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The number of students in the United States who have as their first language (L1) a language other than English is increasing. Parents, educators, and the greater community are searching for ways to best help these students learn English as their second language (L2). As the contributing authors of Early Biliteracy Development suggest, being bilingual is much more than being a double monolingual.

I began working with English language learners some 40 plus years ago. During those decades, a plethora of theories and strategies for teaching English language

learners surfaced. One might expect that since there has been so much effort put into helping American students learn other languages in addition to English, most of my undergraduate college students would have command of a second language; this is not the case. Only a few, rarely more than four in a class of 100, are bilingual and biliterate. However, in my doctoral classes, where I encounter more international students, it is common for them to have acquired multiple languages and dialects. It makes you wonder why, after the huge amounts of money that have been poured into studying the acquisition of the English language and the acquisition of a second language, there are not more American students who are bilingual and biliterate. These students have mastered their public school foreign language requirements; however, they seem to readily lose most of the knowledge and skill they acquired. The authors tell us that there is little research on young developing bilingual and biliterate children; thus, this book becomes a valuable reference for learning about language acquisition, especially English as second language, and how children who have English as their first language learn another language.

I was eager to read this book about early biliteracy development because I have worked in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade; and I have studied other languages, with minimal success, since my youth. I was attracted to the fact that the book focused on the young learner because, in my opinion, that is the critical place to begin if we are to understand the nature and nurture of bilingualism and biliteracy. I echo the writers' tenet, based on my experience, that in supportive contexts emergent bilinguals have the potential to develop literacy in two languages; in fact, multiple languages can be developed. They also remind us that biliteracy in not unilinear; there is rich diversity in progression and development; and, language development is a "dynamic, flexible process." In fact, they see language/literacy development as "constructivist within a sociocultural context" and remind us "variation in human behavior is adaptive and normal."

The book is divided into three parts: (1) Emergence of Biliteracy: The Preschool Years; (2) Biliteracy Development in Early Elementary School; and, (3) Reflections and Future Directions. Contained within these sections are nine chapters written by people the editors
Bauer and Mileidis consider as experts in the field of biliteracy development. The chapters are rich in research-driven detail that will attract those wanting to conduct studies in their classrooms and others who seek to add to a more global understanding and practice. The references at the end of the chapters present some of the seminal as well as more current works to support the authors' findings. In addition, there is a multipage glossary that provides clarity to the text and concepts. The authors of the book incorporate a variety of case studies, vignettes, observations, and dialogue that help the reader understand the processes used to collect data and enlighten findings; and, they offer specific suggestions for helping children who come to our schools as non-English speakers keep their native language and use it to foster their transition into becoming competent users of the English language.

Some of the information was so fundamental to me as an early childhood educator that it hardly seemed to need mention. However, there are parents and educators who fail to recognize the essential nature of supporting the child where he is developmentally and embracing the amazingly predictable yet individual nature of language and literacy acquisition. In the 60s, some of my high school friends, who spoke other languages at home, were forbidden to use their home language in school. For several of them, their parents even encouraged the use of English only at home, suggesting that it would help their children be more successful in the United States workforce. Today, over 40 decades later, many of those friends are monolingual, English speakers and writers, having lost most of what had been their home language (L1) when they first entered the public school system. With our current and more global perspectives, we embrace the command of multiple languages and respect those who are bilingual or multilingual; in fact, in some arenas we hire them preferentially over the monolingual speakers. What a contradiction it is that has taken place. In some cases the use of a foreign language has been viewed as of lesser status or even threatening. Today, we are more likely to seek out those who have mastered multiple languages and literacies, including the hiring of bilingual teachers. The authors share research findings telling us that bilinguals have "heightened cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness." If this is the case, then wouldn't
we want all our students to be bilingual and retain their L1 skills for ready use?

In my geographic area, we encounter Spanish as the most common language other than English. I was surprised to read that Chinese is now the third most common language spoken in the United States, after English and Spanish. This awareness brings me to mention one of the many interesting attributes of the book — the attention to languages in addition to Spanish. The reader is given the opportunity to not only read about the acquisition of different languages but is given an opportunity to experience the world of a child as he hears, speaks, and becomes literate in languages less common, for example Chinese and Turkish as he also learns English (L2).

The authors remind us that the home language (L1) should be considered as a "resource," rather than a "problem," that helps scaffold rather than delay the acquisition of learning English (L2). Those around the child should recognize cognitive processes, such as code switching, as common to the transitions and understanding that take place. Interactions need to be multimodal incorporating a variety of techniques and scaffolding and engaging activities even if the parents use the une-personne un-langue rule, where each parent speaks a different language to the child. Instruction in the school and home should complement each other. Schools need to insure they are offering a safe and caring environment to help reduce the child's affective filter.

The editors state that the idea for this book actually came from a panel presentation at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting. This made the book even more appealing to me because I think we must share and celebrate findings and strategies that help our students address their potential for learning and using language. If you are an educator or parent, I think you will find the book informative, the research rigorous yet enlightening, and the information about acquiring multiple languages fascinating.
About the Reviewer

Kathleen Fite is a Professor of Education and Distinguished Alumni for Texas State University. She serves on the Board of Directors for the Association for Childhood Education International and is an International Ambassador for the Gesell Institute for Child Development.