theDictado®

A Cross-Language Literacy Squared® Strategy

theDictado® is an instructional cross-language literacy strategy within the Literacy Squared® framework that supports biliteracy development in both Spanish and English through integrated, explicit, and interactive instruction. Adapted from traditional methods used in Mexico and Central and South America, theDictado® strengthens spelling, grammar, conventions, vocabulary, and discourse through meaningful, connected text.

Why theDictado® Matters

Rather than teaching language and literacy skills in isolation, theDictado® integrates spelling, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, and cross-language analysis through meaningful, connected text. A key feature of the strategy is its focus on developing students' metalanguage—the ability to notice, discuss, and understand how Spanish and English work similarly and differently.

In bilingual programs, teachers may choose to alternate between Spanish and English dictados across weeks to support coordinated biliteracy development. English-medium programs have also successfully implemented theDictado® to support multilingual learners' literacy and metalinguistic development.

Creating a Dictado Passage

The teacher begins by crafting a meaningful and instructionally appropriate passage based on:

- State standards and the California ELA/ELD Framework
- The district's scope and sequence
- Unit themes and grade-level content
- Common patterns of approximations observed in students' Spanish and English writing

The passage should be concise yet rich in content, featuring connected discourse and increasingly complex sentence structures (typically no more than 2–3 sentences). Each dictado should also include 3–6 intentional teaching points related to spelling, conventions, vocabulary, grammar, language structures, and cross-language connections that students are expected to learn and apply over time.

theDictado® Procedure		
Dictation and Encoding	• The teacher reads the entire passage aloud to ensure comprehension. • The teacher dictates the passage in small chunks. • Students repeat each chunk aloud before encoding it in their dictado notebooks. • The teacher reads the entire passage aloud, and students make final revisions.	Supports oral rehearsal, encoding, and comprehension while helping students connect spoken and written language.
Talk-Through and Self-Correction	• Students switch to colored pens or pencils for self-correction. • The teacher reconstructs an accurate version of the passage on the board or using a document camera, explicitly explaining the teaching points. • Students follow along, engage with the teacher, and self-correct their work using a standard marking code.	Encourages metalinguistic reflection and explicit analysis of spelling, grammar, vocabulary, conventions, and cross-language connections.
Repetition and Reinforcement	• The same passage and instructional routine are revisited at least three times throughout the week. • During the final dictation, the teacher may collect dictado notebooks to assess students' understanding and internalization of the teaching points and monitor progress over time.	Repeated practice allows students to internalize the teaching points and transfer their learning into reading and writing.

Scaffolding for Kindergarten Students

theDictado® can be successfully implemented across all grade levels. However, younger students, particularly in kindergarten, require additional scaffolding to help them engage successfully in the instructional routine.

Beginning of the Year	• Begin with modeled and shared writing to help kindergarten students develop foundational understandings and routines for theDictado®. • During morning meetings, circle time, or writing sessions, the teacher and students collaboratively compose a meaningful message orally (e.g., *"Hoy es lunes. Vamos a la biblioteca."*). • The teacher models encoding the message, thinking aloud.
As Students Gain Confidence	• Students participate in shared writing alongside the teacher • Students begin encoding the message on whiteboards and compare their work to the teacher's modeled version.
Increasing Independence	• The teacher introduces the marking code gradually, teaching one code at a time. • The teacher supports students in self-correction and reflection. • Students engage in theDictado® procedure by the second half of the year.

For additional information and classroom examples of theDictado®, see Chapter 4 of *Biliteracy From the Start: Literacy Squared in Action* (Escamilla et al., 2014) and Chapter 3 of *Biliterate Writing From the Start: The Literacy Squared Approach to Asset-Based Writing Instruction* (Butvilofsky et al., 2023).