

Education Review

Reseñas Educativas



Resenhas Educativas

March 4, 2026

ISSN 1094-5296

García, G. E. (2025). *Accelerating the literacy performance of bilingual students: Evidence-based instruction in grades K-6*. Guilford Press.

252 pp.

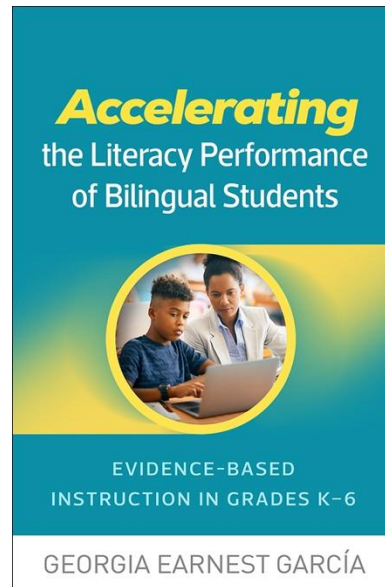
ISBN 9781462556014

Reviewed by Evan McCormick
Leeds Trinity University
United Kingdom

Those who have had the pleasure of working in language-diverse classrooms will understand how bilingual and multilingual children enrich our school communities. Yet, teachers may also feel guidance and professional development in bilingual literacy teaching somewhat lacking. To these teachers, *Accelerating the Literacy Performance of Bilingual Students* offers a needed exploration of bilingual literacy education in the classroom of today, offering excellent depth of knowledge, while remaining accessible and straightforward.

Throughout, Georgia Earnest García, PhD, takes an evidence-based approach, writing with extensive experience as an academic and researcher, as well as teacher of bilingual education, English, and ESL/EFL. Her expertise and experience are felt strongly within each chapter, with the text largely being written in first person. Nevertheless, it is evidence-dense, and how García elicits theory, empirical findings and policy across each chapter is worth noting; practice for the classroom is explored against each of these strands, which creates clarity for the reader. This is supported by ‘guiding questions,’ which foreground each chapter, alongside illustrative examples, which humanize and contextualize key messages.

In Chapter 1, García offers an important conceptual framing. She explores who “emergent bilingual students” are, rejecting deficit terms which center English and do not recognize students’ competencies in other languages. This positions “emergent bilingual students” as an asset-oriented term that makes space for recognition of children’s cultures and existing knowledge. Yet, by sharing some valuable demographics from the U.S. context, García depicts how “emergent bilingual students” are not a homogenous group. While 75% are Spanish speakers, a countless range of other languages are present in U.S. classrooms, and even then,



learners' experiences will differ, with difference in prior schooling and diversity of home environments.

In Chapter 1, García additionally offers a typology of “approved specialized programs,” and presents the legal basis for these. García positions additive bilingual programs, where the first language is maintained while English is acquired, as much more motivating and productive for learners, rather than subtractive programs, where the first language is not addressed. This aligns with Jim Cummins's interdependence hypothesis (1981), which posits that second language learning is supported by the same cognitive system, rather than operating in isolation. This provides the reader with an orientation with which to read the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 2, she goes on to explore theoretical viewpoints on second language learning. This includes sociolinguistic and sociocultural views of learning, which will likely be familiar to readers. García summarizes theory in a concise and digestible format, including detail on Cummins's differentiation between “between bilingual students' development and use of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)” (p. 22). She too notes critiques of BICS and CALP as being too simplified and ignoring social, cultural and political influences on language learning. This relates to the most important part of this chapter, the conclusion that “culturally responsive instruction” is needed (p. 27). Effectively, we must educate bilingual students with intent and criticality, aware of the cultural capital they bring to our classrooms (or “cultural funds of knowledge,” as García refers to them), which is intrinsically tied to students' language.

From here, Chapters 3 to 12 are practice-oriented, working to translate the conceptual theoretical framing already offered. Chapter 3 is an effective synthesis of a wide range of approaches to second language teaching. Notable here is the concept of “sheltering” teaching instruction. This involves scaffolding students' comprehension by chunking material into “units,” which may include reference to their first language (p. 32). Chapter 4 makes clear that educators must also focus on students' oral language development, rather than solely reading and writing, as it is the pillar of language acquisition. It explores how rhymes, songs, as well as reading aloud can be effective for this.

Chapter 5 emphasizes that careful selection of texts is needed. This includes both expository and narrative texts, and books in both first and second language. Importantly, García offers guidance on teaching text structures, including through writing frames, that can be used to develop comprehension. In Chapter 6, the imperative of sustained first language instruction is returned to and explored in greater depth.

In Chapters 7, 8 and 9, García offers an exploration of reading and writing instruction in English as the second language. The author makes clear that teaching approaches developed for native-English learners cannot simply be translated onto emergent bilingual students, especially in regard to phonics instruction. For some, phonics instruction may be less effective and, for all, should be a feature of a varied literacy diet. Then looking at reading comprehension, a key message is that

background knowledge in both languages is vital, and must be activated before, during and after reading. Tying this together, bilingual learners' writing abilities are presented as inseparable from reading and oral language and are best supported by interactive and dialogic opportunities. Together, these three chapters offer the reader the opportunity to reflect on their own practices, with the role of the teacher in modeling and scaffolding being emphasized throughout.

Chapter 10 informatively frames bilingual students of academic language against different stages of second language acquisition. For example, in the speech-emergence stage, teachers should not explicitly correct students' language, instead revoicing and modeling correct language usage. In this chapter, García also emphasizes the need for explicit vocabulary instruction, offering a range of strategies for teachers to adopt. This then leads directly into Chapter 11, which focuses on "disciplinary literacy instruction" (p. 177), whereby language is acquired within specific disciplines or subjects. García highlights that emergent bilingual students' inclusion within subject-specific teaching is needed: it facilitates understanding of new concepts and vocabulary, and exclusion would be inequitable in how it would only lead to a widening gap in knowledge.

While assessment is referred to in earlier chapters, in Chapter 11 García explores this in further depth, advocating for a "comprehensive assessment system" comprising "summative, interim, and formative" assessments (p. 205). Possibly the most consequential claim in this chapter is the recommendation that formative assessment be conducted in first and second language where possible, rather than solely in English. Clearly, it is only through bilingual assessment that teachers fully grasp students' understandings, but this has implementation demands, requiring time and expertise.

This is a text I would have benefited from access to in my former work as a teacher and school leader. Writing from the UK, where "English as an Additional Language" (EAL) is the term used within education policy, García has forced me to consider how this very conceptualization affects my own outlook and practice, and readers may have similar reflections. Now, as a teacher educator in teacher training, it is a book I will employ and direct pre-service teachers to. With this, the book will be of interest to educators, administrators, pre-service teachers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and anyone interested in bilingual education.

As I write from the UK, while I acknowledge the text's emphasis on Spanish as students' first language is due to the U.S. context and García's own experiences, it is a potential drawback. Nevertheless, most of the book is applicable across languages and contexts. Furthermore, the book offers a vast wealth of knowledge, from theory to practice, and discerning and navigating this may be a challenge for educators. However, this is something García seemingly understands and is where the book's conclusion comes into play, asking the question, "How do I pull all this together to accelerate the literacy progress of elementary bilingual students?" (p. 212). Here, readers will find a helpful and manageable list of recommendations.

In all, *Accelerating the Literacy Performance of Bilingual Students* is highly recommended for all educators who work with bilingual students, and may be used

in addition to other key texts on the subject (e.g. Cummins, 2000; García & Wei, 2014; Helman et al., 2019). For some, it will offer clarification of the approaches they use in the classroom. For teachers or administrators looking to revisit or revise their approaches to bilingual education, it will benefit them greatly. García provides an excellent opportunity to review the theory and pedagogy underpinning bilingual education, with a positive, affirming and equitable outlook, which puts the needs of emergent bilingual children at the fore.

References

- Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In Office of Bilingual Bicultural Education (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority education: A theoretical framework* (pp. 3–49). California State Department of Education.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Helman, L. A., Ittner, A.C. & McMaster, K.L. (2019). *Assessing language and literacy with bilingual students: Practices to support English learners*. Guilford Press.

About the Reviewer

Evan McCormick is a lecturer in primary education at Leeds Trinity University in the North of England, United Kingdom. He is an experienced primary school teacher and senior leader, having worked in schools serving diverse and often marginalized communities with great diversity of language. As a teacher educator, his teaching specialisms are in English instruction, early childhood, and inclusive education. With an academic interest in picture-books, he is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.



About the Author



Georgia Earnest García, PhD, is professor emerita in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. She has held appointments at the Center for the Study of Reading, the RAND Reading Study Group on Skillful Reading, and the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth. After retiring, she served on the Educational Testing Service’s Dual Language Assessment Team and the WestED Reading Content Team that updated the Reading Assessment Framework

for the 2026 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Dr. García was inducted into the Reading Hall of Fame in 2019.

Education Review

Reseñas Educativas



Resenhas Educativas



Education Review / Reseñas Educativas / Resenhas Educativas is supported by the Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning

Innovation, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, distribute, and adapt this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and *Education Review*, the changes are identified, and the same license applies to the derivative work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. *Education Review* is free-to-read and free-to-publish.

Disclaimer: The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.

