

UC Berkeley

Policy Reports and Research Briefs

Title

The LITERACY PATHS OF YOUNG BILINGUALS: Negotiating Two Languages When Learning To Write

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/32h956qn>

Author

Bravo, Marco Antonio

Publication Date

2004-05-01

CLPR Graduate Student Research Brief

Center for Latino Policy Research

University of California, Berkeley

Spring 2004

The LITERACY PATHS OF YOUNG BILINGUALS: Negotiating Two Languages When Learning To Write

Marco Antonio Bravo, Ph.D. (2003)

Language, Literacy & Culture - Graduate School of Education

The purpose of this study was two fold. On the one hand, its purpose is to investigate if Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students who were schooled in two languages (English and Spanish) develop parallel literacy skills. On the other hand, it is meant to examine the literacy paths taken by these students when writing narratives in two languages. Longitudinal data for two cohorts of elementary school bilingual children (Kinder-2nd and 3rd-5th grade) was analyzed using the Authentic Literacy Assessment System (ALAS) as the measurement tool to chronicle their literacy trajectories over a three year period.

The ALAS is a tool co-constructed by researchers at UC-Berkeley's school of Education and classroom teachers at Sierra



Madre Elementary School¹ with the intention of creating an assessment that would inform teacher practice and chronicle

student literacy learning over time. The ALAS provides teachers with feedback about the measure and progress of student writing in both languages of instruction while its implementation did not disrupt, but flowed

with the instructional plan already in place. The ALAS gauged student narrative writing performance through "authentic", process-based, literacy events which included reading, pre-writing activities, graphic organizers, and independent writing.

Analysis of students' writing over the three-year study unveiled parallel literacy development among lower-grade and upper-grade elementary school students. Students managed to sustain growth in both languages of instruction at or near grade level standards, disputing claims that instruction in students' native language is detrimental to their academic success in English. Moreover, the corresponding manner in which writing matured in Spanish and English among these students lends support to the premise that literacy in one language develops in conjunction with, rather than separate from, literacy in the other language. Finally, when the writing of more-proficient and less-proficient English speakers were compared, the ALAS process, through which teachers were able to deliver individualized instruction to students, managed to close the achievement gap between those students who were strong writers at the onset of the study and those who were struggling writers.

Footnotes

¹ The true name of the school is not used to protect student identities.

Marco Antonio Bravo was a Mini-grant recipient in Fall 2001.