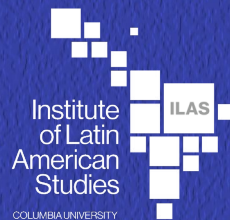# Teaching Early Grade Literacy to Migrant Children from Central America and the Dominican Republic

A culturally relevant pedagogy-based guide

Alex Bonilla Jarquín · Lourdes Natalia Guzmán Taveras · Rafael Meza Duriez

Institute of Latin American Studies
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ILAS

RedLEI
RED PARA LA LECTOESCRITURA INICIAL
DE CENTROAMÉRICA Y EL CARIBE

ILAS K-12 Outreach Program, Columbia University | RedLEI

Teaching Early Grade Literacy to Migrant Children from Central America and the Dominican Republic

A CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY-BASED GUIDE

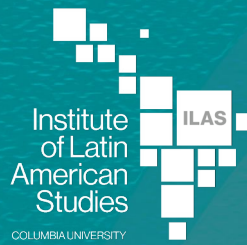The Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS) at Columbia University has commissioned the production of this curriculum guide to serve as a resource for the K-12 teaching community in New York City. This work aims to strengthen background knowledge and instructional strategies so that teachers and educators can both meet the demands and make use of the great cultural and linguistic diversity of students coming from or whose relatives are from Latin America and the Caribbean. The ILAS K-12 Outreach Program strives to enhance the professional capacity of teachers in a multicultural New York City environment and promote the inclusion of Latin American and Caribbean history and culture in their classrooms and students' daily lives.

On an ongoing basis, the K-12 Outreach Program draws on the expertise and support of faculty and students across Columbia University to provide the K-12 teaching community with resources and opportunities to learn about creative ways to incorporate Latin American and Caribbean topics into their educational activities. On this occasion, the Central American and Caribbean Early Literacy Network (RedLEI) collaborated with the Program to develop this guide. We hope that this collaboration contributes to the endeavors of the K-12 teaching community from a real-time, cultural perspective prepared by experts in the field.

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The Central American and Caribbean Early Literacy Network (RedLEI) is a network of universities in Central America and the Dominican Republic and an international organization whose headquarters are at the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG). RedLEI was created to build local capacity to conduct and apply the best Early Grade Literacy (EGL) evidence for the improvement of teaching and learning outcomes in the region. It is committed to building a community of academic actors (universities) and encouraging them to promote rigorous research to produce evidence to be used by decision makers, policymakers, and other actors that develop initiatives to improve the quality of education, particularly in EGL.

Together with the UVG, the other founding members of RedLEI are: Francisco Morazán National Pedagogical University (UPNFM) of Honduras; the Central American University (of Nicaragua); Central American University "José Simeón Cañas" (of El Salvador); the University of Costa Rica (UCR); the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) of the Dominican Republic; and the Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination (CECC-SICA).

Acknowledgements

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List of Acronyms

CIASES	**Centro de Investigación y Acción Educativa Social** (Center for Research and Social Educational Action)
ERCE	**(Cuarto) Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo** ((Fourth) Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)
EGL	**Early Grade Literacy**
FAS	**Fonológico-Analítico-Sintético** (Synthetic Analytical Phonic Method)
ILAS	**Institute of Latin American Studies**
LLECE	**Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación** (Latin American Laboratory for Evaluation of the Quality of Education)
LRCP	**LAC Reads Capacity Program**
MEP	**Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica**
MINED	**Ministry of Education of El Salvador**
MINED	**Ministry of Education of Nicaragua**
MINEDUC	**Ministry of Education of Guatemala**
MINERD	**Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic**
OREALC	**Oficina Regional de Educación para América Latina y el Caribe** (Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean)
PEN	**Programa del Estado de la Nación** (State of the Nation Program)
PERCE	**Primer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo** (First Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)
RedLEI	**Red para la Lectoescritura Inicial de Centroamérica y el Caribe** (The Central American and Caribbean Early Literacy Network)
SEDUC	**Secretaría de Educación** (Secretary of Government in the Office of Education of Honduras)
SERCE	**Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo** (Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)
TERCE	**Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo** (Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study)

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INTRODUCTION

S ome teachers in New York City are trained according to the sociocultural environment in which they were born and raised. Yet, these educators have to teach students who live in a multicultural environment that congregates immigrant families who escaped the critical social, political, and economic situation of Central America and the Dominican Republic. That context, like the language and culture of these families, may be unfamiliar to New York teachers.

Cultural diversity is often seen as a challenge for teaching, which makes us wonder how educators can teach students with diverse linguistic and cultural codes to read and write. Cultural relevance is important not only in terms of language, but also for gaining a deeper understanding of those who learn. That situation raises questions sometimes overlooked in classrooms: what are students' contexts? What have their life experiences been like? What were their realities in their countries of origin? What part of those realities are they carrying with them? How do students understand the new environment in which they live from their perspective?

Central America is witness to constant crises. The region's risks push thousands of people to migrate every year in search for better lives and opportunities, their main destination being the United States. American schools make a tremendous effort to adapt to multicultural classrooms. Teachers strive to be cultural leaders who transform their students' diversity into learning opportunities, in order to close cultural learning gaps.

This effort to provide multicultural education is significant in New York State, where the Central American population has lived since last century, and to where it continues to migrate. In 2019, a notoriously large number of approximately 850,000 people of Dominican background lived in New York State (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). The population with roots in the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America – Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador – is also significant, with over 380,000 people, most of whom come from El Salvador (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Table 1 shows the number of people from Central America who lived in New York State in 2004, 2010 and 2019, and the growth rate of this population.

Central America is composed of countries with different histories and cultures, which are also represented in New York City. In such a diverse environment, how can educators promote little-known cultures when teaching reading and writing? With that question in mind, this guide constitutes an international and inter-institutional effort to introduce the current state of the teaching of reading and writing in Central America and the Dominican Republic. This guide

TABLE 1. *Evolution of the Central American and Dominican population in New York State*

Country	Year			Population Growth
	2004	**2010**	**2019**	
Total Population (New York State)	18,661,943	19,392,283	19,453,561	**0.0%**
Total Population from Central America and the Dominican Republic (New York State)	807,054	1,056,495	1,256,375	**1.9%**
Dominican Republic	585,354	724,197	844,183	**1.7%**
Costa Rica	10,601	10,883	13,919	**2.7%**
Guatemala	43,686	62,492	113,436	**6.6%**
Honduras	62,870	86,748	87,636	**0.1%**
Nicaragua	6,361	15,254	17,991	**1.8%**
El Salvador	98,182	156,921	179,210	1.5%

Source: United States Census Bureau (n.d.). ACS 1-Year Estimates-Public Use Microdata Sample 2010 & 2019. https://data.census.gov/cedsci/

is the result of a collaboration between the K-12 Outreach Program at the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS), Columbia University, and The Central American and Caribbean Early Literacy Network (Red para la Lectoescritura Inicial de Centroamérica y el Caribe [RedLEI]) at the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, to develop a resource guide for K-12 teachers and educators. It gives an account of Early Grade Literacy (EGL) and shares recommendations on culturally appropriate practices in the countries where RedLEI works – Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica in Central America, and the Dominican Republic.

This guide aims to provide guidelines for teachers working with children from the Central American region to contextualize their educational strategies and adjust them to children's cultural needs. In other words, its purpose is to help teachers develop culturally relevant learning processes by considering the Central American and Dominican cultural diversity when teaching reading and writing. To achieve that, this guide outlines situations, approaches, and empirical data on reading and writing based on the ideologies of regional specialists, members of RedLEI, on reading and writing. The guide intends to serve educators who teach EGL in Spanish and English, especially in New York City.

Chapter 1 outlines an overview of the Central American and Dominican contexts, including persisting challenges in their education systems. This chapter intends to inform teachers about these countries' cultural, social, and economic characteristics, allowing them to understand why

families decide to migrate and what they are looking for when migrating. It also aims to help teachers understand the complexities and learning gaps in migrant children, brought about by educational systems which may have failed in offering them high-quality education. This same chapter presents in greater detail the evidence available on Central America and the Dominican Republic regarding literacy learning in basic education, highlights regional results in international reading and writing tests, and provides possible explanations for low performances in these tests. Finally, Chapter 1 explains how teacher training works in the region, as well as the status of bilingualism.

Chapter 2 explains how the education systems of Central America and the Dominican Republic conceptualize and guide EGL teaching in their respective curricula. It also describes approaches defined in the above-mentioned curricula and their correspondence with official guidelines.

Finally, **Chapter 3** offers guidance and tools to teach reading and writing, and to enable meaningful learning. These tools consider children's contexts and their linguistic and cultural diversity, allowing for meaningful learning to take place. This is known as the culturally relevant approach to teaching (Jennerjohn, 2020). The guidelines and tools facilitate the teaching of three fundamental EGL skills: 1) reading comprehension, 2) phonological awareness, and 3) creative writing.

It is important to note that, even though this guide refers to Central America, it only includes information about Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. The context and circumstances that characterize the rest of the Central American countries (Costa Rica[1], Panama and Belize) differ from the situation in the countries included in this guide and go beyond the scope of this work.

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[1] Some parts of the guide provide data for Costa Rica to highlight differences regarding the rest of the countries of the Central American and Caribbean region.

About the Authors

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Alex Bonilla Jarquín is Professor at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), where he teaches undergraduate courses in reading comprehension in early grades. He is affiliated with the Center for Research and Social Educational Action (Centro de Investigación y Acción Educativa Social [CIASES]), in Nicaragua. Mr. Bonilla Jarquín is also a member of the regional research team at RedLEI that studies early childhood education and emerging literacy in Central America and the Dominican Republic. From 1997 to 2008, he worked at the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education in the areas of training, pedagogical advice, teacher training, planning, and curriculum development. He also has experience in educational research, which he gained while working at a Nicaraguan civil society organization devoted to public opinion and knowledge production. Alex Bonilla Jarquín specializes in Sociolinguistics. He holds a B.A. in Hispanic Language and Literature from UNAN-Managua, an M.A. in Education Administration and Management, and an M.A. Social Policy, Program and Project Management.

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Ms. Guzmán Taveras is a member of the regional research team at RedLEI that studies early childhood education and emerging literacy in Central America and the Dominican Republic. She has worked as an educator of Language and Literature at the primary and secondary educational levels, supported and trained primary school teachers and assisted in the development of the Continuous Training Strategy focused on the school managed by the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) and the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic. Previously, Ms. Guzmán Taveras was a literacy specialist for LAC Reads in the Dominican Republic, an academic writing tutor for PUCMM and a RedLEI fellow. She holds a B.A. in Education with a mention in Letters from Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo.

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Mr. Meza Duriez is Professor at the Department of Education of Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in Nicaragua, where he teaches courses in Spanish reading and writing, as well as research methodologies. He is also an Associate Researcher in early grade literacy at CIASES and RedLEI's training coordinator. He has collaborated with RedLEI and the LAC Reads Capacity Program (LRCP) as a research fellow and as an academic tutor in regional courses on several topics, including Foundations of early grade literacy and reading comprehension. Mr. Meza Duriez holds a B.A. in Law and a M.A. in Education and Learning from UCA.

Central America and the Dominican Republic:

Diamonds Covered in Mud?

La Calumnia[2]

Rubén Darío

Puede una gota de lodo
sobre un diamante caer;
puede también de este modo
su fulgor oscurecer;
pero aunque el diamante todo
se encuentre de fango lleno,
el valor que lo hace bueno
no perderá ni un instante,
y ha de ser siempre diamante
por más que lo manche el cieno.

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2 The poem describes slander as mud that may cover a diamond, but mud has no effect on it because the diamond's value will remain as is.

CHAPTER 1

Central America and the Dominican Republic: Diamonds Covered in Mud?

Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío wrote the verses on the previous page. The beauty of poetry lies in that, once published, its meaning ceases to belong exclusively the author's vision and becomes part of the reader's domain. Although they were not written with this purpose, these verses apply to a region such as Central America and the Dominican Republic. It is a complex region, with open wounds, ongoing political conflicts, and great uncertainty about its future. But it is also a region full of potential, with an inherent beauty to those who inhabit it and landscapes taken from picturesque tales. The following sections describe the geographical and educational contexts of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, with their particularities.significant, with over 380,000 people, most of whom come from El Salvador (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Table 1 shows the number of people from Central America who lived in New York State in 2004, 2010 and 2019, and the growth rate of this population.

The sociocultural context of Central America and the Caribbean

GEOGRAPHY. Central America is the region of the American continent located on an isthmus comprising several countries that share borders: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (as well as Panama and Belize, which are not part of this report, Figure 1). In global geopolitics, specifically in international trade treaties, the Dominican Republic is usually considered part of the Central American region; it is included in the Free Trade Agreement between Central America, the Dominican Republic, and the United States

FIGURE 1 Central American Isthmus and the Dominican Republic

Source: *Daniel Sojuel for RedLEI*

of America (CAFTA- DR), and in the Central American Integration System (SICA in Spanish).

According to Instituto Cervantes (2019), 50,134,946 people speak Spanish as their mother tongue in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, which represents 8.64% of the world's Spanish speakers. Guatemala is the Central American country with the largest number of inhabitants who speak other languages, while this segment is less than 1% of El Salvador's population. Regarding the situation of the Indigenous population in El Salvador, Hernández (2016) points out that these groups have had serious difficulties in fully enjoying their rights vis-à-vis the Salvadoran state, which has made them invisible and endangered their intangible heritage. In the Dominican Republic, Haitian immigrants constitute 2.4% of the population of speakers with limited Spanish proficiency (LAC Reads Capacity Program [LRCP], 2017b).

CULTURE. Central America is a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural region. This diversity arises from the fusion between the cultures of the original populations and those from other latitudes, which translates into linguistic diversity and richness (*Centroamérica cuenta*, 2020). On the other hand, Agudelo (2017) argues that Central America is also home to African descendants with their arrival to those lands during the period of colonization. There are three categories of Afro-Descendants: 1) those who arrived in colonial times, who constitute the Creole populations, and who mixed with Mayan populations to give rise to the Miskito ethnic group in the bordering coastal region between Honduras and Nicaragua; 2) the Garifuna group, who came from the small Antilles and emerged from the miscegenation between Carib-Arawaks and enslaved African women who arrived on the islands; their communities are settled on the Caribbean coasts of Guatemala, Honduras, and Laguna de Perlas in Nicaragua; 3) a third wave of Afro-Descendants that arrived from the Antilles between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century due to the great demand for labor in the growing industries

FIGURE 2 Origins of Afro-Descendants in Central America
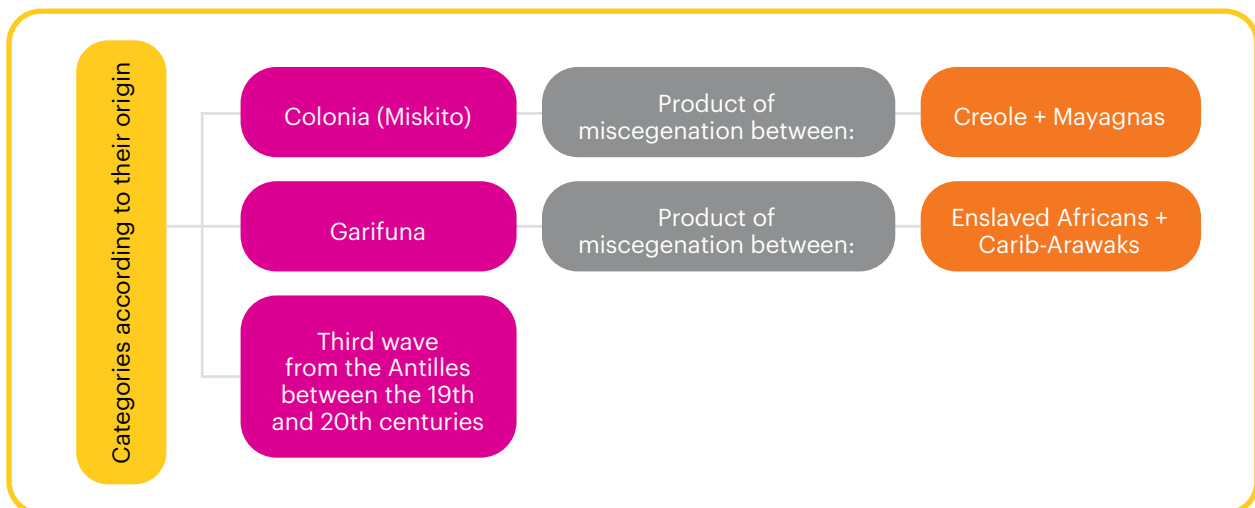
of banana production, as well as port infrastructure and railways construction, and who settled mainly in Panama (Figure 2).

The fusions described in Figure 2 are also the source of historical breaches in equality that are expressed in various social and economic terms, causing unequal access to quality education in the long run.

Profound social differences prevail in Central America and the Dominican Republic due to cultural discrimination practices inherited from colonial times, and which translate into social and political exclusion. Hopenhayn and Bello (2004) claimed that "in modern Latin America and the Caribbean, the problem of exclusion is expressed in the fact that the region has the worst income distribution in the world, and the deepest elitist gaps in power relations" (p. 9). Indigenous communities, along with other ethnic groups, still suffer greatly from the colonial label *indio* (Indian), which has put at risk their culture, language, and ways of life, including losing their rights to lands and territories.

Spanish is the dominant language in Central America and the Dominican Republic. Despite the existence of other languages, each country's constitution and, in some cases, their legislation on education, decree the teaching of Spanish as compulsory throughout the education system because it is the state's official language. These regulations force the prioritization and promotion of Spanish teaching and learning.

NATURAL DISASTERS. The region is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, which further exacerbates inequalities because the poorest are in the front line of these disasters. Hurricanes that hit the entire continental and insular zones of the Caribbean Sea cause some of the worst damages (Trejos & Gindling, 2004), as has happened in recent years with hurricanes Mitch (1998), Jeanne (2004), Stan (2005), Gustave (2008), Agatha (2010), and Eta and Iota (both in 2020). Additionally, the region is located on the Cocos tectonic plates (on the Pacific Ocean side) and the Caribbean plate (on the Caribbean Seaside), which makes of it a highly seismic zone. This location has an impact on the demographic distribution, which is found mainly in large cities (capital and other major cities) and where urban development barely considers tectonic vulnerability. The catastrophes caused by the earthquakes in Managua (1972, magnitude 6.2 on the Richter scale), Guatemala (1976, magnitude 7.5), San Salvador (1986, magnitude 7.5), and Santo Domingo (1946, magnitude 8.1) are hard to forget.

SOCIOECONOMIC DYNAMICS. The 21st century in Central America is witness to challenging, complex, socioeconomic dynamics. The Fifth report on the state of the region conducted by the State of the Nation Program (*Programa Estado de la Nación* [PEN]) documents these dynamics in facts and figures: in 2014, about 59% of the Central American population had at least one unsatisfied basic need, 47% were below the poverty line, and about one fifth lived in extreme poverty (PEN 2016, p. 47).

In 2015, about 8% of Central Americans had migrated from the region, mostly to the United States (82%). One explanation for these figures is that the relatively young Central American population is without access to decent jobs due to lack of qualifications. Another reason is that the minimum wage does not cover the basic cost of living in almost all Central American countries, except for Costa Rica and Panama, although there are extreme cases such as Nicaragua, where the cost of living is almost three times higher than the minimum wage.

In the case of the Dominican Republic, data from the World Bank (2019) point towards significant improvement in social inequality reduction. However, a large percentage of people (41%) remain at risk and may fall back into poverty. Moreover, the population living in rural areas is usually the most affected by the lack of income. Presanca II et al. (2011) estimate that 41.4% of the Central American population live in rural areas.

EDUCATION. The socioeconomic context in the Central American and Caribbean region has a strong impact on the quality of its education systems. The region has recently achieved universal access to education after a long struggle, but still faces many more challenges. PEN's (2016) Fifth report on the state of the region regroups Central American countries in three strategic situations (see Table 2).
Regarding educational investment, the region set these main goals: universalization of primary

TABLE 2. *Challenges faced by education systems in Central America*

Strategic Situation	Main Challenges	Demographic Bonus Ending[3]	Countries
Developed educational system	• Adequate levels of educational investment • Extensive achievements in terms of quality of learning • Universalization of private school enrollment • Efforts to increase quality at all levels of access to secondary school	2020	Costa Rica
Mixed educational system	Investment and quality levels are below those of developed systems, but results are significantly better than those of incipient systems	2020-2030	Panama, El Salvador
Incipient educational system	Much effort is required in terms of coverage and retention, although there is ample room to incorporate educational reforms	2035-2050	Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Dominican Republic

Source: PEN (2016).

3 Strategic situation of a country in which its economically active population increases progressively and steadily over a specific period of years. Countries should take advantage of this situation to improve their youth's skillsets.

education, improvement of teacher training, and attention to children's fundamental learning (Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas [IEEPP], 2017). These goals particularly focus on increasing coverage and higher quality and relevance in education and are a strategic dilemma to achieve sustainable human development in Central American and the Dominican Republic. That focus is based on the following:

> "Improving educational coverage, quality, and pertinences is a strategic dilemma for sustainable human development in Central America because it would allow the spread of opportunities for economic growth and social progress in various sectors of the population, many of whom currently live in conditions of poverty and social exclusion, which requires institutional reforms and investment levels that are currently out of reach for some of the region's countries. Although several countries have increased the allocation of resources to education, facing the historical lag, the challenges associated with the increase in demand generated by the demographic transition, and the new conditions of the national and international environment call for the optimization of the resources allocated to investments and the increase of funding opportunities. One of the main factors limiting this possibility is the fiscal weakness of the region's states. In 2011, only Honduras and Nicaragua had a tax burden greater than 15% of their GDP, which is lower than the Latin American average (18% of GDP) and even lower than the tax burden of developed countries (more than 30% of GDP)" (Álvarez et al., 2014, pp. 9-10).

Reading and Writing: Learning Poverty and Common Challenges in EGL Teaching

The problems that the region faces are related to the implementation of educational policies not being based on scientific evidence. Central America lacks a common conceptual framework and, as such, needs to identify successful and contextually-appropriate practices that can be applied in Spanish and Indigenous languages. The LAC Reads Capacity Program (LRCP), which gathers local evidence to promote the efficacy of EGL policies in the region, found out that most of the factors that influence reading comprehension known and applied so far in Latin America derive from American and European models (LRCP, 2016). Consequently, the studies carried out to date do not allow for an in-depth understanding of Central American reality, which is why it recommends promoting studies with larger samples and diverse topics.

Common issues across the region explain the current state of EGL instruction and account for the persistent pedagogical challenges associated with guiding the effective learning of reading and writing in the early grades. Improving the quality of teaching and, therefore, children's reading comprehension, presents a great challenge. According to Vijil (2017), education quality in Central American countries is deficient, and children are not learning to read and write well in the early grades.

One of those issues is the low levels of reading comprehension among children. In the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo [TERCE]) carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)[4], Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic show levels of reading comprehension that are below the average of the other Latin American countries. According to Flotts et al. (2016), two out of every five schoolchildren who finish third grade in Latin America lack the expected qualifications. Indeed, almost all Central American and Caribbean countries are below the Latin American average (700 points). Table 3 provides a brief account of the scores that third-grade students from Central American participant countries and the Dominican Republic achieved in reading.

TABLE 3. *Summary of TERCE results for the countries of the region*

Country	Country's EGL Situation Based on TERCE Results	Average Test Score
Dominican Republic	• It shows the lowest EGL results in the region • It has the highest proportion of underperforming schoolchildren • It is the Latin American country with the greatest improvement in the subject	614
Costa Rica	• It is the only country in Central America with an average test score higher than the Latin American EGL average • It registered the largest drop in test scores compared to the rest of Latin America (SERCE-TERCE period)	754
Honduras	• Its results are just below the Latin American average	681
Guatemala	• It shows results below the Latin American average • It is the third country with the greatest improvement in the Latin American region, only preceded by the Dominican Republic and Ecuador	678
El Salvador	• It did not participate in TERCE. In the 2006 SERCE assessment, it ranked fifth in Latin America as having the highest percentage of third-grade students in SERCE tests who rank at the lowest level in the reading tests	N/A
Nicaragua	• It is the second country with the lowest results in the region • It is the country with the least improvement in SERCE-TERCE in Central America	654

Note: Data taken from Ganimian (2016) and Flotts et al. (2016).

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4 Since 1997, UNESCO has been developing regional studies to determine how third- and sixth-grade primary school students in Latin America perform in fundamental areas such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The first study was carried out in 1997, the second in 2006, the third in 2013, and the most recent one in 2019. The studies are applied to a national sample defined in conjunction with the ministries of Education of the participating countries. The studies are administered by the Latin American Laboratory for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education (Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación [LLECE]), based in Santiago, Chile. The studies carried out so far are namely PERCE (1997), SERCE (2006), TERCE (2013), and ERCE (2019) based on their acronyms in Spanish.

To better understand these results, we highlight some findings obtained through associated factors analysis that helps explain the situation of the education systems, which in this case allude to third-grade assessments. We summarize below some of these findings, taken from Treviño et al. (2016):

A. Most schools in the region use grade repetition as a remedial measure for educational lags; this measure negatively influences student academic achievement.

B. Attendance at preschool between the ages of 4 and 6 is a positive factor for learning.

C. When parents monitor their children's school development, their scores tend to be higher.

D. Reading habits outside of school improve reading comprehension.

E. Paid child labor wreaks havoc on the effective performance of reading skills.

F. Girls perform better in reading than boys.

G. Indigenous and migrant children have consistently lower learning achievements than other children.

Most children in the region only achieve a literal reading level. According to TERCE, the majority of students are at reading levels I and II. Based on the study's parameters, those students can find explicit information, identify colloquial vocabulary, or understand the overall meaning of a text, but most of them are unable to assess what they just read or make complex inferences about the meaning of the text, skills that correspond to reading level IV (Flotts et al., 2016).

Students in El Salvador also scored low in EGL. Even though it did not participate in TERCE, El Salvador created in 2012 the Assessment of Learning Achievements in Basic Education test for third-grade readers, known as PAESITA in Spanish. Results show that, although students know how to read and write, they have not developed the ability to write texts using their own ideas (Chévez, 2019).

Another problem is the lack of access to relevant materials adjusted to the children's required literacy level. "A challenge was observed in the region related to the availability and use of materials for teaching literacy" (Vijil, 2017, p.12). According to LRCP (2016), the high cost and late distribution of materials lead to their lack of availability. This problem can be easily observed in Guatemala's Quiché-Spanish bilingual education contexts, where each teacher pays for the

educational materials they use and does not possess appropriate resources for bilingual teaching (Saz-Choxin, 2020).

In the last ten years, most Central American countries made progress in training teachers in EGL by integrating EGL training into higher education, as was the case in Costa Rica, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. In Nicaragua, initial primary teacher training is still added to eight to nine years of formal basic education (Álvarez et al., 2014). Despite the efforts made to improve teaching quality such as the implementation of support programs and the establishment of requirements to apply for a teaching position, the region still faces other challenges: improving teacher training, reviewing pre-service teaching programs, and reassessing the evidence-based teaching methods in place (Álvarez et al., 2014; Elvir, 2020; Flotts et al., 2016). Another problem is the lack of reading culture and of communication skills among teachers, which suggests an absence of reading role models for children (Álvarez, 2019).

EGL in Children's Mother Tongue

According to Instituto Cervantes (2019), Spanish is more relevant than ever before. The United States is expected to be the second non-Spanish-speaking country with the largest population of Spanish speakers by 2016, and one in three Americans is expected to have Hispanic-American ancestors.

FIGURE 3 **Geographical location of Indigenous languages in Central America in the 1980s**

Source: Background map of Central America by Daniel Sojuel. Adaptation by Romina Quezada from Cotter, J.V. (2003), Indians, 1980s, in Hall, C. & Pérez Brignoli, H., *Historical Atlas of Central America*, (p. 103). University of Oklahoma Press. Adapted with permission.

Table 4 shows the demographics of Spanish speakers by country in the Central American and Dominican regions, highlighting the percentage of Spanish native speakers and that of those who use Spanish as a second language or who learned it as a foreign language.

TABLE 4. *Demographics of Spanish speakers in Central America and the Dominican Republic*

Country	Population (inhab.)	Native Spanish Speakers (%)	Speakers of Spanish as a second or foreign language (%)
Guatemala	17,137,209	78.3%	21.7%
El Salvador	6,400,698	99.7%	0.3%
Honduras	9,158,345	98.7%	2.3%
Nicaragua	6,347,484	97.1%	2.9%
Costa Rica	5,058,007	99.3%	0.7%
Dominican Republic	10,358,320	97.59%	2.41%

Source: Instituto Cervantes (2019).

The countries listed in Table 4 share several features. Notably, Spanish is the most widespread mother tongue, even though other languages[5]–like Quiche (Guatemala), Miskitu or Miskito (Honduras and Nicaragua), Bribri (Costa Rica), or Nahuatl-Pipil (El Salvador)–prevail in areas with Indigenous settlements. Unlike Central America, no Indigenous language is spoken in the Dominican Republic (López & Callapa, 2019; Zajícová, 2017); however, a high percentage of Haitians whose mother tongue is Creole live in the country. The Second National Immigrant Survey (Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Development, 2017) estimates that the Dominican Republic is home to 497,825 people of Haitian origin, and 252,349 people who were born in the country have Haitian ancestry. Within the Haitian population in the Dominican Republic, 74.5% of children between ages 5 to 9 speak Creole as their mother tongue, and 54.3% are illiterate. The challenge for the Central American and Caribbean region is thus to create (like Nicaragua) or reinforce and deepen (like Honduras and Guatemala) linguistic policies that support teaching

5 In Guatemala, after the Peace Accords were signed in 1996 following a civil war where many Indigenous populations where persecuted by the army, changes were made in the constitution for native or autochthonous languages to be included in the coined term national languages (Secretaría de la Paz de la República, 1996).

Indigenous languages; these are the mother tongues of groups considered minorities, but which have prevailed and become part of each country's cultural heritage (López & Callapa, 2019).

The cultural wealth of Central America and the Dominican Republic has spread to New York City through its migrant population. On one hand, this diversity poses a serious challenge to the educational processes developed by local teachers; on the other hand, it presents a great possibility to be used as a means or resource to teach reading and writing in the City's multilingual and multiethnic context. Using the cultural and linguistic values of Central American and Dominican migrant children activates a friendlier process in terms of adaptation and integration to a culture in which they are immersed as part of their new social and educational reality.

EGL Teaching Overview:

What is Happening in the Region?

CHAPTER 2

EGL Teaching Overview:
What is Happening in the Region?

In the official documents of Central America and the Dominican Republic's education systems, EGL teaching is considered fundamental and of vital importance. However, how does this EGL inclusion in education systems translate into teaching curricula? This chapter aims at answering that question and thus provides New York teachers with a clear picture of what is happening in the region in terms of EGL.

Regional Overview

Halfway through 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) presented the first findings report of its Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Cuarto Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo [ERCE]) corresponding to curriculum analysis. The study began in 2019, when students from 18 countries[6] in the region were tested in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The initial results of the report provide an update about the approaches that can be found in literacy curricula, among other aspects (OREALC & Unesco Santiago, 2020).

Regarding third-grade Language teaching, ERCE's curriculum analysis identified key aspects of the pedagogical dimension of Language area of knowledge, summarized in Table 5.

It is important to highlight that limitations may exist in the implementation of these country curriculum analysis reports. Ministries and Secretaries of Education make their statements on the topic, but big inconsistencies often exist between what the curricula say and what takes place in the classroom.

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6 The same ERCE report shows that the following countries participated in the fourth edition: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, and Uruguay. Venezuela was included in the curriculum analysis.

TABLE 5. *Pedagogical Dimension of the Language Area of Knowledge*

Countries Studied	Pedagogical Dimension 3rd Grade Language Analysis (ERCE)
Guatemala	The national curriculum is preeminently framed by the sociocultural approach. It indicates that language learning in schools will start from real communication contexts rather than from artificially created situations and texts. This focus implies starting from the language of the social environment surrounding students because it constitutes their linguistic background, community culture, and the role of language in that culture (MINEDUC, 2008). The curriculum is also based on the communicative/textual approach because it encourages function, meaning, and language norm learning, among others, as tools to appropriate reality and interact with it.
El Salvador	The curriculum's pedagogical orientations are based on the constructivist approach, where students play an active role in the construction of learning and development of competences. It explicitly mentions that the approach to teach Language courses is communicative. Consequently, courses focus on the use of language for social interaction, both in its oral and written forms.
Honduras	The underlying curriculum approach is constructivist. Students actively construct knowledge informed by their environment. According to this perspective, each learner constructs the learning of their language through its oral and written variants in diverse contexts, which leads us to conclude that the curriculum approach is also communicative.
Nicaragua	The explicit pedagogical approach of the area is functional-communicative. Following this approach leads to understanding the goal of the Language and Literature area: to enhance communicative competences so that students become part of their sociocultural community. In other words, students learn to use a language competently and develop linguistic awareness of its value and uses. The approach's purpose is to contribute to the development of students' communicative competences, so they become speakers capable of using all language systems.
Costa Rica	The curriculum explicitly states that the language course focus is functional-communicative. Language is considered an effective means of expression, communication, and interaction with others; language is conceived of as a social practice where the communicative purpose, the context, the person to whom it is addressed (recipient), and the type of text become relevant. Finally, language teaching should focus on two objectives: communication and knowledge acquisition in a holistic way.
Dominican Republic	The Dominican curriculum proposes to frame Language learning through constructivism and the competency-based approach. Its principles are meaningful learning (at the psychological, sociocultural, and logical levels), the functionality of learning (construction and mobilization of knowledge and its application in a given context to respond to a situation, solve problems or produce new realities) and the integration of knowledge (concepts, procedures, attitudes and values) for proficiency.

Source: ERCE Curriculum Analysis (2019), by country. https://lleceunesco.org/

National Overviews

Between 2002 and 2012, national education systems progressively adopted a competency-based curriculum design (Álvarez et al., 2014). They established knowledge segments that corresponded to the functional communicative approach, which aims at encouraging students to improve their performance and use language as a social tool to understand and communicate effectively (MEP, 2013; MINED, 2008; MINED, 2019; MINEDUC, 2015; MINERD, 2014; SEDUC, 2003; Vijil, 2015). Despite these guidelines, there is little evidence that verifies the effectiveness of the methodologies used. Some of these countries have set strategic guidelines in literacy, with a special focus on the first grades of primary education. We outline these strategies below.

NICARAGUA. In 2015, the country officially began implementing the Child Development Approach Learning Strategy (*Estrategia de Aprendizaje con Enfoque de Desarrollo Infantil*). This strategy adopted the Synthetic Analytical Phonic Method (método Fónico-Analítico-Sintético [FAS]), implemented in Cuba, as the mandatory method to teach EGL. This method prioritizes the development of five skills: phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, fluency, basic spelling rules, and writing in relation to lettering (CIASES & LRCP, 2020). The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education sees FAS as the most effective method for teaching reading and writing in early grades but lacks evidence to support such a claim.

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC. In partnership with organizations, cultural centers, and universities, MINERD has been promoting reforms to improve the teaching of literacy through the implementation of the Early Grade Learning Support Policy (*Política de Apoyo a los Aprendizajes en los Primeros Grados*). The implemented strategies include teacher training and support in areas of early literacy, creation of literate environments, training of library staff, reading camps, provision of school libraries, learning fairs, and story contests, among other activities (Vijil, 2019).

HONDURAS. There is no evidence of an education policy or official guidelines from the Secretary of Education that specifically addresses the teaching of reading and writing in early grades. However, the Education Fundamental Law, the Law for the Promotion of Reading and the Book, and other institutional instruments provide some orientation to develop skills focused

on Spanish language reading, as well as Indigenous and Afro-Honduran languages. However, none of these legal instruments refer specifically to EGL skills (LRCP, 2018a).

GUATEMALA. The state has not developed any official policy or guidelines for the improvement of EGL. In line with LRCP's country profile, a series of programs and projects exist that promote reading and have become a de facto public policy. "Other actors consider that Guatemala should establish its policy on teaching literacy focused on early childhood, to guarantee its teaching at an early age" (LRCP, 2018b). Despite these recommendations, Guatemala has developed more programs for EGL teaching than any other country in the region, produced a variety of high-quality materials for teaching and learning, designed monitoring and evaluation tools, and been a pioneer in the development of EGL teacher training programs, including initiatives to teach in students' mother tongue.

COSTA RICA. According to the Ministry of Public Education (MEP, 2013) the Spanish Program for the First Cycle of Basic Education (*Programa de Español para el Primer Ciclo de la Educación Básica*) states that language teaching must follow the Education Policy Towards the 21st Century (*Política Educativa hacia el Siglo XXI*), which posits that language learning is a central element of politics and includes the oral and written forms of language. In addition, Costa Rica extended the literacy learning period from one to two years in 2013 and fostered the use of oral and reading comprehension activities to language teaching starting in preschool (MEP, 2013). The guidelines are still in force since they were included in the implementation of the Educational Policy approved in 2016.

EL SALVADOR. According to a study that Urías (2013) carried out for El Salvador's Ministry of Education, the Ministry established in 2008 a program for Language courses that focuses on developing the capacities that students need to communicate effectively in their environment. The program also included teaching reading with a focus on the reading competency. According to the then National Institute for the Evaluation of Education of Mexico[7] (Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación Educativa [INEE], 2010), this competence lies in the individual ability to understand, use, think, and show interest in written texts to achieve personal goals, develop knowledge and personal potential and, consequently, take part in society.

CONCLUSIONS. Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic have issued official guidelines from specific educational strategies or policies, whereas Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala have issued norms and guidelines based on curriculum programming. All cases have in common the adoption of the functional-communicative approach. However, research on literacy has increasingly shown that there are gaps and inconsistencies between official statements and what is implemented while managing the curriculum in class, which indicates that efforts to improve literacy in the region are insufficient, as the results from national and international assessments confirm (Vijil, 2015).

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7 This institute was dissolved by the Mexican Government in 2019 (Ortega & Ibarra, 2019). For more information: https://bit.ly/39a7Jqd

The 5 T's to Teach EGL Applied to Central America and the Dominican Republic

Arlington (2002) proposed a conceptual framework to identify successful EGL teaching processes, known as the 5 Ts. Arlington's work served as a starting point for recent studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2016) that have adapted his conceptual framework and suggested five key elements to make the teaching of EGL effective. These elements are the following:

A. **Teaching:** Arlington (2002) defined effective and exemplary teaching as the explicit use of specific EGL skills, highlighting the importance of transferring responsibilities to students gradually to help them become independent readers and learn how to self-regulate their reading activity.

B. **Tasks:** Arlington (2002) recognizes that, in classrooms where effective teaching takes place, learning activities take time and facilitate different learning options, interdisciplinary work and motivation to learn. Teaching activities vary according to the skills that are being developed.

C. **Texts:** To learn to read, children need varied and diverse books that match their reading levels, interests, and motivations (Arlington, 2002). These books should allow children to apply the strategies and skills that each teacher showed to them.

D. **Time:** According to Arlington (2002), time is a determining factor in EGL teaching. In most effective classrooms, and in most cases, students devote 50% of class time to reading and writing.

E. **Tests:** Tests must be formative, and students should see mistakes as an opportunity to learn more and improve their learning. Tests should evidence learning in different formats adjusted to students' needs and specificities. They should allow teachers to draw a line of progression adjusted to each learner's level and determine how far students can go with the appropriate type of support.

To provide a clearer picture of how schools in the region teach EGL, Table 6 on pages 32-37 summarizes the information for each country according to each dimension of the 5 T conceptual framework.

Teaching Models and Methods

Teachers in New York City may need to know how educators teach reading and writing in Central America and the Dominican Republic because the debate on theoretical models and methods is incipient and influences EGL classroom practices and learning.

Theoretical models on teaching reading and writing have served as a frame of reference to develop curriculum proposals; however, there is no regional consensus for their application, and it is hard to identify how these guide teaching practice. The LRCP (LRCP, 2016; LRCP, 2018; LRCP, 2018; Vijil, 2019) mapped government agencies, higher education institutions, international non-governmental organizations, and key participants who drive policies and initiatives to improve the quality of EGL in the region; the mapping allowed to know their opinions on different areas of EGL education. This process showed that schools in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic teach using a combination of different educational procedures of various origins. Given this overview, most countries' curriculum policies are in many cases contradictory and create discrepancies between official documents and classroom practices.

Regarding methodologies, in Latin America, "the most common classroom practices are centered on teachers" (LRCP, 2016, p. 4). However, the current state of research prevents us from further generalizing what happens in the classroom when students are learning to read and write, particularly in Central America. Based on the studies cited above, we encourage researchers to produce evidence on the methodologies used in classrooms and their effectiveness in childhood learning.

TABLE 6. *Dimensions to teach EGL effectively according to the 5 T conceptual framework*

Effective teaching dimension	Research-based claims	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Dominican Republic
Teaching	• Teaching specific early literacy skills in an explicit way • Promoting gradual self-regulation when reading	The communicative approach is assumed and officially declared in the basic national curriculum.	The approach is communicative, playful, globalizing, and game-based to achieve personal self-assertion, autonomy, socialization with other people and connection with their environment, without neglecting its characteristics, needs, interests, and value promotion. The 2014 official curriculum put forth the functional-communicative teaching approach.	Teaching is framed by the functional-communicative approach. However, the basic national curriculum mentions communicative competences as a whole, rather than as a competence that requires the development of micro-skills or constructs, as the current scientific literature suggests.	Although the functional-communicative approach is mentioned in the national curriculum, explicit teaching is limited to decoding skills. Reading comprehension activities are vague and imprecise. The same competencies appear in different grades. Only content changes from one grade to another; there is no progression.	The development of an explicit and comprehensive teaching process of EGL skills is not visible. The development of phonological awareness and reading conventionalities (directionality, linearity, disposition of writing on paper) are addressed. However, other skills such as decoding and reading fluency are not directly targeted. Organized competencies are defined from the simplest to the most complex ones, although not all of them are related to EGL. Self-regulation is promoted based on the parts of the reading process.
Tasks	• Continuous processes • Motivating and multidisciplinary	Activities aimed at developing communication and language skills, such as writing one's own name, phonological memory, visual reading, oral language, motor skills, graphomotor skills, concept of print, alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, rhymes, initial and final sounds. In primary school, teachers work on students' fluency, vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabetic principle to reach decoding, writing as expression and line.	The curriculum presents globalized methodological suggestions called earning and development situations. However, practices linked to a traditional, behaviorist approach persist, with synthetic, phonological, and syllabic literacy methods remaining in use.	Activities are not continuous, gradual, or systematic.	Short and simple activities (such as *fill in the blanks*). Repetitive, monotonous, and decontextualized exercises. The same methodology is used in phoneme learning since it follows the didactic sequence prescribed by the FAS method.	It defines strategies that require continuous, multidisciplinary activities that increase students' motivation, such as project-based learning.

TABLE 6. *Dimensions to teach EGL effectively according to the 5 T conceptual framework*

Effective teaching dimension	Research-based claims	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Dominican Republic
Texts	• Using a variety of books of various genres and suitable to the level of each child	There is a series of books with activities to develop the aspects considered in the tests. These texts are designed by MINEDUC and correspond to what is defined by the National Reading Panel. In addition, their design foresees the inclusion of the country's 25 languages, although gaps in mother tongue texts persist.	Material to teach literacy is available, rich in resources that rescue national identity, such as Comprendo and the Cipotes y Cipotas collection.	General criteria appear in the official curriculum. For instance: • Sufficient amount and variety of increasingly complex texts. • Various types of texts: journalistic, scientific, fictional. • Great variety of literary texts belonging to different genres (poetry, short story, novel, theater) from different regions. • Oral literature typical of each region, such as songs, proverbs, romances and rounds as they form a cultural repository and memory map. • Selection of classics from regional, national, and universal literature. Since 2019, a new official textbook for EGL teaching is being piloted in a small sample of educational centers.	Only textbooks and associated materials are used. There are no criteria to define the selection of texts. Official Language and Literature textbooks for each grade of primary school are available, as part of the same national educational series. In 2014, a new Language and Literature textbook for first grade came out. The book is in line with the FAS method, structured in learning stages (acquisition, consolidation, and autonomous practice).	The state encourages the use of different reading materials and emphasizes the functional use of the literate environment and libraries. However, criteria to define the selection of texts are missing.
Time	• Devoting at least 50% of the effective class time to reading	Every day, from 45 minutes to an hour.	At the national level, almost everything is based on learning through letter and line repetition. The largest amount of time is devoted to this process, but without specifying in what proportion.	There is no set reading time during class.	There is no set reading time during class.	There is no specific time devoted to reading.

TABLE 6. *Dimensions to teach EGL effectively according to the 5 T conceptual framework*

Effective teaching dimension	Research-based claims	Guatemala	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Dominican Republic
Tests	• Using clear indicators • Promoting a path of progression • Using instruments	Evaluation of skills is related to communication and language learning, through indicators for skills such as writing, fluency, concept of print and phonological awareness, among other key EGL skills. Progression routes are established, but they are difficult to apply in class.	The Early Childhood and Kindergarten Education Curriculum suggests process assessments based on development indicators. These are based on the international development indicators and are specific to both age group and literacy level. Progress is evaluated throughout the year, with a formative focus. In addition, the assessment process encourages family participation.	The national curriculum does not specify indicators to assess literacy, but these guidelines are stated in the National Educational Standards. The most recent version (2018) includes gradual standards within each grade and in subsequent grades; EGL skill progression is guaranteed in this way. The end-of-year standardized tests are designed following these guidelines.	Learning activities are confused with assessment activities. There is no path of progression and no clear indicators.	Learning indicators are defined by competency, but they are very broad. They do not indicate a path of progression.

Note. Table 6 contains information from MINED (2019), MINERD (2016) and responses to an online questionnaire completed by key participants from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala involved in EGL teaching, learning, and teacher training. We consulted with key participants when the information was not available in documents. Key participants answered the questionnaire between July 28 and July 30, 2020. They were selected according to their role in the implementation processes of national curricula

Teaching Reading and Writing to Central American and Dominican Migrant Children in a Culturally Relevant Way

CHAPTER 3

Teaching Reading and Writing to Central American and Dominican Migrant Children in a Culturally Relevant Way

New York is a cosmopolitan city that welcomes people from all cultures. Consequently, teachers from the different districts in the city must adopt a culturally relevant pedagogy that responds to the learning needs of Central American and Caribbean children.

Jennerjohn (2020) describes the education that supports culture as one that retrieves students' cultural heritage to link the curriculum to their lives. For Peralta (2002), the cultural relevance of a curriculum helps contextualize learning which, in turn, fosters evoking prior knowledge in a meaningful way, which is essential to address reading comprehension (Hattan & Lupo, 2020; Kaefer, 2020).

Based on the above and on culturally relevant pedagogy, this chapter offers recommendations to reinforce the development of reading comprehension skills, creative writing, and phonological awareness, in addition to strengthening the learning of these skills through the recovery of Central American and Caribbean cultural heritage as a resource for reading and writing in classrooms where children from that region learn. These three skills were selected based on the evidence framework available in the referred area, which provides guidance on the need to produce processes to reinforce them.

Each section discusses concepts and theoretical references based on EGL skills, as well as recommendations for planning a class to address the content used in teaching which, according to Schares (2017), are key indicators to develop cultural leadership. Links to resources available online that can be used in the teaching processes are also provided.

Teachers as Cultural Leaders

Practicing Cultural Leadership. Cultural leadership implies bringing together the school's culture and the children's culture. Cultural relevance is closely linked to educational inclusion to the extent that diversity is integrated into teaching processes to guarantee the same learning opportunities for all students (Montoya, 2007).

Cultural competence (Schares, 2017), in turn, enables teachers to understand cultural diversity in their classroom, and seeks to incorporate it to ensure motivation, relevance, and meaningful learning. A person who teaches and is culturally competent has the ability to reflect on the biases that arise from the privileged positions created from a hegemonic ideology and where that diversity is exploited to justify the learning gap (Wagner et al., 2012).

To practice cultural leadership, teachers must practice some competencies. Schares (2017) provides a series of indicators to achieve this, which have been adapted in Table 7.

TABLE 7. *Cultural leadership achievement indicators for teachers*

Component	Indicator
Content Development	• Frame the theory according to the context and culture of students. • Use examples, metaphors and analogies that reflect the context of the group of students. • Identify, address, and correct biases in the curriculum.
Planning	• Plan while thinking of different scenarios and learning modalities. • Use assessment data to identify who is learning at the expected pace and who is struggling. • Incorporate resources from the surroundings or community to facilitate learning. • Consider using multiple formats to display information.
Instructional Strategies	• Model high-level thinking through conversation. • Employ cooperative learning and promote collaboration over competition. • Comunicate high expectations to all students. • Connect teaching strategies with real learning needs.

TABLE 7. *Cultural leadership achievement indicators for teachers*

Component	Indicator
Evaluation	• Use several evaluation formats. • Evaluate instructional strategies. • Monitor and report progress. • Take advantage of the strengths of each student. • Provide specific feedback.
Classroom Management	• Reinforce attitudes that promote a good classroom atmosphere. • Address instantly any gender-biased or violent behavior through positive disciplinary practices and resolve. • Promote respect and tolerance to deconstruct any prejudices and symbolic violence.

Teaching Reading and Writing from a Cultural Leadership Pedagogical Perspective

Below are specific examples of the application of good educational practices according to culturally relevant pedagogy, designed and adapted for students of Central American and Dominican origin. The examples suggest teachers to reflect on how to integrate cultural relevance into their classroom practices. Strategies to help implement the pedagogy in class are provided, which intend to make important changes to teaching reading and writing in settings as complex as the multicultural one.

TOPIC 1. Reading comprehension from a culturally relevant perspective

According to Tunmer & Hoover (2019), reading comprehension is the goal of reading, and it is achieved through the complex interaction among cognitive skills under two basic components: letter and word recognition, and oral language comprehension. Therefore, each learner needs to apply language comprehension skills (development of inferences and vocabulary, among others) in such a way as to facilitate the construction of meaning from what is read. The process of teaching to understand what is read may be organized in the following phases.

1. To plan: Promote empathy, think outside the classroom, and consider guidelines.

To integrate cultural relevance to the teaching of reading comprehension, teachers will be guided through the following points to reflect on and think about the curriculum from the perspective and emotions of Central American and Dominican children.

A. Promote empathy. Remember your childhood.

- Reflect and write about the following:

Describe your early grade literacy learning process.

What would you have liked your teacher to know?

Where did you need help?

How is your experience different from that of your students of Central American and Dominican origin?

How is your experience similar to that of your students of Central American and Dominican origin?

B. Think "outside the school."

- Complete what is requested in the table below (Table 8).

TABLE 8. *Reading composition: topics and resources*

Curricular Competencies	Biases: What does the curriculum omit?	Interesting and relevant topics in the community	Resources available in the community	Potential learning activities

TABLE 8. *Reading composition: topics and resources*

Curricular Competencies	Biases: What does the curriculum omit?	Interesting and relevant topics in the community	Resources available in the community	Potential learning activities

C. Read the guidelines in the boxes that follow (Figure 4).

- Mark the ones you incorporate or use with your students of Central American and Dominican origin.

FIGURE 4

Reading composition: guidelines

LEARN representative texts of the country of origin, popular or traditional songs, history, or gastronomy.

KEEP IN MIND that the mother tongue can be the starting point for learning and progressive mastery of the English language. Working in teams or pairs helps a lot.

IDENTIFY people in the community with whom migrant schoolchildren have ties. Ask for class support from those people.

2. To promote oral language understanding: Practice structured dialogues.

Oral language comprehension is important to understand what we read since written language is a representation of how the world is perceived based on sociocultural interactions. Therefore, we invite you to create spaces to promote the understanding of oral language while considering the context of origin of Central American and Dominican children. To do this, we offer you the following guidelines.

A. Conduct structured dialogues that seek to create the "*third space*"[8] (Benson, 2010). Structured dialogues are the best way for children to participate actively. A structured dialogue should ensure everyone's participation. A series of resources is suggested to help develop a structured dialogue.

- To organize the dialogue, you may use the *Talk* strategy (Hadley et al., 2020).

FIGURE 5 *Talk Strategy*

Note: *Figure based on Hadley et al., 2020*

OBSERVE / Which children speak less? Which ones speak most? How to achieve balance?

Give turns to speak

DEFINE clear indicators you want to observe and develop recording tools. WRITE down any improvements consistently.

Keep a record of who participates

Ask open questions

ASK challenging questions, preferably evoking the students' cultures and interests.

Listen actively

LISTEN carefully and think about the answers you are going to give to the questions.

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8 According to Benson, the "third space" is the space of intersection between the culture of the school and that of the context of origin. At that intersection, each infant detects the biases of the curriculum and finds ways to make it relevant to themselves.

- Complete a table like the following one (Table 9) by writing down aspects of the types of texts, the topics of interest and your alternative uses. Keep this information at hand to continue structuring dialogues.

TABLE 9. *Reading composition: texts and topics*

Most used texts in the classroom	Topics covered by the text	Topics of interest to my students	Options vis-a-vis the most used text (alternative text)

- Refer to Table 10 on page 47, which shows a guide with useful questions to create the meeting point between the most used text and the cultural background of your students. The colors represent the level of reading comprehension that you want to promote through the question (**black** = literal comprehension; **purple** = inferential; **pink** = critical).

TABLE 10. *Question guide to find meeting points between texts and cultural backgrounds*

Questions about the most used text in the classroom	Meeting point	Script of questions about the alternative text
What is the reading about?	What differentiates one story from the other?	What is the reading about?
Which main characters do you remember?	Which of the two did you like more? Why?	Which main characters do you remember?
What facts or events do they face?	Which text better represents you?	What facts or events do they face?
How do they solve their problems?	What do you take away from each text? What life lesson does it teach you?	How do they solve their problems?
What is the moral of the story?		What is the moral of the story?
How do you think the characters felt when …?		How do you think the characters felt when …?
Do you feel that something like this could happen to you or your family?		Do you feel that something like this could happen to you or your family?
What would you have done differently from what happened in the story?		What would you have done differently from what happened in the story?
How did you feel when …?		How did you feel when …?
What memories did the story bring back when …?		What memories did the story bring back when …?
What do you think of the actions of each character?		What do you think of the actions of each character?
What did you like about the story?		What did you like about the story?
What did you dislike about the story?		What did you dislike about the story?
What would change in the story?		What would change in the story?

- Implement the *Talk* Strategy (as a way to structure the dialogue).

B. Ask the group of students to tell culturally relevant stories.

- Suggest using different formats to strengthen the use of language. Some themes include:
  - important family celebrations
  - historical dates of the country of origin and their importance
  - family memories
  - childhood anecdotes
  - stories from community or neighborhood where the student lives

We suggest using the following formats to tell stories: writing a narrative for anecdotes or stories; drawing the story; making a family album; creating a digital book using available resources (such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Microsoft PowerPoint, or others).

3. Resources to apply the strategies: Mother tongue, family members, and Internet sites.

Additionally, it is important that children be allowed to express themselves in their mother tongue in order to master its underlying linguistic knowledge. That learning will later be transferred to the second language, in this case, English. To achieve this, we suggest the following activities:

A. For the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies, using the mother tongue is important, especially if the group of students do not master the English language or there are some minors who do not do so completely. Under those circumstances, request support from your students' family members and ask them to:

- Visit the classroom to participate as readers or assistants and help students speak in their mother tongue. This option is also appropriate when the teacher does not speak the children's mother tongue.

- Model the strategies from home, in their own language, and compare what they do at school versus what they do at home.

B. To access resources available online to use in the classroom, we suggest visiting the following sites (all resources are in English):

- **Folktales, myths and other stories from Central America.** This is a site containing myths, stories, and legends from Central America: https://americanfolklore.net/folklore/2010/07/central_american_folklore.html

- **Geography Now.** This YouTube channel offers cultural, demographic, and social information on Central American countries and the Dominican Republic. All videos are available in English. https://www.youtube.com/c/GeographyNow/videos

- **Teaching Central America.** This site offers free downloadable material, such as lessons, biographies, poetry, and prose by personalities and artists of Central American origin, such as Roque Dalton, Rigoberta Menchú, Claribel Alegría and Ernesto Cardenal: https://www.teachingcentralamerica.org/about

TOPIC 2. Phonological Awareness

Phonological instruction may favor the transition from L1 to L2 in Central American children because Spanish is a pre-eminently transparent language, while the phonological system of English is not. Research results suggest paying attention to phonemes because these direct brain processing towards areas that deal with language, which prepares children for effective reading (Dehaene, 2015). Phonological awareness development predicts reading, along with alphabetical knowledge and phonological memory (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008).

Active processes of phonological awareness, such as manipulating and segmenting linguistic units, show a higher correlation with reading levels than passive tasks such as identifying and recognizing phonemes (Bravo et al., 2011). Above all, L1 phonological skills are transferable to L2 and underpin the development of the target language. Learners with low phonological awareness in their first language often face difficulties in learning a second one (Anthony et al., 2009; Fonseca-Mora & Fernández-Corbacho, 2017; Sparks & Ganschow, 1993).

1. To teach phonological awareness, without neglecting cultural relevance, begin with self–awareness and reflection to gain a deeper insight on your particular attitude towards the cultures of Central America and the Dominican Republic.

A. How do you value Central American culture and diversity in educational settings?

B. Can you identify any biases or prejudices?

C. In your role as a teacher, do you carry out educational processes that may favor the integration of different cultures? If so, which ones?

D. What do you need to know to suggest activities of greater cultural relevance?

2. To plan and address content, involve students' families, make a diagnosis, and design a variety of activities.

A. Include families when planning activities. Family members can provide information on cultural elements that you can use in class. At the same time, it is important to guide families on how to reinforce phonological awareness skills at home through songs, videos, or challenging questions related to everyday texts, such as product labels.

B. Assess phonological awareness proficiency in L1 and L2.

- Based on the needs identified in L1, plan interventions that favor the transition to L2 or L3.

C. Plan a variety of activities that respond to the different levels of phonological awareness learning identified during the diagnosis. Keep in mind which groups or students are in greater need of support.

3. To manage content and direct instruction, consider the pillars that make up cultural identity (Vargas, 2014), displayed in Table 11:

TABLE 11. *Pillars of cultural identity*

Pillars of Cultural Identity	Examples of Ideas and Activities
Self-awareness and self-esteem: students' self-perception and personal history	• Start with students' first names, which are essential parts of their identities. Students can compare their names with those of their peers and observe similarities and differences in structure • Let students tell the story of their names: why was their name chosen? Why does it make each person unique and identify them? How many syllables and sounds does their name have? Which of their peers' names rhyme with theirs?
Recognition of the immediate social environment: family, school, and community	• Suggest students look for outstanding anecdotes in their family and share them with their peers
Recognition of the immediate natural environment: knowledge and appreciation of the natural resources that exist in the geographical environment	• Use texts where the natural environment of both Central America and the Caribbean are detailed and create picture books with the images of the region's natural resources • Help students articulate the names of flora and fauna species so they can identify their phonic segments
Cultural recognition: the ways of life, worldview, and cultural heritage of Central American children that retrieve intangible assets such as cuisine and dance, as well as tangible assets such as arts and crafts	• Select rhymes, sayings, tongue twisters, recipes for traditional dishes, and nursery rhymes that are specific to your students' cultural backgrounds. Select texts that are used in everyday life in practice, such as shopping lists, billboards, or invitations. Select words and phrases from the texts or everyday words that your children easily identify. • Examples of children's songs to make activities (in English): https://www.allaroundthisworld.com/listen/latin-american-songs-for-kids/#.X6V4U2hKjlU • Examples of tongue twisters to reinforce phonological awareness skills (in Spanish): https://www.speakinglatino.com/6-tongue-twisters-to-improve-your-spanish-pronunciation/#t-1588091610794

4. To promote direct instruction of phonological awareness:

Work in sessions that holistically develop levels of phonological awareness: syllabic, lexical, and phonemic. One way to promote phonological awareness development using culturally relevant texts is presenting a story like Coatlcelic: Naluta's Secret, (available in full at https://issuu.com/lacuculmeca/docs/el_secreto_de_naluta). Below is a short summary of the story that was used to create the activities in this guide. We are sharing the summary to guide those who are yet to read the whole story.

Coatlcelic: Naluta's Secret

In the story, Lisa and Simón were walking through the Coatlcelic forest, the Bosawas Reservation located in the northwest of Nicaragua; the Garifuna, Miskito, Rama and Sumu populations live there. Lisa and Simón felt scared when they saw a tiger and some animals that they considered dangerous. Soon after, an old woman – who looked like a witch — spoke to them. Her name was Naluta, and she introduced them to Pachuat, the little tiger whose mother had died at the hands of hunters. The lady asked them if they wanted to know her secret; they said yes. Naluta took them to a cave where there was a waterfall. It looked like magic. After returning from that wonderful trip and eating zapotes, Naluta confessed to her secret being the forest, and to her fear of that place dying without her. That treasure needed to be protected from the cruel poachers and the industrial machinery that were destroying the forest. Finally, Naluta gave them a box full of forest soil and seeds of all colors.

Ask some questions after reading the story out loud (Table 12). Each question helps develop skills with different levels of complexity. Teachers can implement this activity using any story as long as it shows culturally relevant features.

TABLE 12. *Examples of questions applied to the story* Coatlcelic: Naluta's Secret

How many syllables can you hear in the word Simón? And in the name Lisa? Which one has more syllables? Do these words have the same length, or is one longer than the other? Let's look at the number of sounds and check!	• With what sound does the word "tiger" start? Pronounce the /t/ sound. • Name another animal that begins with the same sound. Do you think that the animal you named also lives in Central America? • Let's play "I spy:" name objects in the room that begin with the sound /t/, until you discover an object that was previously chosen (each teacher chooses it).
Count how many words you hear in the question: Do you want to know my secret? Clap for each sound spoken. What is the last sound of the word want? What happens if I remove this sound? How would the word sound? What word would it form if I add the /s/ sound at the end?	• Can you mention a word that ends with the same final syllable as waterfall? • Create a word train: each participant takes turns to say a word that begins with the final sound of the word spoken by the one before them. Thus, the whole group participates in a chain. For example, cave-vase-zebra.
According to the story, after returning from the waterfall, the characters ate zapotes. This is a common fruit in Nicaragua. Show a picture and ask: In the United States, do you eat any fruit similar to zapotes? How many sounds does the name of that fruit have?	The story tells that Naluta gave Lisa and Simón some seeds so that the forest could continue to grow over time. What plants would you like to grow in that forest? Which animals would you like to treasure from your native country? How can you contribute to the conservation of natural resources?

FIGURE 6 **Varieties of zapote: Black zapote, chicozapote, and red zapote, also known as mamey or sonzapote**

Sources: Zapote by sandid (pixabay.com); chicozapote by riki risnandar (pexels.com); Zapote002_03069 by gnexus (creativecommons.org; licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0).

Each teacher can tell the stories or the content of the texts orally, show the related images and ask questions, or even play challenging games at different moments of the story.

5. Resources for further consultation to work on this skill.

D. To select online resources to work in the classroom, we recommend consulting the following portals:

- **Lesson planning that schools in the Dominican Republic use.** The lesson plan includes the procedural contents of phonological awareness and the communicative competencies established by the Dominican curriculum. It uses a shopping list and simulates a communication situation in which teachers may read the text attached (resource in Spanish): https://bit.ly/3jGQ5gq

- **This video shows a teaching and learning process in Guatemala,** aimed at first-grade students. In the video, a teacher is using various strategies to promote syllabic awareness of words, such as listening to songs and using materials from the surroundings for students to count the syllables they hear. A short story is read, and students are asked to count the syllables of the words that they hear (resource in Spanish): https://bit.ly/33ScQZf

- **"Aprendizaje de la lectoescritura"** (Literacy Learning) is a book that provides guidelines for working with phonological awareness in a bilingual context. It addresses differences between the consonantal and vowel systems of Mayan languages and Spanish, as well as their implications in the development of phonological awareness activities (resource in Spanish): https://bit.ly/3jU8DK6

TOPIC 3. Encouraging children's creative writing in multicultural classrooms

According to García (2011), creative writing develops when it abandons the limitations of professional, journalistic, academic, and technical writing; it includes literature, its genres, and subgenres. Unlike non-literary writing, which is generally informative, creative writing is characterized by its aesthetic quality and originality.

Promoting children's creativity through writing provides new and different possibilities in the classroom, without excluding any context where creativity may develop, even from early childhood. Figure 7 illustrates this point:

FIGURE 7 Creative writing activities

Preschoolers & young students (K–1)

Changing the lyrics of songs and making up new ones

Scribbling with paints of various colors

Playing "travel the world" and then drawing the places visited

Schoolchildren Grade 2 & up

Writing letters or dedications in art class

Rewriting stories, fables, or legends with new characters or events

Starting from known cooking recipes to make new ones or creating their favorite dishes

Creative writing focuses on encouraging the use of imagination and other creative processes in any form of graphic representation, whether alphabetic or pre-syllabic (Tok & Kandemir, 2015). For Álvarez (2008), a good creative writing proposal presents several components, among which this guide highlights three:

A. It fosters a playful, experimental, and aesthetic relationship with language. This implies seeing the writing activity as an opportunity to learn by playing, experimenting with what is written, to rewrite and produce different graphic forms (e.g., drawings, letters, labels, stories, comics, poetry, stories, among others).

B. It gives way to other readings: non-verbal cues, previous readings or graphemes, readings of the world around them and its creatures, readings of forms and sounds. All spaces – the world, the social environment, the school, one's home – allow or suggest something new to write about. A country's anthem, the colors of its national flag, or an Indigenous dance allow students to observe, process, and create topics for writing.

C. It uses slogans, which are key in activating the imagination and the creative process. Like reading comprehension, teaching to write creatively must be done explicitly; it requires guiding and modeling writing situations as well as stimulating the imagination.

According to Arroyo et al. (2011), in multicultural contexts, creative writing is considered a personal cognitive process and a personal product that can draw attention to whether the writer

and the text are immersed in interrelated social processes. Thus, writing creatively in culturally diverse classrooms must take intercultural development into account. It is possible to take advantage of a culturally diverse class to teach creative writing.

Teachers must know their students socially and culturally, possess skills and abilities to promote students' integration through educational activities, and show respect for those beliefs beyond their own culture.

1. To plan how to teach creative writing in a diverse classroom: consider Intercultural Pedagogy and explore your students' sociocultural contexts.

The intercultural-pedagogical approach assumes that multicultural environments provide an opportunity to educate, and that people are multicultural. This approach demands being aware of values and beliefs.

A. Make a first assessment of the origin and cultural relevance of your students. Inquire about their country of origin, the languages that each child inherited, who in the class speaks English as a second language, and which stories or legends they have heard most often.

B. Take advantage of the information collected through the assessment and prepare an inclusive creative writing process, making every child feel included regardless of their English level. Make sure that the texts produced tell stories from their own perspective. Ask your students to interact orally as well as in writing, regardless of their reading and writing levels.

C. Explore the sociocultural contexts and origin of each of your students. Find out what they know about US culture and what they share across cultures. Likewise, observe any common features between the cultures of Central America and the Caribbean. Central American and Caribbean realities share many elements, which may enable collective motivations for different writing purposes. As you prepare your lesson, answer the following questions:

What would your students like to know about US culture?

What aspects about US culture are similar to those of your students' cultural origin?

What aspects about the history, geography, or culture of your students' countries of origin would you like to continue exploring in the classroom?

D. Encourage community and interrelation between different cultures through extracurricular activities that promote communication and values such as equality, respect, and acceptance. Figure 8 on page 59 shows some ideas to achieve this goal.

FIGURE 8 Extracurricular activities to encourage creative writing

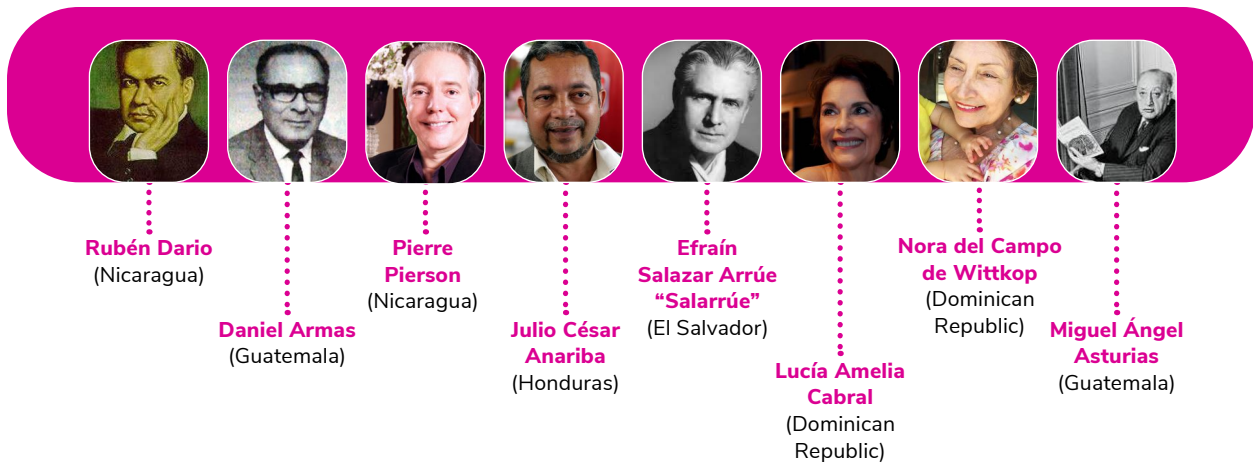|	
Organize festivals	Suggest that the class celebrate a holiday. Ask younger students to draw and write essays related to that holiday; ask older ones to write poems. During the festival, ask students to do recitals or reading and drawing marathons.
Prepare children's art galleries	• Suggest students to draw their favorite landscapes or how they remember a natural landmark in their country of birth. • Ask students to paint at will landscapes, animals, their house, their family, their country, or the national symbols of their country of origin. • Exhibit the works created and invite people to visit the gallery.
Organize game days related to reading and writing in the classroom	Invite your students to draw or write stories told by someone in their family. Then, let them build on those stories and make up songs. They may work in teams and act out the stories or dramatize their pictures.

2. To help children from Central America or the Caribbean read and write in the classroom: resort to the literature and oral tradition of those countries.

A. Use the most popular children's fiction readings from each country. Do some research about the traditional stories and legends, popular songs, the most outstanding facts in the history of the region; these elements are always helpful because they come out among the first motivations for creative writing.

B. Encourage your students to read texts popular in the region where they were born. Central America and the Dominican Republic abound with literary works for children; reading them may increase their interest in writing. Figure 9 (page 60) displays a series of male and female writers from the region who have published storybooks and stories for children.

C. Use videos about the life and culture of your students' countries of origin; choose videos that show traditions, national symbols, and historical themes. You may also select videos related to geography, flora and fauna, gastronomy, or children's games, among other topics.

D. Encourage your students to consider situations or events that they love about their culture to motivate them to write. They may share ideas and compare their favorite situations with those of students from other cultures.

FIGURE 9 Storytellers from Central America and the Caribbean

Rubén Dario
(Nicaragua)

Daniel Armas
(Guatemala)

Pierre Pierson
(Nicaragua)

Julio César Anariba
(Honduras)

Efraín Salazar Arrúe "Salarrúe"
(El Salvador)

Lucía Amelia Cabral
(Dominican Republic)

Nora del Campo de Wittkop
(Dominican Republic)

Miguel Ángel Asturias
(Guatemala)

E. Listen to audiobooks with your students and pause the recording from time to time to discuss those aspects of the stories that draw the most attention from students.

F. Make connections between writing topics and cultural characteristics in the Central American and Dominican region. You may invite your students to write about gastronomy, traditional dances, customs, and religious holidays in their region. These connections always encourage writing because students like remembering how life looks like in the country from where they come. For instance:

- Ask students to write a cooking recipe for a traditional dish from their country, draw it, and present their illustrated recipe at a Central American, Dominican, or Caribbean food fair.

- Suggest making crafts to represent the traditional clothing of your students' countries of origin. Explain that they may draw their respective costumes or model them using clay or play dough, and then present their creations in class.

- Ask students' families to tell their children about religious events or popular festivals in the countries from where they come. Explain to students that, for an upcoming class, they will share what their family members told them, and that they may bring pictures of that holiday.

3. To use creative writing strategies: Essays

Various specialists propose different strategies to develop writing activities in the classroom. Cassany's (1987) Spanish Linguistics and Grammar books stand out among them. According to this author, using essay strategies that follow a logical sequence in writing development helps develop creativity. Table 13 illustrates this sequence.

4. To make what your students write visible: Work in steps, from what is easy to what is complex.

A. Start encouraging the production of written texts through the easiest types such as dialogues, descriptions, or narrations. It is also beneficial for students to illustrate their written texts since this creates a symbolic relationship to better represent the written

TABLE 13. *Essay sequence*

1. Create the task	2. Help students come up with ideas	3. Encourage students to organize ideas
• To create a text, make a list of ideas about which students would like to write. • Set up a work plan, decide (students and teacher) when writing will begin.	• Use various activities through brainstorming. • Make mental maps of what your students want to write about, write the ideas on the board so that the whole group knows about the variety of interests.	• Clarify the ideas about which they want to write, decide which will be the most used or the ones that best express the message of their interest.
4. Make sure it is on paper	**5. Evaluate and make a diagnosis**	**6. Help students make changes**
• Make sure that your students write, no matter whether it is good or bad, if they make spelling mistakes, or if they write too much or too little. What is important is to increase their desire for writing.	• Encourage students to read their writing out loud and in public. • Ask students about what they learned from what they read. • Encourage students to improve what they wrote, ask if they could write it differently. If they say that they have more ideas to share, ask them to add them and, in this way, a new writing process will begin.	• Have students rewrite their texts, but this time help them improve their spelling and calligraphy, and to use the conventions of an essay (that there is a beginning, middle and end or conclusion, that words should fit the topic and that a train of thought should be kept).

written texts since this creates a symbolic relationship to better represent the written idea. This process involves asking students what they want to write about, what stories they would like to draw, paint, and write. One option to do this is asking them to describe the flag of the country from where they come and compare it with the United States' flag, to comment on their personal experience speaking and understanding English, or to explain orally or in writing the differences they find between food, parks, cities, or means of transportation where they live, and in the region where they used to live. These are effective topics to develop creative thinking in children.

B. Teachers may place students' written materials on the classroom walls and decorate the room with their creations, allowing for the content to be a class topic for a couple of weeks.

C. Resort to previously created texts to produce new ones; this will help students remember that writing is a permanent process and that it can keep on going based on a previously written text. Doing so stimulates students' divergent thinking because something written earlier may correspond to another way of thinking.

5. Some online resources to encourage creative writing in children in multicultural classrooms.

To select resources available online to work in the classroom, we suggest visiting the following portals:

- To find videos about the history and cultural life of some countries in the Central American region, use the following website (resource in English and Spanish): https://www.visitcentroamerica.com/en/

- The NGO Ayuda en Acción's website (Central American tales and legends for fun and education) displays a digital catalog of children's stories with different educational purposes oriented to social and moral values. You may download the stories from the catalog (resource in Spanish): https://ayudaenaccion.org/ong/blog/educacion/cuentos-leyendas-centroamericanas/

- The website Antología de cuentos de Guatemala displays a selection of children's stories complementary to the reading processes in schools; the stories are in line with the Guatemalan national curriculum (resource in Spanish): https://bit.ly/35mMuy4

TOPIC 4. The cultural heritage of Central American and the Dominican Republic as content for reading and writing

Migrant children from Central America and the Dominican Republic in the United States possess a set of cultural references that they likely learned through growing in Spanish-speaking families in their country of origin or, because they were born in the United States, their families communicate in the language of their country of origin. In both cases, the linguistic experience in their family and country of origin, as well as the new sociocultural and linguistic circumstances as bilingual immigrants, influence children's reading and writing.

Being bilingual does not mean that two monolingual beings coexist in one person (Grosjean, 1989) but, rather, that most bilinguals have a dominant language and use each one of the languages in different contexts (Suárez, 2002).

Cultural heritage is the tangible and intangible legacy of a people or community that has been bequeathed to them, to be conserved and transmitted to subsequent generations. It includes beliefs, knowledge, artistic expressions, norms and values, social practices, traditions and customs, places, objects, and any other cultural expression (Contreras, 2020). From a linguistic rights perspective, those who move and settle in a territory with a linguistic community different from their own have the right and the duty to keep an integrative relation with their first language (PEN Club Internacional, 1996).

In educational contexts, retrieving their condition as bilingual, as a population group with a greatly similar cultural heritage (mainly due to the official language, history, geography, religion, ethnic groups, and customs) will be very valuable for Central American and Dominican migrant children. Teaching reading and writing as sociocultural practice to immigrant children must start with the recognition of their cultural heritage as a means to acquire fundamental communication skills.

Turning cultural heritage into a motivation to read and write in classrooms with Central American and Dominican migrant children

1. To plan: select an intercultural approach, highlight the socioemotional component, consider the literature.

 A. Apply an intercultural approach by highlighting in class the linguistic and cultural diversity of Central American countries or the Dominican Republic, and their differences with the dominant US culture.

B. Emphasize affective and social components in your teaching activities as essential elements of learning, such as valuing communication in the family as a resource for speaking and writing.

C. Understand that some children's mother tongue is Spanish, but that others learned it as a heritage language[9] and, therefore, this makes the learning context more diverse.

D. Resume reading as a key pillar for the development of linguistic competences in bilingual children as you use children's literature from the Central American and Dominican regions. This activity will increase children's vocabulary and increase their exposure to different styles and variations of language.

E. There are some very popular children's stories at home and school that may serve as a motivating and creative activity to talk, read, and write about customs and traditions, such as the story of the Tooth Fairy, commonly known in Latin America as *Ratoncito Pérez or Ratón de los Dientes* (Tooth Mouse). Choosing these stories fosters bicultural awareness since they draw attention to the similarities and differences in facts recognized by the student group.

2. To address the content in the classroom: retrieve cultural values, the reading of regional topics, and fun activities.

A. Use the cultural heritage values of Central American and Dominican children as a resource for their literacy education. These skills should be learned first in their mother tongue to facilitate the process, since reading skills acquired in the mother tongue are transferable to the other language and facilitate its learning (Baker, 1997).

B. Organize different sessions in which the class takes place around a specific topic, such as natural geography, history, gastronomy, arts, sports, or literature. From there, select readings according to the topic, start with an exploratory activity of previous knowledge and introduce new vocabulary, then continue by using other diverse activities, such as games, crafts, roundtables, or exhibitions.

C. Consider that learning the lexicon and its various regional forms demands a great deal of exposure to both languages since vocabulary increases separately in each language (Bialystok, 2007).

D. Consider that, for newcomers or new immigrants who are discovering the use of stories and aspects of US society, it is very helpful to know and understand cultural differences, and increase vocabulary and intercultural awareness in these new aspects.

E. Other important fun resources are flashcards or any cards with printed drawings or clippings from magazines, toys or figures, costumes, and games (homemade or store-

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9 A family or minority language of Spanish-speaking immigrant descendants in the US, where English is the dominant language (Acosta, 2011; Valdés, 2001).

bought), puppets made with various materials or with laminated images attached to sticks, images for a magnetic board (color photos or drawings can be printed, cut out, laminated, and attached to the board with magnetic adhesive tape on their back).

3. To make visible what children of Central American and Dominican origin read, write, and understand based on their cultural heritage.

A. Play board games or other fun activities that help create a relaxed, less tense atmosphere while practicing the language.

B. Use songs written and translated from Spanish into English and vice versa, which helps develop intercultural awareness of the uses of the mother tongue and of their heritage language. Songs play an important role in developing different linguistic levels: phonetic and phonological (they improve auditory discrimination and pronunciation), morphosyntactic, semantic and lexical (they also increase vocabulary), and sociolinguistic, as well as exposure to varieties and registers of the language.

C. Use artistic activities to encourage and create a supportive environment that offers new vocabulary, such as that of the different materials used in their artwork. When students make crafts, the instructions on how to make them develop oral language when they describe what they are doing and how they present the final outcome in front of the class. Following oral instructions promotes a practical and interactive approach.

4. Resources that you can use to teach children from the Central American and Dominican region.

To find resources available online that you can use in the classroom, we suggest visiting the following portal:

- In her TedXTalk, Dr. Elizabeth Buenabad (2017) discusses interculturality, its importance in educational processes and its appreciation in daily social processes, as well as current educational reforms with a view to create intercultural citizenships. You may access her documents related to intercultural education in diversity contexts through the following site (resource in Spanish): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBo5YpxfPZE

Final Thoughts

This chapter provides recommendations to address three essential skills for EGL development according to the existing literature: reading comprehension, phonological awareness, and creative writing. The suggestions are in line with the culturally relevant pedagogical approach since it is necessary for Central American and Dominican children to feel welcomed in a multicultural and, at first unknown, environment like New York City. Learning is more meaningful when it starts within students' sociocultural realities, which is why proposals for pedagogical procedures promote the region's cultural heritage. These are flexible suggestions, not closed educational sequences, so teachers can adapt them to curricular contents developed in different educational contexts.

All hyperlinks that this guide shares may be used to teach about the cultural heritage of Central America and the Dominican Republic. Each link offers materials that we carefully selected to support the best practices in this guide.

In addition, you may visit ILAS's K-12 Outreach Program's website and review its other curriculum guides at https://ilas.columbia.edu/education/k-12.

Similarly, RedLEI developed a virtual library that contains a large amount of material selected by professionals, including strategies to teach EGL skills for teachers and children. This library is available at http://biblioteca.red-lei.org/.

For Further Discussion

The authors consider that writing this guide posed a two-way challenge. On the one hand, it was daunting to fully understand how to teach reading and writing in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Our extensive literature review on the topic involved a thorough reading and reflection process to make a pertinent and relevant contribution. On the other hand, it was a challenge to empathize with New York City's reality and analyze possible scenarios to identify common issues to create a meaningful educational tool that supports the teaching community in the City as it embraces the different cultures that children from Central America and the Dominican Republic bring to a new life, a new culture, and a new language completely different from those of their place of origin.

We recommend that the community of teachers to whom this guide is directed revisit some questions for personal reflection. After having read and used this guide in their classroom practice, we encourage you to observe your changes achieved through this work:

Have I learned anything new through this guide?

Should I understand the culture, structures, and linguistic content of migrant children from Central America and the Dominican Republic?

What does cultural relevance mean when thinking of Central American and Dominican migrant children?

As a teacher, am I a cultural leader?

Try to internalize these four key questions when using this resource to improve educational awareness and, therefore, the social inclusion of migrant children.

Finally, this guide may be the first of a more strategic series of encounters with ways to use culturally relevant pedagogy in converging settings for people with different cultures and different languages. The reality of migrant children from Central America and the Dominican Republic is similar to that of children arriving in New York from other cities, reason for which cultural relevance could and should become a permanent topic of discussion in New York City's schools, especially those that these children attend. Finally, we must highlight the value of educational and social training of teachers who welcome these children: their charm, their drive to teach, and their commitment are essential factors to create highly-relevant educational environment for the multiple customs, traditions, and beliefs that each child brings to a privileged cultural space to learn collectively, like a classroom.

—**The authors**

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FIGURE 1 Map by Daniel Sojuel for RedLEI.

FIGURE 3 Geographic location of Indigenous languages in Central America in the 1980s. Background map of Central America by Daniel Sojuel. Adaptation by Romina Quezada from Cotter, J.V. (2003), Indians, 1980s, in Hall, C. & Pérez Brignoli, H., *Historical Atlas of Central America,* (p. 103). University of Oklahoma Press. Adapted with permission.

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