

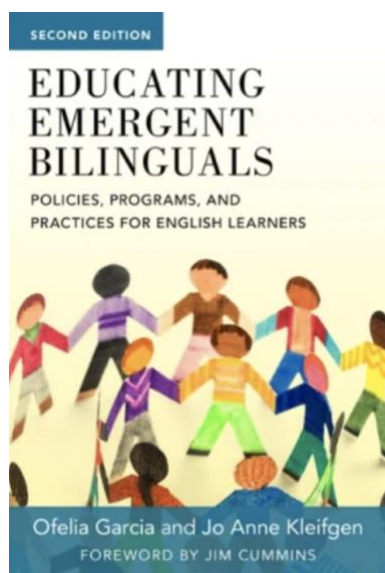
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## *Review of Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*

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## Abstract

This review of *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) by Ofelia García and Jo Anne Kleifgen (2018) highlights the key themes of the benefits of bilingual education, instruction that leverages family language practices, and the disconnect between research and practice in the education of emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools. The book chapters follow a framework that covers important issues that impact emergent bilinguals, investigates current inequitable practices, and advocates for alternative practices that better serve emergent bilinguals, citing evidence to show how these practices are beneficial. Examples of these alternative practices for emergent bilinguals include support of translanguaging in the classroom, the use of performance-based assessments that distinguish between language and content proficiency, and more access to advanced academic classes. The review links these key themes to important current educational issues, including interrupted instruction from the Covid-19 pandemic and the rapid increase in early literacy screening throughout the U.S. The review concludes by highlighting a bilingual Pre-K program in Syracuse, NY, that supports linguistically diverse students through equitable teaching practices and family engagement.

**Key words:** emergent bilingual, bilingual education, multilingualism, English learner, translanguaging

## Book Overview

*Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) by Ofelia García and Jo Anne Kleifgen (2018) is a book for educators, researchers, linguists, policymakers, parents, and advocates who are interested in learning about the state of bilingual education in the United States. García and Kleifgen present and

discuss many convincing studies showing the benefits of bilingual education, the challenges facing bilingual programs and emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools, and alternative practices and policies that would help connect research to practice. A recurring theme in the book is that despite research showing the effectiveness of leveraging student's home languages as a resource for instruction, little has changed in teaching practices for emergent bilinguals in the United States, and in fact policy is moving more toward English-only education. Throughout the book, the authors highlight inequities in educating emergent bilinguals and present alternative practices that would address these inequities. García and Kleifgen focus on minoritized students who are often excluded from social and educational opportunities, as well as from language-rich instruction. The authors continually emphasize the linguistic resources emergent bilinguals bring to school from their home language practices, which educators should leverage to help students build both their language proficiency and academic knowledge. This second edition was published in 2018 and its message is even more urgent today as educators work to support students, including emergent bilinguals, whose learning has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Summaries of Chapters

Chapter one (Introduction) discusses the many labels used to categorize students in the U.S. who are learning English and provides an overview of the book. García and Kleifgen note that categories such as ESL and LEP reflect how the term *bilingual* has been silenced more and more in the United States since the late 1990s. As Jim Cummins states in the Foreword: "when students see themselves (and know their teachers see them) as emergent bilinguals rather than as English language learners (or some other label that defines students by what they lack), they are much more likely to take pride

in their linguistic abilities and talents than if they are defined in deficit terms” (García & Kleifgen, 2018, p. x). García and Kleifgen chose to use the term *emergent bilingual* because it emphasizes that the students are not only becoming proficient in English but will eventually become multilingual students and adults. The term also raises academic expectations, acknowledges that language acquisition takes time (research shows it takes five to seven years to acquire an additional language), and that “our linguistic performances are never done” (p. 5).

Chapter two provides a vivid portrait of emergent bilinguals in the United States, including how students are classified and reclassified as English learners. The authors highlight that reclassification criteria lacks consistency across states due to different types of assessment practices and varied home language surveys, though the emergence of English language proficiency standards have helped improve reclassification assessments, such as WIDA, which is used by a consortium of states. This chapter also describes where emergent bilinguals live and go to school (California, New Mexico, and Nevada have the highest proportion of emergent bilinguals), the languages spoken by emergent bilinguals in the United States (70 – 76% speak Spanish, followed by Arabic and Chinese), as well as differences and commonalities between emergent bilinguals living in the United States, noting that 77% of emergent bilinguals are U.S. citizens (García & Kleifgen, 2018, pp. 15, 17, 22).

Chapter three describes the U.S. education policy landscape and legislation that has impacted emergent bilinguals, from the establishment of Title VII: The Bilingual Education Act in 1968 to the slow eroding of support for instruction in students’ home languages in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The Bilingual Education Act is also known as Title VII of the 1968 reauthorization of the Elementary

and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Title VII set aside funding to be allocated to school districts that had large numbers of students with limited English proficiency for the purpose of designing bilingual programs and/or instructional materials to meet these students’ educational needs. The No Child Behind Act is the name of the 2002 reauthorization of the ESEA, which shifted away from support of student’s home languages and bilingual education programs to a narrower focus on English proficiency as measured by standardized tests. The authors note that the 2009 Common Core State Standards emphasize language, particularly academic language, which increased the need to support emergent bilinguals in both language acquisition and in achievement of academic goals. English language proficiency standards, developed by consortia such as WIDA and ELPA21, aim to provide this support. Overall, bilingualism has been silenced in U.S. education, though there are efforts to revive bilingualism through such state initiatives as the Seal of Biliteracy. However, the authors express concern “that these awards would just become affirmations of ‘foreign language’ ability for language-majority students” (p. 46).

Chapter four provides a review of the various theories related to bilingualism, highlighting the cognitive, metacognitive, interpersonal, and social-emotional benefits of bilingualism, and solid research showing the advantages of acquiring a second language while receiving literacy instruction in one’s first language. Regarding cognitive benefits, because bilingual speakers rely on the executive function of their brains to constantly manage the different features of different language systems, they have strong cognitive plasticity and inhibitory control. The authors cite research conducted by Bialystok and her colleagues over the past decade showing that due to these cognitive benefits, bilinguals performed better than monolinguals on tasks requiring executive control (p. 51). The chapter

discusses *linguistic interdependence*, a concept pioneered by Jim Cummins, which describes how knowledge and skills in one language serve to support development in another language. This chapter also discusses the concept of *dynamic bilingualism*, which focuses on language practices bilinguals use to navigate increasingly multilingual communities, viewing languages as ways of multimodal meaning-making rather than as separate and autonomous systems. This concept underpins the pedagogical practice of translanguaging, in which students are encouraged to freely access their entire range of linguistic knowledge for academic and communicative purposes. The chapter highlights compelling empirical evidence, such as from a 2002 study by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier, showing that bilingually-schooled students exhibit higher academic performance and fewer dropout rates than students enrolled in English-only programs (p. 65).

Chapters five through eight cover important issues that impact emergent bilinguals, using a structure in each chapter that outlines theoretical frameworks, investigates current inequitable practices, and then describes and advocates for alternative practices that better serve emergent bilinguals. Chapter five discusses instructional practices that often isolate emergent bilinguals from interactions with language-majority students and also discourage use of their home language, based on the prevailing view of languages as separate and isolated systems. Even though the emergent bilingual population in U.S. schools continues to grow, these students are increasingly educated in English-only programs. The authors point out that schools often focus on English acquisition because this is what is measured on standardized tests—home language proficiency is not prioritized but is seen as a bridge to acquiring English. In contrast, *heteroglossic* instructional practices that support emergent bilinguals include exercises in which students write in both their home

language and English, as well as translanguaging pedagogy that encourages students to use all their linguistic resources to “extend their semiotic meaning-making repertoire” (p. 83). These approaches support students’ understanding of complex content as well as their social-emotional development as they build their bilingual identities. Teachers who engage in these practices provide students with opportunities to engage in language practices for authentic purposes—not simplifying English but rather helping students delve into complex language use through critical investigations into issues that are important to them.

Chapter six discusses the ways in which digital technologies enhance learning for emergent bilinguals and points out the persistent issues of limited technology access for many emergent bilinguals, both in and outside of school. Referring to the pedagogy of multiliteracies as put forth by the New London Group in 1996, García and Kleifgen highlight the importance of multimodal communication in a world with increasing linguistic diversity and new digital resources for learning. Students make meaning through digital technologies in ways that go beyond language—leveraging their full semiotic repertoire (akin to translanguaging)—by incorporating images, sounds, and music into digital resources that heighten interactivity and social learning. Digital resources provide students with the ability to conduct web-based research, access multimedia writing instruction, use collaborative discussion and note-taking software, and create content and stories using new media, returning to educational materials as many times as needed. As a component of project-based learning, educators can leverage digital resources to increase collaboration, authentic audiences, and differentiated instruction for all students.

Chapter seven focuses on the evidence-based educational practices that best serve emergent bilinguals, using a social justice framework to analyze the discriminatory practices and structures in schools that persist despite research showing their negative impact. Curricula serving emergent bilinguals should elicit higher-order thinking skills, incorporate collaborative social practices, and be taught by high-quality teachers with expertise in language and bilingual education. Early childhood education is also an essential way to narrow gaps prior to elementary school, though emergent bilinguals are less likely to attend early childhood education programs than their monolingual peers. Emergent bilinguals are often enrolled in pull-out ESL courses that are remedial and isolate them from their peers (and are also the costliest type of program for emergent bilinguals), they are significantly underrepresented in advanced classes, and are significantly overrepresented in remedial courses and special education. Overall, U.S. schools with high populations of emergent bilinguals typically lack appropriate instructional materials, have more decrepit facilities, and lack educators who are certified in bilingual education.

Chapter eight discusses family and community engagement, emphasizing the importance of using a *funds of knowledge* approach to leverage home language practices and engage parents in the education of emergent bilinguals and their classmates. The concept of *funds of knowledge* refers to the knowledge and skills developed and employed in households by individuals as they navigate social networks and relationships (Kinney, 2015). The premise underlying *funds of knowledge* in relation to teaching is that students bring competencies and life experiences with them to school, and educators can leverage these *funds* to improve these students' educational experiences and outcomes. This challenges the deficit view often taken toward minoritized families, which fails to recognize

parents' aspirations for and contributions to their children's education. García and Kleifgen point to studies showing that parent engagement has the most benefits for students who are minoritized and from low-income families. The authors also cite studies from the 1980s by Susan Philips in Oregon and Shirley Brice Heath in the Carolinas, as well as studies by Katherine H. Au in Hawaii in the 1990s, to show how home participation structures often differ from school participation structures. It is up to schools and educators to recognize the literacy practices students bring with them from their communities in order to draw on this knowledge to help students achieve academically.

Chapter nine discusses assessment and poses a key question: "Given what we know theoretically and research-wise about assessment of emergent bilinguals, are these students being assessed according to accepted theories and research evidence about language and bilingualism?" (p. 145). The authors respond with an "emphatic *no*" and discuss how inadequate assessment leads to inequitable outcomes (thus lacking consequential validity) including an emphasis on remedial instruction and higher drop-out rates for emergent bilinguals (p. 145). One major concern is the validity of tests that claim to assess content proficiency, but because the tests are given in English, also assess language proficiency. García and Kleifgen state, "In fact, much educational time is taken up testing with invalid instruments" (p. 150). Assessments must be designed to differentiate between these two dimensions, and norming needs to include diverse samples of students. Also, performance-based assessments that incorporate multiple modalities best serve emergent bilinguals.

Chapter ten provides a summary of the concepts covered throughout the book and ends with "signposts"—a number of recommendations for various stakeholders to support movement toward

more equitable education for emergent bilinguals. These recommendations include a call for policymakers to support bilingual early childhood programs and to agree upon a definition of *English learner* that can be used consistently throughout the United States. This definition should acknowledge students' home languages and their emergent bilingualism, viewing students' linguistic journeys as a continuum along which different types of academic programs and supports are needed. The authors call on educators to learn about their students' home languages and practices, develop strong relationships with students' families, and use bilingual instructional practices including translanguaging in their classrooms. Researchers are called upon to study the cognitive advantages of bilingualism, which is still an emerging field of research. Additionally, researchers should develop assessments that can distinguish between language and content knowledge and that can take into account emerging bilinguals' language practices, including translanguaging.

### Reflection and Critique

In *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* (second edition), Ofelia García and Jo Anne Kleifgen present undeniable evidence showing the benefits of bilingual instruction, which is so important as emergent bilinguals' enrollment continues to grow in U.S. schools. As the authors note, enrollment of emergent bilingual students increased by 56% between 1995 and 2005 while the overall enrollment of students grew by only 2.6% (p. 9). After approximately two years of interrupted instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to support emergent bilinguals' educational needs with a focus on leveraging their home languages is more urgent than ever. School closings, remote instruction, and disconnection from social engagements have limited the opportunities for students to participate in

academic conversations and activities at school. Given the increased amount of time students spent at home during the pandemic, their home language practices have likely intersected with schooling more than in the past. This is a pivotal time for educators to build from the linguistic resources their students bring to the classroom. García and Kleifgen recognize the challenges of supporting students' home language use and building bilingual programs that will serve the many various home languages students speak, and acknowledge it is easier to build bilingual programs for large language groups such as Spanish. The authors state that educators can still draw on student's home language practices even if they are not fluent in the students' home languages themselves. More tangible daily procedures, methods, and approaches for educators would make this book more useful for practice. A helpful follow-up to this publication would be a companion workbook with specific classroom approaches and activities for educators to employ.

This edition's publication date is also convergent with a rapid increase in state legislation throughout the United States mandating early literacy and dyslexia screening (Dyslexia, 2022). As García and Kleifgen (2018) discuss, assessments must be valid measures of students' linguistic and academic abilities. Any early literacy screener that is valid for emergent bilinguals must be able to distinguish between those students whose English proficiency is still developing, those who exhibit reading difficulties related to such factors as phonological processing issues, and those who may require support in both areas. This distinction will help to avoid an overrepresentation of emergent bilinguals in the identification of students with dyslexia risk and/or special education while also ensuring they receive the support they need. Amid the growing emphasis on phonics-based instruction to meet the needs of students with reading difficulties, an equal emphasis must be placed on those students who

require more focused support in language development, oral vocabulary, knowledge building, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension (Dickinson, et al., 2010). Using guidance from García and Kleifgen, educators and researchers can help to ensure students are assessed with valid, reliable, and developmentally-appropriate instruments at the appropriate times, making more time for instruction. When selecting a literacy screener, administrators and educators need to evaluate how the screener distinguishes between different root causes of reading difficulties (e.g., phonological processing, linguistic comprehension, fluency), which constructs are measured by the screener at different developmental stages of literacy acquisition, and what the makeup of the sample sizes were in validity and reliability field testing. Educators also need support in interpreting the results of these screeners so the instruction students receive builds from what they know and meets their specific needs.

García and Kleifgen emphasize that half to two-thirds of all emergent bilinguals are U.S. citizens. One significant group of emergent bilinguals the authors do not address in detail, which has become even more important today, is the increase in immigrants, refugees, and unaccompanied minors enrolled in U.S. schools in the past decade. Given that the average number of unaccompanied minors in the United States has increased from under 2,000 in 2010 to over 12,000 in 2019 (Chishti et al., 2019), this group of emergent bilinguals requires particular linguistic and academic support through trauma-informed practices (TIP). Educators trained in TIP learn to foster a school and classroom environment that is responsive to students' needs and mindful of the impact of traumatic experiences on students' social-emotional health and academic development (Kostouros et al., 2022; Sweetman, 2022). For example, a student who appears to be unmotivated and resistant in the classroom may be feeling

overwhelmed by their new environment and mistrustful due to past actions of others (Sweetman, 2022). At the same time, TIP incorporates findings from resilience research, which focuses on students' intersectionality, strengths (such as bilingualism), and family connections. Through TIP, students receive support in areas that are most efficacious for their immediate needs, often including a focus on language proficiency and digital literacy. Schools incorporating TIP seek to avoid the possibility of retraumatizing students, which can happen when school practices are based on deficit models or in which peer connections are not nurtured and encouraged (Kostouros et al., 2022).

One recommendation García and Kleifgen (2018) give in chapter ten is for advocates to publicize dual language programs that are serving emergent bilinguals with equitable practices. The MANOS dual language early education program in Syracuse, NY, which is part of Partners in Learning, Inc., is one such program, which offers dual language preschool education in English and Spanish (Partners in Learning, Inc., n.d.). I had an opportunity to speak with the Director of the program, Linda Facciponte. Ms. Facciponte explained there are distinct parts of the preschool day when English or Spanish is spoken, but any small group time encourages students to use whichever language they are most comfortable with. Ms. Facciponte stated this is a fundamental need, particularly to support students' social-emotional development. Teachers often read books to students that include both English and Spanish, reading in one language and then reading again and discussing in the other language to help students utilize their full linguistic repertoires. Ms. Facciponte noted that families are an essential part of their community. Parents are invited into the classroom to work with the students and to share information about their careers, home countries, or other topics. The MANOS program also holds events in the classroom during which parents meet other

parents and engage in activities such as reading, dancing, and singing. The mission of Partners in Learning, Inc. reflects the principles discussed by García and Kleifgen: “Partners in Learning, Inc. (PIL) supports adults, children, and families of diverse cultures in their efforts to learn, earn, and live well in Syracuse and Onondaga County” (Partners in Learning, Inc., n.d.). Educators, policymakers, and researchers who take action based on the research and recommendations provided in García and Kleifgen’s book can help to make more programs such as MANOS possible.



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