

# **NYS Bilingual Common Core Initiative**

## **Theoretical Foundations**

## Theoretical Foundations of the New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative

At the core of The New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative (NYSBCCI) is the idea that in addition to being a series of grammatical structures, language is also a social practice (Street, 1985; Pennycook, 2010). Therefore, language learning in an academic context is not solely about mastery over grammatical structures or isolated vocabulary but also about the development of competency in the language specific to each academic discipline. In order for this development of competency to occur, students must participate in a language socialization process that includes both explicit and implicit guidance by mentors who are more proficient in the language of the academic discipline (Duffy, 2010) as well as an engagement with the ways of thinking in each academic discipline through exposure to content-specific texts (Snow, Griffin, and Burns, 2007). What this means is that in a history class students are treated as historians and in science class students are treated as scientists and are provided with both explicit and implicit guidance on the language structures and practices associated with the discourse of the content-area being taught (Walqui & Heritage, 2012).

The NYSBCCI also embraces a dynamic view of bilingualism. Bilingualism has at times been conceptualized as “double monolingualism,” with strict separation of languages from each other in instruction (Cummins, 2007). In an English as a Second Language program such an approach minimizes the use of the home language while in a bilingual program it compartmentalizes instruction in the two languages. However, more dynamic views of bilingualism that have emerged in recent years have argued that using the home language as a springboard to understand and produce in the new language will not confuse children and will not hinder their progress towards mastering the new language (Cummins, 2007). Similarly, continued development of the home language will also support the development of the new language (August and Shanahan, 2006). In line with this research, the NYSBCCI views bilingualism both as a point of departure for language instruction and as goal for all language learners.

The major goal of the NYSBCCI is to provide teachers with tools to enact this vision of bilingualism in the Common Core classroom. To this effect, the New Language Arts Progressions (formerly known as English as a Second Language Learning Standards) and Home Language Arts Progressions (formerly known as Native Language Arts Learning Standards) that have been developed as part of this initiative provide points of entry for students of all language proficiency and literacy levels to access grade level Language Arts content as described by the new NYS Common Core Learning Standards. These tools are designed primarily to meet the needs of English Language Learners; however, to support a broader goal of bilingualism for all students, these resources can also be used as a guide for planning instruction for students who are learning a foreign language or who are developing their home languages. Specifically, the New Language Arts Progressions can also be used as a guide in foreign language classrooms, and the Home Language Arts Progressions can also be used as a guide for the development of literacy among bilingual students who are not English Language Learners. This approach continues the tradition of strong support for bilingualism and biliteracy in New York State and is in the spirit of the recently enacted Seal of Biliteracy legislation that seeks to promote greater biliteracy among students in New York State. As with the 2004 New York State Learning Standards for English as a Second Language and Native Language Arts, the New Language Arts Progressions and Home Language

Arts Progressions identify performance indicators for students based on the NYS P-12 Common Core Learning Standards. Thus, these resources help teachers provide all students with access to grade level content. The New Language Arts Progressions and Home Language Arts Progressions are not separate standards, but rather provide a roadmap for teachers to ensure that students who are learning a new language and/or developing their home language meet the Common Core standards.

## New Language Arts Progressions

The New Language Arts Progressions focus specifically on the needs of English Language Learners. However, the progressions can also be applied to students learning a foreign language, as the stages of new language development are the same regardless of the language (Council of Europe, 2001) or whether a language is being learned as an additional or foreign language (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996). Thus, the term *new language* is being used to replace *second language*. Using *new* as opposed to *second* language also acknowledges the many students in New York State who have competency in more than two languages. Moreover, it is the term that is used by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1998) in its national certification program.

The New Language Arts Progressions are aligned with the emerging research that has called for the integration of content and language in new language development (Chamot, 2009; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2012). The idea behind integrating content and language is that new language development happens most successfully when learners are engaged in authentic content-specific tasks from the very beginning of their exposure to the new language. That is, when provided appropriate scaffolding, language learners can start developing language for academic purposes at the same time that they are developing basic communication skills in their new language (Walqui & Heritage, 2012).

In order to demonstrate the trajectory of learning language and content, the New Language Arts Progressions identify five levels of progressions (Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, Commanding). The decision to expand from four to five levels is based on the latest work in language development being done both nationally and internationally where progressions have been divided into five (WIDA, 2012) or six levels (Council of Europe, 2001; Interagency Language Roundtable, 2011). Those that include six levels, however, have a “level zero” for a student with absolutely no proficiency in a new language, which research indicates is a very short period of time when students are interacting with others in the new language (Calderón, 2009).

The five levels of language progressions demonstrate a trajectory of language learning and teaching. It should be emphasized that students at all five levels are expected to work with the same grade level texts. At the entering level of the New Language Arts Progressions, grade level texts are heavily scaffolded (e.g. pre-identified words, graphic organizers, option to use home language, etc.). This scaffolding is temporary assistance by which a teacher or peer helps a learner accomplish a task in their “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978), the gap between what students can do independently and what they can do with supports implemented by a skilled expert (Gibbons, 2002). The performance indicators at the entering level have scaffolding explicitly built into them because students who are very new to the language will need such supports to engage with grade level texts. Gradually, these scaffolds are removed from the performance

indicators. Thus, the Progressions demonstrate that with appropriate supports all learners can engage meaningfully with grade level text to meet the expectations of the Common Core, rather than working with simplified texts or lower level texts. The difference between the levels is not with the complexity of the text or rigor of the content, but instead with the amount of scaffolding provided for students to access the grade level text that all students work with.

The New Language Arts Progressions follow the lead of the Framework for English Language Proficiency issued by the Council of Chief State Schools (2012), by organizing language into receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) functions within the modalities of oracy (oral skills) and literacy (written texts). The division into receptive and productive language functions allows for a more integrated approach to language development. Students just beginning to learn a language have neither oral nor written receptive or productive skills in the new language. Therefore, they have to develop both receptive competencies in oral language (listening) and written language (reading), while also needing to develop productive competencies in oral language (speaking) and written language (writing). A curriculum for these students must include all four components of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (NYS English as a Second Language 2004). Organizing language development as productive and receptive ensures the integration of the four components of language and emphasizes that students who are new to a language do not need to first develop oral language before being exposed to written language.

### Home Language Arts Progressions:

In addition to the development of New Language Arts Progressions, the NYSBCCI has created Home Language Arts Progressions as a tool for teachers of classrooms focused explicitly on teaching Language Arts in the home languages of English Language Learners and other speakers of languages other than English. The Home Language Arts Progressions builds upon the work of the New York State Native Language Arts Learning Standards (2004) and World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) (2005) in the creation of standards related to home language arts. Like these predecessors, these Home Language Arts Progressions are based upon the extensive research into the role of home language development on the development of a new language (Cummins, 2001; Krashen & McField, 2005; August & Shanahan, 2006). The term *home language* as opposed to *native language* is used to describe the languages other than English spoken by the bilingual students of New York States. This change is aligned with recent developments in language education that finds the term “native” speaker to be a concept no longer applicable to our increasingly globalized world (Graddol, 2006). In addition, the shift in terminology allows for a message that home and school can and must be integrated in ways that allow students to see them as complementary spheres as opposed to separate spheres in their lives.

Similar to the New Language Arts Progressions, the Home Language Arts Progressions create performance indicators for the Common Core Learning Standards that address all four components of language. However, in contrast to the New Language Arts Progressions, where new language development and content learning are emphasized equally, the Home Language Arts Progressions focus on the learning of Language Arts content in the home language. In this way, the Home Language Arts Progressions parallel the skills that are focused on in English Language Arts Classrooms.

Like the New Language Arts Progressions, the Home Language Arts Progressions are organized into productive and receptive language components. However, they differ from the New Language Arts Progressions in that there is a stronger focus on literacy development. This is because students come into Home Language Arts classrooms with stronger oracy skills but with varying degrees of literacy in their home language. This foundation in oracy can and must be built upon in supporting students in their development of home language literacy. Therefore, the purpose of the Home Language Arts Progressions is to provide guidance to teachers and points of entry for students at all levels of literacy in their home language.

The Home Language Arts Progressions are cognizant of the continuum of bilingualism and biliteracy that exists for students in New York State. In particular, research has identified at least three subgroups of such students: (1) Students with strong schooling in their home language, (2) Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), and (3) heritage speakers—students raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken and who have some degree of ability in that language (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Valdés, 2001). In order to provide tools for teachers to meet the needs of all of these students, the Home Language Arts Progressions are divided into five levels (Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, Commanding). Thus, similar to the New Language Arts Progressions, the Home Language Arts Progressions have five levels. Also, similar to the New Language Arts Progression, the difference between the levels is not related to the rigor of the content or grade level of the text. That is, students at all literacy levels are expected to engage with grade-level texts. The difference between the levels relates to the amount of scaffolding that students receive based on their literacy levels. It is important to note, however, that while the names of the levels and the philosophy underpinning both Progressions are the same, a student can be at a different level in new and home language. A student in this situation would be expected to receive different types and amounts of scaffolding depending on the language of instruction.

### Bilingual Common Core Progressions

Taken together, the New Language Arts Progressions and the Home Language Arts Progressions present tools for teachers to develop grade level instruction for students with varying levels of language proficiency and literacy. When used together, New Language Arts Progressions and the Home Language Arts Progressions provide a roadmap to develop bilingual Common Core skills for all students—skills that are necessary for our increasingly global society.

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