

# Professional Development

Sophie Degener, Adelfio Garcia, and Ivy Sitkoski

## About this Column

It's spring and time to consider some fresh ideas, even if they are about topics we have been considering in an ongoing way in the past few years. As educators, we have always taken on hefty challenges and done important work. Recently, we have been more and more focused on the challenge of creating a more equitable society by turning the deficit model of cultural difference upside-down. The movement to value differences in culture and language as assets, and to embody that view in classrooms, is definitely gathering momentum. More and more books, articles, seminars, and workshops focus on this endeavor. It is not surprising, then, to find that all three of the books in our column for this issue reflect that perspective. One of the books describes highly authentic, deeply informative literacy assessments that help teachers more fully understand students' identities and the community-based funds of knowledge each one brings to the reading process. Another of the books issues a stirring call to all bilingual educators to reflect on their strength, power, and richness of their own bilingualism; incorporate all of the resources it gives them into their teaching; use the linguistic resources their students bring from home; and work together to advocate for the cultivation of bilingualism. The third book shares the practices of a small group of highly effective teachers who use community building, culturally sustaining practices to celebrate the diverse languages and cultures of their kindergarten through 3rd-grade students and to create an atmosphere of belonging. Sit down with at least one of these books this spring! As nature renews, get some new ideas from the unique insights these books offer.

## Let's Turn Old Models Upside-Down this Spring!

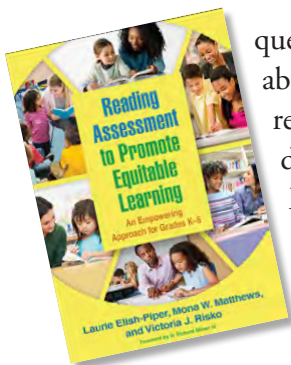
Elish-Piper, Laurie, Matthews, Mona W., and Risko, Victoria J. *Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning: An Empowering Approach for Grades K-5*. The Guilford Press, 2022, 340 pp. ISBN 978-1-4625-4997-9.

The teachers I work with frequently share their frustrations about the assessments they are required to use: high stakes standardized tests, the ubiquitous MAP tests (given thrice yearly), fluency snapshots, DIBELS, and other discrete skill assessments, not to mention additional tests given to emergent bilingual students. And for what? What

do these assessments tell us? They typically provide incomplete and deficit-focused snapshots of our learners, and the results are often insufficient to inform our instructional planning across all areas of literacy.

Fortunately for literacy teachers, *Reading Assessment to Promote Equitable Learning* provides a welcome alternative to this kind of assessment. The book offers an approach to holistic literacy assessment that is guided by four principles. According to the authors, assessments must

1. Be viewed through an equity lens or mindset.
2. Ensure that both students and teachers are visible during the process.
3. Be embedded in daily learning activities.
4. Account for the complexity of reading. (p. 12)



The book includes 28 different assessments across seven chapters, organized by type. Assessments include those that help us to understand students' identities (e.g., interviews with students and parents), those that support relationship building (including conferencing and retrospective miscue analysis), comprehension assessments (both discussion- and text-based), constrained skill assessments (within an authentic context), and assessment of student agency and literacy-related strengths.

Each chapter follows the same structure, starting with an overview of the assessment type, an explanation of how that type of assessment addresses the four principles, and then a detailed look at the specific assessments that can be used in each category. The authors share clear procedures for planning for and administering the assessments, and for analyzing the data that are collected, as well as examples of the assessments in use in classrooms and blank forms to be used for note taking, analysis, and recordkeeping.

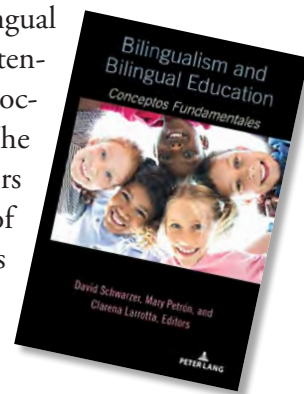
Some of the assessments will be familiar to teachers, particularly those that are detailed in Chapter 6, "Assessing Constrained Skills Within the Big Picture of Reading," where assessments such as running records and developmental spelling inventories are detailed (though even these are modified to better address the four principles). However, there are assessments that will be new to teachers, offering unique ways to assess those things that are not always easy to measure. I really appreciated the two chapters devoted to assessing student comprehension as the seven assessments detailed in these chapters shed light on students' thinking as they make sense of texts, giving teachers insights into all the ways students utilize strategies and funds of knowledge to understand what they read.

The notion that literacy assessments could provide a complete picture of our students that considers their full selves—languages, families, communities, experiences, interests, and strengths—and honor teachers' knowledge and

capacity for decision making is in direct contrast to current assessment practices in schools. I hope teachers will see the potential of this book to "view reading assessment as a humanizing, empowering process that proceeds through an equity mindset" (p. 6). My suggestion would be to start with the assessments in Chapter 2 that are designed to help teachers learn about students' out-of-school lives and perceptions of their own reading. The assessments in this book will provide a greater understanding of students that will help make their strengths and needs visible. —SD

**Schwarzer, David, Petrón, Mary, & Larrotta, Clarena (Eds.). *Bilingualism and Bilingual Education: Conceptos Fundamentales*. Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2021, 178 pp. ISBN 978-1433184505.**

I want to invite all bilingual educators to read this enlightening resource written in a provocative, translanguaging way. The editors challenged contributors to use their entire repertoire of linguistic resources to address today's bilinguals, bilingualism, and bilingual education in today's classrooms.



The book is divided into three parts. The first part is entirely devoted to the contribution of authors whose work highlights bilingualism as an asset. The second part includes the experiences and stories of several authors in whose lives two languages are intertwined and can serve as inspiration to bilinguals experiencing simultaneous input in different contexts. The third section establishes the groundwork for speakers of two languages across the globe to increase awareness of their self-power as bilinguals in any context.

The structure of the book, which is similar in each section, is one of its strengths. The introduction and relevant literature are presented first, then further explanation of the

concept is discussed. The last part of each chapter includes relevant implications for bilingual teachers and ways to discuss ideas and concepts, either self-reflecting or in small groups. Do not forget to visit the glossary because it includes terminology that would be complex to understand in one named language and helps reinforce the concepts and big ideas.

Dive into each section and uncover the power in the words that bilingual researchers and teachers have and underutilize, maybe even suppress, daily. Remember your daily languaging acts and pride yourself on allowing your bilingual self to abolish subtractive schooling and what it means to many of us. In this way, we are no longer promulgating and contributing to the colonial structures that persist in educational institutions. Advocate to highlight and use the rich language bilinguals bring into classrooms and utilize those linguistic resources students already have to enhance their learning. The authors' theoretical stance provides research-based terminology to support your bilingual actions in all educational and social contexts. These concepts and theories also invite the readers to reflect on their ideologies and embrace their translingual and transracial selves. They summon our help to stop language policing in our classrooms and make a difference in societal and institutional perceptions of linguistic and ethnic differences.

The second part of the book brings the voices of several authors who reflect on their reading and writing identities and express the frustrations of their bilingualism in a large society and in the institutions in which they are a part. These narratives can potentially be used as models for preservice and practicing teachers so they can see how their bilingualism supports professional and personal growth. The authors' reflections and challenges while writing using their entire set of linguistic resources are important visible reminders of our bilingualism. Also, the authors provide recommendations for us to continue pushing the cultivation of

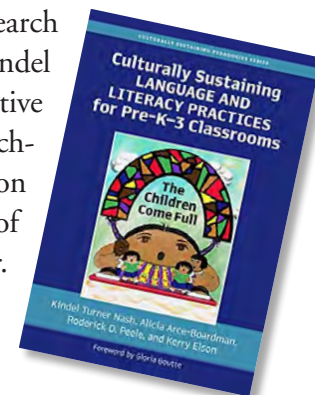
bilingualism in ourselves and in our bilingual students.

The book's third part is a call for action—a commitment to undertake REAL action. This writer joins the authors and editors of this book in their call. Teachers, practitioners, and all bilinguals must work together to inspire the cultivation of bilingualism in self, families, and educational institutions. This call may be foreign to some educators, but taking the language away from our students is not honoring and valuing them as human beings. —AG

**Nash, Kindel Turner, Arce-Boardman, Alicia, Peele, Roderick D., & Elson, Kerry.** *Culturally Sustaining Language and Literacy Practices for Pre-K-3 Classrooms: The Children Come Full.* Teachers College Press, 2022, 156 pp. ISBN 978-0-8077-6746-7.

This book grew out of research conducted by the first author, Kindel Turner Nash. Her search for effective culturally sustaining literacy teaching led her to the four teachers upon which this book focuses, three of whom wrote the book with her. The book describes, in joyous detail, the practices these teachers use to create a caring space. In this space, children feel they are known, they belong, and they are free to express their diverse identities and cultural practices. The teachers use moves and approaches well-grounded in research that are thoroughly explained at the beginning and cited throughout the book.

We first learn how the teachers go to great lengths to get to know students, their families, and their communities in depth through a variety of practices before school even starts. One of my favorites is the informal playground gathering at which the teacher, students, and family members come together in a playground, bring dinner, and interact through conversation and play. One teacher directly asks families how they would like to see their cultural, linguistic, and



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ethnic backgrounds represented in the classroom. Then, when the school year begins, the teachers use every opportunity to develop and deepen feelings of community, self-worth, and cultural affirmation during such initial tasks as setting up the classroom, establishing routines, and assigning classroom jobs.

As I progressed through the chapters, each discussing different aspects of literacy instruction, I came across descriptions of all of the components of a balanced literacy program that so many of us have taught but with culturally affirming adaptations. Oral language and vocabulary development are grounded in the belief that all children are capable speakers of their own languages, and no single language is privileged above any other. Instead, multilingualism is encouraged by creating activity structures in which children can interact with each other and converse throughout the day, giving them the opportunity to experiment with each other's language conventions. Comparison among languages is encouraged and is extended into other components of literacy instruction. Classroom libraries are curated to make sure they represent and affirm multiple cultures, especially those of the children in each class, and that they explore issues of racism in age-appropriate ways. They are used for interactive read-alouds, small-group guided reading, and Writing Workshop.

Often, books for instruction are chosen based on daily questions and reflections from children, which, in turn, are informed by children's cultures, revealing aspects of those cultures to the teachers. Writing projects are inspired by these revelations as well. An example that I loved grew out of the preference expressed by several students in one teacher's class for a version of "Happy Birthday" by Stevie Wonder. Their teacher then provided the opportunity for all of her students to share their linguistically diverse family birthday songs, read about different birthday traditions, and write a class multilingual birthday song. These teaching

practices center the children in the curriculum while engaging them in well-established, research-supported instruction.

As you read this book, I know you will agree that it is easy to see what makes these teachers so effective. If you teach a diverse class of young children, and have been looking for ways to make your teaching more culturally sustaining, I truly believe you will find what you have been looking for in the examples and other resources in this book. —IS

## About the Authors

Sophie Degener is an associate professor in Reading at National Louis University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy, and her research interests include early literacy, family literacy, and teacher education. Adelfio Garcia is a biliteracy consultant to Chicago Public Schools and Chicagoland school districts. He received his doctorate in Reading and Language from National Louis University, and his research interests are in the areas of biliteracy, translanguaging, family literacy, language development, and methods of teaching literacy in Spanish. Ivy Sitkoski teaches reading, library, and computers at Grass Lake Elementary School in Antioch and is also an adjunct professor at National Louis University. Her research interests include methods for teaching literacy as well as collaboration among reading specialists and speech language pathologists. All serve as school district consultants and are frequent presenters at local, state, national, and international literacy conferences. If you have comments about this column or suggestions of books to review, please send them along to Sophie Degener at [sophie.degener@nl.edu](mailto:sophie.degener@nl.edu).