

Key Concepts and Structure

The nine chapters in the book open with discussion and guiding questions related to the topic of the chapter, including topics such as: equitable assessments, student interest and engagement, and the integration of diverse perspectives. Throughout the chapter the author introduces types of meaningful, quality, equitable assessments that teachers can use in their

classroom. Then, the author lines out the procedures for using an assessment and describes how to collect and analyze the data. Each chapter concludes with how the information from the assessment can be implemented using real-world examples and includes how the information from the assessment can benefit students, teachers, and parents. Recommended assessments are embedded at the end of each chapter but can also be found in the appendix in the book. There are 28 assessments in the book, some of which are formative and some that are informative. Elish-Piper et al. (2022) believe that reading assessments should offer more than just information about what students know; rather assessment must account for students' personal, social, and cultural influences. This is why reading assessments must be equitable.

Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning (Elish-Piper et al., 2022) discusses the importance of implementing quality equitable assessments in the classroom. They recommend assessments that make “your students feel valued because they see evidence of their histories, identities, funds of knowledge, and lived experiences in how reading is taught and assessed in the classroom” (p. 17). The book contains examples of assessments that can be replicated, used or copied for use in the classroom, centered around four elements of a more authentic and equitable approach to reading assessment.

First, the assessments are equitable for all students. Second, the assessment cycle in this book is much more beneficial than a traditional approach of assessment to both students and educators in the classroom. Third, the assessments in this book consider many other aspects of learning that are critical to student success and help connect learning to the real-world. Throughout the book, there are four principles that guide a more authentic and equitable approach to reading assessment that measures the whole child. These four principles include:

- Principle One: Reading assessment must ensure the visibility of teachers and students in the assessment process.
- Principle Two: Reading assessment must occur through an equity mindset.
- Principle Three: Reading assessment must be embedded in daily instructional and learning activities.
- Principle Four: Reading assessment must account for reading complexity.

Each principle is unique in that all four work together to ensure that every child can reach their full potential because they see the whole child and all assessments are equitable.

Equitable Assessment

Reading assessment must occur with an equity mindset. The assessments in this book are made to be fair and impartial for all kids. Equitable means that any child, no matter their race, gender, background, or real-world experiences, can be successful. Elish-Piper et al., (2022) claim that “Standardized tests are products of the dominant, White middle-class culture and reflect that culture, while disadvantaged students are not always socialized within that culture. Therefore, these tests are inherently biased for many of the students who attend our schools” (Elish-Piper et al., 2022, p. 7). However, with improved assessments there comes the challenge of trying to utilize the assessments in this book when districts often already have assessments in place that must be used. For example, schools and districts may be tied to mandated assessments and may not have the capacity to incorporate new forms of assessment such as the ones recommended in

the book. Therefore, they suggest using the assessments in their book alongside current assessments (i.e., high stakes tests, formal classroom assessments, and benchmark testing) to support what is already being done in schools. The authors urge educators to share findings from their recommended assessments with other education professionals that you work with so that they can implement it in their classroom and see the benefit of the results. The assessments would be valuable to the school and possibly influence instruction in other content areas. Often the assessments in this book do not take long and can be done through teacher-student conferencing, as an observation, or as a tool to intervene and re-teach as the assessment is being conducted.

Principle Two states that reading assessment must occur with an equity mindset. An equity mindset is fundamental to designing reading assessment. This means that teachers must select assessments that promote positive teacher-student relationships. They must embrace students as active partners and build on students' strengths. Reading assessment must account for reading complexity. Because it is imperative that students are challenged and given opportunities to think at a higher level, the assessments in this book go beyond multiple choice and true or false and instead offer opportunity for higher level questioning, open ended answers, and short answer responses. The assessments in this book are rigorous for students. Assessments such as, Student Self-Assessment, Goal Setting, and Portfolios, require students to think with a growth mindset, set goals for themselves, and determine what steps they will take themselves to improve their understanding. This gives students autonomy over their learning.

The Whole Child

Reading assessment must ensure the visibility of teachers and students in the assessment process. The assessments in this book focus on students' cultural differences to provide opportunities for students to share and bring their lives into the classroom which in return will help families to feel valued, seen, and heard. Assessments that focus on the whole child such as, The Blob Tree, Think Alouds, and What Can You Show Us, allow students to share and bring their own lives into the classroom. Elish-Piper et.al. (2022) state that building relationships with parents is critical for getting them to be supportive and willing to be involved. Assessments and strategies included in their book, such as Initial Parent Conversations, Initial Student Conversations, Celebrating Identities with Students and Their Families, and I am Who I Am as a Reader, help to include important factors including cultural background, language, family customs, and motivation. However, this type of assessment strategy can be considered a challenge for educators who have a difficult time engaging parents in schoolwork, perhaps because they are single parents and may have limited time to participate due to jobs or other scheduling conflicts. Student-teacher led conferences help teachers to know students personally and academically on a deeper level through teacher-student conferencing. The assessments described in this book are presented in multiple forms. These forms include observation, interviews, and conferences and which may better represent and account for the whole child.

Elish-Piper et.al. (2022) recommend that reading assessment be embedded in daily instructional and learning activities. The assessments in this book consider many other aspects of learning that are critical to student success and help connect students' learning to the real-world.

Real-world connections are essential because they give students relevance and significance to what they are learning. What students learn in school must be present and used in their everyday life. Including students' personal lives with content and lessons offered in school can make the learning more personable to students. The assessments in the book have value because they connect with students personally and engage with their everyday life and are culturally relevant.

Conclusion

This review of *Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning* (Elish-Piper et al., 2022) aims to inform early childhood literacy educators about an authentic and equitable approach to assessment in the early literacy classroom grades K-5. Because assessment should be a useful and necessary tool for helping educators to meet the needs of all students and help guide next steps for instruction and intervention, this book provides a foundation for culturally relevant assessment that may be a useful resource for teachers to better understand and to meet the needs of their students with an equity mindset.

Literature Cited

Elish-Piper, L., Matthews, M. W., & Risko, V. (2022). *Reading assessment to promote equitable learning: An empowering approach for grades K-5*. The Guilford Press.

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