Introduction

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In this digital age, children are exposed to different modalities at a young age. Literacy education should not be print-centric. This book draws upon multimodality and social semiotics to understand the ways in which multiple modes of learning are used to teach literacy in early childhood contexts. The chapters push for a change in view of what counts as literacy and what is valued, especially when working with diverse populations. Issues of access to learning opportunities and constraints on traditional assessments are highlighted.

The series of chapters showcases the changing natures of languages and literacies globally. A multimodal approach provides a framework for rethinking what it means to be literate in the 21st century. This book’s uniqueness stems from the coupling of multimodal literacy and young emergent bilinguals. It expands traditional notions of literacy to include other ways of representing and learning. For example, the role of images becomes a central tool for meaning-making, especially for students who are working to learn English as a new language. Each chapter informs teachers, teacher leaders, literacy researchers and graduate students about ways to promote an expanded view of literacy development where student assets are built upon to promote positive literate identities and learning experiences. We provide culturally sustaining pedagogical possibilities for using multimodal approaches to teach literacy with early childhood students learning multiple languages, thus impacting the daily lives of diverse learners as they try to navigate challenging settings where oral and written language is prioritized.

For the purposes of this book, emergent bilinguals (EBs) are students who are learning their home language and an additional language (usually English) simultaneously at a young age. In 2009, Garcia renamed English language learners (ELLs) as ‘emergent bilinguals’, in order to stress the importance of developing children’s bilingualism and avoid categorizing ELLs as either limited English proficient or English proficient. Internationally, teachers often view EBs with a deficit view and focus on what they do not know rather than what they know, which limits children’s bilingualism development.
The Purpose of This Book

This book presents research focused on young emergent bilingual children’s multimodal meaning-making processes in diverse cultural and linguistic settings. It aims to extend what is known in the field of multimodal literacy.

In this book, we address the following questions:

• In what ways are emergent bilinguals using multiple modes and culture to make sense of literacy events?
• How are multimodal multicultural texts being used to support the literacy development of emergent bilinguals in a variety of contexts?
• How does a multimodal approach support the composing processes of diverse young emergent bilinguals?
• How are multiple languages and pictures used as mediational tools for cultural constructions of personal experiences and the use of imagination?
• What role does translanguaging play in multimodal learning activities?
• How are the cultures, languages and experiences of young learners utilized as assets in a multimodal curriculum?
• How are the identities of emergent bilinguals impacted by multimodal practices?
• What are the challenges of multimodal literacy teaching?
• What are the practical implications of multimodal authoring or composing for preschool–fourth grade?

The chapters in this volume were selected to offer a unique insight into one of the four contexts organizing the book: preschool, kindergarten, primary grades and out-of-school contexts. The purpose is to change the ways in which current teachers enact literacy practices with emergent bilingual students and to inform teacher candidates who are enrolled in teacher education programs across the world. This book may be used as a course textbook to provide readers with insights into diverse early childhood classrooms and to add to a knowledge base about teaching literacy with marginalized populations that often go unrecognized by school systems. The end goal is to make a difference in the lives of children as they engage in daily classroom literacy events.

An Overview of Chapters

The book opens with a synthesis of research regarding the impact of multimodal literacies on emergent bilingual students’ literacy and cultural identities. Next, the book is organized into four parts based on children’s age groups: Preschool (Chapters 2–7); Kindergarten (Chapters 8–10); Primary Grades (Chapters 11–19); and Out-of-School Contexts (Chapters 20–22).
The students featured in the chapters range in age from 3–10 and represent various language groups, including Black English, Spanish, Mandarin, Portuguese, Arabic, Norwegian and Korean languages. The chapters include perspectives from areas of the United States where students are relegated to English-only policies and practices, as well as studies from China, London, Brazil and Norway. Individual chapters specifically address pedagogical issues that connect back to theory and ultimately impact literacy instruction and the policies guiding what gets counted as literacy in diverse spaces.

In Chapter 1, a synthesis of literature on emergent bilingual children’s multimodal literacy practices provides foundational knowledge about the field. The authors outline and analyze different studies on bilingual children’s cultural awareness and identity shaping through multimodal practices in PK–6 contexts. The authors conclude that multimodal literacies are effective tools in supporting children’s language development and identity construction and developing various competences in school and out-of-school contexts.

Part 1 presents six chapters about preschool children’s multimodal practices. Chapter 2 features a four-year-old bilingual Korean child’s classroom play and his use of multimodal resources with other children. Through nexus analysis, the authors argue that ‘young bilinguals’ play narratives and classroom participation are supported by a nexus of multimodal interactions with other children, toys, furniture, the physical environment, and teachers’ provision of materials and time through routine and repetition’ (pp. 17–18).

Chapter 3 presents a four-year-old Chinese-English speaking child’s multimodal and multilingual home literacy practices. Grounded in translanguaging and superdiversity theories, the authors find that the girl creatively uses her linguistic resources, gestures and spatial resources in her biliteracy development process. This chapter provides insights into understanding young children’s biliteracy development from a holistic perspective that includes ‘learners’ languages, dialect, gestures, intonations and knowledge of space and direction, as well as body language’ (p. 44).

Chapter 4 highlights two Black four-year-olds’ collaborative multimodal narrative composition with plastic animals and blocks in an urban Head Start classroom. Guided by multimodal meaning-making, linguistic authenticity, cultural knowledge and identity construction theories, the authors discuss the questions of ‘What counts as narrative?’ and ‘Whose narratives count?’ as they analyze the children’s storytelling during play.

Chapter 5 examines emergent bilingual children’s multimodal and multilingual practices in a Head Start classroom and a second-grade class and prioritizes the children’s agency and complex language use. Situated within translanguaging and multimodality, the authors find that the children use their language repertoires and translanguaging based on their preference and for their aims. This chapter highlights the flexibility of
children’s translanguaging and multimodal practices as the children navigate diverse linguistic and cultural settings.

Chapter 6 explores different multimodal ways to teach Chinese pre-school children in Beijing and Taiwan. Guided by new literacies and multimodality, the authors design various activities including dramas, stories, music and drawings for the children to understand solar terms and discuss the dialogic interaction of the modalities.

Chapter 7 introduces the Brazilian educational context and stresses the needs to challenge monolithic and monolingual ideologies in Brazilian education. The authors call for a politically engaged and socially, culturally and linguistically just language education through critical multimodal literacy. The authors showcase going to bed activities in a preschool English class in an underprivileged community in Brazil and explain how different modes like singing, dancing and playing enhance children’s funds of perezhivanie. This chapter informs audiences how multimodality could be utilized to promote a socioculturally transformative and plurilingual education as well as to support emergent bilingual children’s meaning-making process.

The three chapters in Part 2 focus on children’s multimodal practices at kindergarten levels. Chapter 8 depicts a multimodal storytelling activity in a bilingual kindergarten. During the storytelling activity, the Latinx children in the kindergarten utilize various communication modes available to them in their meaning-making and composing process. From a translanguaging perspective, this chapter demonstrates bilingual children’s learning and engagement in the story genres through multiple modalities. The author suggests that the semiotic resources of oral and written languages, material objects, movement and drawing support emergent bilingual children’s multiliteracy development.

Chapter 9 presents an integrated view of translanguaging and multimodality as an approach to teaching emergent bilingual children. Drawing upon data from two classroom vignettes in urban communities with Latinx students, this chapter depicts multimodal read-alouds with young bilingual children, and a community of teachers and researchers discussing ways of incorporating play into literacy instruction. The authors suggest a teaching plan for multimodal and multilingual experiences to enrich children’s play and value children’s linguistic repertoire.

Chapter 10 describes bilingual identity construction in a Spanish-English dual language program in a kindergarten. The authors develop and implement a three-phase multimodal pedagogical approach to help the children explore their bilingual identities. The authors conclude that multimodal resources like portraits, music and drawing help the children communicate their ideas about bilingualism and construct their bilingual identities.

In Part 3, nine chapters portray the meaning-making processes of children from primary grades (1–4) through multiple modes. Chapter 11
investigates how teachers use creative drawings and artifacts as ways to discover and integrate children’s lives and experiences in the classroom. Drawing from a multimodal social semiotics lens, the author presents two studies on first-grade Spanish-English speaking bilingual children’s drawings and family storybooks. The author argues that multimodal creations are a source for engaging emergent bilingual children’s funds of knowledge. This chapter demonstrates that children’s multimodal expressions can be used as a tool for promoting biliteracy development and understanding funds of knowledge.

Chapter 12 presents two bilingual Arabic-dominant 7-year-old children’s retelling in multiple modes using an iPad app. The authors compare the children’s oral retelling and digital retelling scores and find that digital tools provide opportunities for children to interpret stories while creating their own stories. They conclude that ‘creating stories in multiple modalities enhanced Layla and Rosa’s oral language, literacies and social interaction’ (p. 169).

Chapter 13 exhibits the narrative composing process of second grade bilingual students. The author applies a multimodal approach to writing instruction and showcases a three-phase composing workshop. The results show that explicit teacher instruction about words, art and design is significant in transforming knowledge, developing children’s semiotic landscapes and fostering their metalinguistic awareness.

Chapter 14 foregrounds a STEERS model of literacy as a new way to theorize literacy and integrated multimodal perspectives. A STEERS model of literacy ‘highlights the importance of sponsors, tools, emotions, experiences, reflexivity and syncretism’ (p. 187) and bridges the home and school literacy practices. The author presents third- and fourth-grade bilingual students’ use of an online technology platform and investigates how the social and material become woven in sharing the students’ literacy practices. The author calls for a STEERS model of literacy to tackle social injustice.

Chapter 15 portrays stories of refugee children from Burma. The authors examine three bilingual children’s use of multiple semiotic resources to make sense and tell their family stories. Guided by positioning theory and the social semiotics multimodal perspective, the authors find that the children position themselves in different ways and present their family’s culture, religion and educational backgrounds through their multimodal creations. This chapter empowers the voices of refugee children and their families through their multimodal artifacts.

Chapter 16 explores bilingual children’s multimodal flexibility in a Spanish/English dual language program. Utilizing translanguaging and multimodal literacies as theoretical frameworks, the authors investigate how the multilingual children use multimodal resources to navigate their social worlds. This chapter presents two ethnographic case studies on elementary-aged African American children’s use of translanguaging and
multimodal resources in their language and literacy practices. The authors conclude that ‘translanguaging, gestures, artifacts and visuals served as devices that facilitated learning and interaction for multilingual Black girls to navigate and explore their identities as literate and capable enactors of knowledge’ (p. 221).

Chapter 17 delineates a missing piece of understanding EBs’ comprehension of multimodal narrative texts. The authors build upon Theory of Mind to highlight emergent bilingual children’s social awareness. This chapter shows how characteristics of multimodal texts can leverage bilingual children’s Theory of Mind skills and facilitate their comprehension.

Chapter 18 shares an ethnographic case study about fourth-grade linguistically diverse bilingual learners’ multimodal literacy practices. Drawing upon a literacy engagement framework, the authors present how bilingual learners engage with graphic text production and how these multimodal literacy practices promote the learners’ identity construction and language development.

The last chapter in the primary grades section provides sociomaterial insights into a young African student’s multimodal literacy experiences in an English-only school setting. The research applies the concept of learning stories to highlight the child’s assets as a meaning-maker and storyteller. The implications provide insight into the ways teachers can document the learning growth of EBs.

In Part 4, the chapters focus on EBs’ multimodal practices in out-of-school contexts. Chapter 20 exhibits a parent-reported survey of Chinese-Norwegian bilingual children’s multimodal literacy resources and practices at home across age and language dominance. The multimodal resources available for children include print-based and screen-based resources. By analyzing the books and apps mentioned by parents, the authors conclude that children utilize multiple modalities to make meaning and learn languages at home.

Chapter 21 portrays how two emergent bilingual children use multiple modes to understand and produce multimodal texts. The author explores the EBs’ multimodal activities based on the concepts of meaning functions, transmediation and synesthesia. This chapter sheds light on the multiple modes emergent bilingual children leverage as they make sense of the digital multimodal texts.

Chapter 22 showcases a bilingual family’s multimodal interaction and meaning-making in a science museum. Built on multimodality, this chapter explains how the family creates learning opportunities by utilizing multimodal resources and interacting with the exhibits. The author focuses on a Korean first grade child and his family members’ meaning-making as they read signage texts in the museum.

Early childhood professionals will find this book invaluable as a tool for expanding the way literacy is conceived and ultimately ensuring literacy success for diverse learners. Insights into various original research
studies help readers understand the many avenues one can take as a practitioner. In other words, the chapters are filled with a plethora of practical suggestions and implications. The book is truly the ultimate resource on using multiple modes to teach literacy with diverse student populations.

Reference
