The effect of bilingual instruction and play on preschoolers' English proficiency

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This study seeks to demonstrate the benefits of bilingual instruction, story drama, and play with low-income preschool children. Sixty-five percent of the children in the study were dual language learners (DLLs). The investigation took place in a state-funded, public, universal prekindergarten program implementing Tools of the Mind (*Tools*), a Vygotskian play-based curriculum. Teachers read aloud fairy tales twice a week. Children in three classrooms were exposed to one of three read-aloud conditions: English-only, bilingual and no play, or bilingual and play. The results indicated that the classroom that provided bilingual instruction and play had significantly higher English proficiency and story recall scores than either of the other two classrooms. Providing opportunities to play and reenact fairy tales seemed to have positive effects on English proficiency and story recall for low-income preschool children.

Keywords: Bilingual; play; oral language; preschool; fairy tales; recall

In the USA the number of children entering school who speak a language other than English at home is increasing more rapidly than the overall school-aged population (Fry & Gonzales, 2008; Hernandez, Takanishi, & Marotz, 2009). According to the 2010 United States Census, close to a quarter of the young children in this country are growing up in families where English is not the primary language (Nemeth, 2012) and by 2050 Latino children may constitute 50% of the total student population (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). Thus, the Spanish-speaking population is young and many attend state-funded prekindergarten programs (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011).

Many of these students are dual language learners (DLLs). DLL is a term used to describe a child who is learning English while also developing proficiency in another language (Ballantyne, Sanderman, D'Emilio, & McLaughlin, 2008; Nemeth, 2012). These students speak their native language at the same time they are being exposed to and are learning English. The use of the term DLL also focuses on a young child's cultural home experience, an important consideration when teaching a four-year-old child (Espinosa, 2010b; Nemeth, 2012).

Research on bilingualism has shown that bilingual children evidence numerous cognitive, metacognitive, metalinguistic, and sociolinguistic advantages compared to monolinguals (Bialystok, 2001; Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004) as early as the preschool years (Espinosa, 2010a). Despite this research, Hispanic children have the lowest mean scores on reading proficiency

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compared to African-American, Asian, and White children (West, Denton, & Reaney, 2000). A synthesis of the research literature (August & Shanahan, 2006) suggested specific instructional practices that foster academic outcomes for elementary students, but there appears to be a paucity of research on instructional programs for prekindergarten (Castro, Espinosa, & Paez, 2011; National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2007; Zepeda, Castro, & Cronin, 2011). This suggests a need for better research about dual language instruction and methods that measure what is happening in the classroom regarding how DLLs absorb and learn multiple languages at once (Severns, 2010) and acquire the literacy and social skills necessary for success in kindergarten (Espinosa, 2010a). According to Roskos and Christie (2013), story drama is a play pedagogy that 'replicates traditional story retelling using creative drama techniques' (p. 131). Although there is a body of research that has investigated play, language, and literacy (Hirsch-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Roskos & Christie, 2007; Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2004), few studies have specifically examined the effects of story drama on ways that pretend play can help promote improved language and comprehension of fairy tales with Spanish-speaking preschool children.

The current study

This article will describe story drama and play to assess preschoolers' language proficiency and story recall when bilingual storybooks and play props are provided. Specifically, we will describe an investigation in a school district implementing the *Tools of the Mind* (*Tools*) (Bodrova & Leong, 2007), a Vygotskian play-based curriculum, to examine the effects of bilingual instruction and play on English proficiency and story recall where one classroom partnered with a university. *Tools* curriculum incorporates 40 Vygotskian activities based upon Vygotsky's (1978) cultural–historical theories. The study ran for two months due to public school holidays. Previous research (Barnett et al., 2008) examined language and literacy related to the *Tools* curriculum. Barnett et al. (2008) reported that *Tools* classrooms had fewer behavior problems and marginally better language and literacy skills when compared to children in a control group. Independent observers rated *Tools* classrooms as having overall higher quality and *Tools* teachers as being more efficient with management and instructional time and routines.

We predicted that two language and literacy outcomes would occur if prekindergarten children were provided English and Spanish instruction that utilized story drama with bilingual fairy tales:

1 It was hypothesized that preschool children's English comprehension would improve when storybooks were read in English and Spanish.
2 It was predicted that preschoolers' ability to retell the fairy tale would increase when given play props and an opportunity to reenact the fairy tale during playtime.

Thus, we begin with the literature related to story drama as play pedagogy for the acquisition of language and emergent literacy skills. Next, we describe the research related to the *Tools* curriculum and play props. Finally, we discuss the connection between story drama and elements of story recall.

Story drama as play pedagogy

The Common Core State Standards (2010) list folktales, legends, and fables among the range of text genres students should read beginning in kindergarten. In some states, this mandate has also been extended to the prekindergarten level. For preschool children storybook reading is an

opportunity for them to explore and experiment with books, puppets, and play props. Soderman, Clevenger, and Kent (2013) suggested teachers' use of 'stories and connected activities can expand DLLs cultural awareness and address the complexities of language acquisition' (p. 37). Soderman et al. (2013) further suggested using traditional stories, such as fairy tales, and claimed 'even though bilingual children do not have the receptive vocabulary to understand every word of the English version, they often are completely engaged and actively listening as they put the teacher's expressions together with pictures and story lines that are similar to those in their home language' (p. 38).

Children frequently improvise and pretend by creating their own scripts, retellings, and assuming the role of story characters after hearing fairy tales read aloud. Roskos and Christie (2013) explained that story retelling using creative drama techniques is simple to implement in early childhood classrooms. Paley (1990) has consistently argued that 'fantasy play and storytelling are never far apart' (p. 8) and has shared her story-telling/story-acting play practices with teachers for decades. Various studies have found that children's participation in dramatic storybook enactments (Martinez, Cheyney, & Teale, 1991; Pelligrini & Galda, 1982) improved children's ability to remember, reproduce, and comprehend stories. Pelligrini's (1984) research demonstrated that children showed gains in remembering both the story that was enacted and other unfamiliar stories that were not enacted. Some researchers (Nicolopoulou, 2007; Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sá, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2013; Pelligrini & Galda, 1982, 1990) found that the cognitive skills required and promoted by pretend play and story comprehension are related to rule systems governing language.

Play and play props in tools classrooms

Tools *story lab and discussion mediators*

Adult–child storybook reading is the most researched approach to instruction (Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pelligrini, 1995). *Tools of the Mind* classrooms use Vygotskian approaches to storybook reading to increase children's vocabulary and work on children's oral language. The *Tools Story Lab* activities build skills in listening comprehension, oral language, vocabulary, and working memory (Leong et al., 2011). What distinguishes storybook reading in *Story Lab* from other preschool programs are the Vygotskian tactics of shared activity, language, and mediators embedded in *Story Lab* activities. Discussion mediator cards are provided for teachers implementing the *Tools* curriculum project. Some of the main purposes of the mediator cards are for children to (a) practice recalling story elements (setting, characters, etc.), (b) expand working memory by holding more than one idea in the mind at a time, (c) make inferences about characters' feelings and actions, (d) engage in active listening, and (e) state and discuss opinions about the text.

There are nine *Story Lab* activities and discussion mediator cards introduced at different times throughout the school year: (1) active listening, (2) connections (e.g. text to me, text to world, and text to text, (3) vocabulary, (4) visualization, (5) character empathy, (6) learning facts, (7) story extensions, (8) story grammar, and (9) predictions and inferences (Leong et al., 2011).

Story Lab activities can take place in different contexts: large group, small group, or paired groups, with different levels of scaffolding experiences. Children use language to answer teachers' questions and explain their thoughts through buddy interaction or in small or whole group settings. The teacher chooses a comprehension skill and shows a discussion mediator card to prompt children to think and talk about the story, characters, or vocabulary (Figure 1).
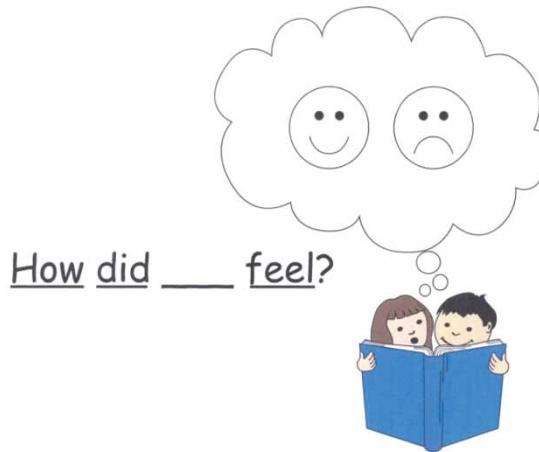
Figure 1.   Character empathy. The figure is an example of a discussion mediator used to scaffold storybook reading during *Tools* story lab. The teacher shows the mediator to the children and asks them to think about the character(s) feelings as she/he reads aloud. Copyright 2011 by *Tools of the Mind Curriculum Project*, Pre-K Training.

Leong et al. (2011) provide a prompt for each discussion card to scaffold the comprehension skill. Below is the dialogue used by the teacher while displaying the character empathy mediator card and prompting children to think about the story:

> See the happy and sad faces in the bubble over the children's heads? They are reading the book and are thinking about feelings. They are wondering how the cat in their story is feeling. It might be happy, or excited, or content – purring and relaxing in the sun. Or – it might be angry, or anxious, because a dog is barking at it in the story they're reading. Today as I read our book, you're going to be thinking about the character's feelings, too. Our card says 'How did _____ feel.' So today, as I read _____ to you, you'll be thinking about how _____ (and _____) feel. The happy and sad faces on the card will remind you that we're thinking about the characters' feelings. (Leong et al., 2011, p. 291)

Leong et al. (2011) find that shared activity and discussion mediators in *Story Lab* activities provide support for the development of oral language and comprehension skills in preschool classrooms with DLLs when the book is read in the children's home language and in English. Therefore, the use of a discussion mediator during our study was not only consistent with *Tools* curriculum, but also supported the oral language of the children in this research.

Play props

Vygotsky (1978) identified play activities as the center of young children's zones of proximal development where new knowledge is gained through social interactions. Given the recent play–literacy research (Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2009; Roskos & Christie, 2013), it is puzzling that there has been so little research describing book-related play in the context of classroom interactions. For DLLs, pictures and concrete 'realia' can support language acquisition and vocabulary and comprehension learning (Roberts, 2009; Roberts & Neal, 2004). Rowe (2007) defined book-related dramatic play as the 'involvement of symbolic transformations that explicitly or implicitly reflect the meanings signed in books text or illustrations, or in the book-reading events in which children encounter books' (p. 38).

Studies have shown interesting connections among teachers' read alouds and their scaffolding of story enactments by adding toys and props related to children's books. Observational studies examined narrative comprehension (Martinez, Cheyney, & Teale, 1991; Rowe, 2007; Welsch, 2008). Martinez et al. (1991) demonstrated that features of the classroom context, such as repeated readings and teacher support for play as a book response, were related to the frequency of book-related play. Experimental research investigating vocabulary using informational texts (Leung, 2008) and narrative texts (Wasik & Bond, 2001; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006) found children learned more vocabulary words and their oral language increased in the story props intervention group than in a comparison group that did not include story props. Studies like these suggest that the scaffolding opportunities for children to see the bigger picture and respond to a read-aloud book through play can deepen and enrich their experiences with the book. Such opportunities can promote comprehension and vocabulary, as well as help with recall.

Story retelling

The use of retellings or recalls has a long history in the research literature. Their use to both measure and promote comprehension has found wide acceptance (Brown & Cambourne, 1987). 'The basic assumption among researchers is that retelling is a system for evaluating the depth and breadth of student text understandings based on their attempts to retell or recall what they have read' (Cohen, Kurstedt, & May, 2009, p. 106). A story retelling task supports comprehension (Kucer, 2010; Mandel-Morrow, 1985) and is a popular classroom assessment task, as well as an instructional strategy for language development.

Oral retelling of narrative stories provides a purposeful context for supporting the development of young children's oral language. Stadler and Ward (2010) investigated the use of props on narrative retells with kindergarten and first-grade children. Props had a positive effect on the children's use of descriptive language. Leong et al.'s (2011) mediator cards in the *Tools* curriculum are specifically designed to support listening comprehension and recall of narrative and informational texts.

Young children can practice retelling fairy tales in different formats, with and without props. For example, dramatic pretend play can be a verbal replay (retell) or explanation (Kyratzis, Tang, & Koymen, 2009) of a real or vicarious situation. In addition, young children improved their story comprehension and created their own diverse images, as demonstrated through their retelling, when stories were told to them, rather than when hearing stories through read aloud (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004).

Retellings can be analyzed for inclusion of story elements and oral language syntactic complexity (Isbell et al., 2004; Mandel-Morrow, 1985). Post-test scores for theme, resolution, sequencing, and total retelling improved when students retold (emphasizing structural elements), rather than drew a picture about a story. Sequencing was an issue, but improved through practice, as did students' enhanced sense of story structure and comprehension (Mandel-Morrow, 1985).

Even though retelling has been previously studied in the research literature as a measure of comprehension, there is a need for instructional strategies for young DLLs (Castro et al., 2011; National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2007) and retelling can improve young children's oral language. Therefore, it was predicted that preschool classrooms' English language proficiency and comprehension of bilingual fairy tales would improve when given play props. It was also predicted that preschoolers' ability to retell the fairy tale would increase when given play props and an opportunity to reenact the fairy tale during playtime. Knowledge of instructional strategies successfully used with large populations of DLLs is important for early childhood play researchers.

Method

Participants

Parental permission was obtained from 79 parents of the preschool children (45 girls and 34 boys). The mean age of the children was determined by their chronological age (in months) at the beginning of the study, which was 56.5 months (4.71 years; range: 49–62 months; SD = 3.53 months). Fifty-one children in the study spoke Spanish and English and three children spoke French Creole in their household. The three French Creole participants were in the classroom who read fairy tales in English. Three teachers and three assistants (three classrooms) agreed to participate in the intervention. All lead teachers were licensed early childhood teachers and the university lead teacher/author held additional certifications in both bilingual education and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Two teaching assistants had valid Teaching Assistant certifications and one was Early Childhood certified. The university teacher and teacher assistant were bilingual. Years of teaching experience ranged from 3 to 17, with an average of 12 years. Lead teachers and teacher assistants were female.

Setting

This two-month study took place in a Universal Prekindergarten program in the Northeastern USA operating in a K-2 low-income public school building. The study ran for two months due to public school holidays. Eighty percent of the students in the school district, including children in the study, were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Three prekindergarten classes were involved in the project, with a university serving as a community-based organization (CBO) who provides services and teaching staff for one classroom. In classroom 1, the teacher read fairy tales in English. Teachers in classrooms 2 and 3 (CBO) read fairy tales in Spanish and English. Children in classroom 3 used the story props and puppets in play centers during the two-month intervention (Table 1).

The instruction and language goals of the program were primarily English instruction with home language support from the university bilingual teacher/author and the teaching assistants. The curriculum was *Tools of the Mind* (*Tools*) (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Each classroom's daily schedule included *Tools Story Lab* and discussion mediator cards. In addition, all classrooms allocated at least 30 minutes daily for intentional make-believe play. *Tools* classrooms are thematic. Although themes change during the school year, the classroom remains structured around six major centers: (1) literacy, (2) housekeeping/dramatic play, (3) science/sensory, (4) blocks, (5) art/fine motor, and (6) math/table toys.

Measures

Espinosa (2010b) recommended the use of a variety of methods and assessors to provide insights about children's home language abilities. For example, informal, indirect measures of observing ELL children's interactions and language usage can be highly reliable in estimating a child's level

Table 1. Classroom, language, and play.

Classroom	*n*	Language	Play props in literacy center
Class 1	24	English	No
Class 2	27	English and Spanish	No
Class 3	28	English and Spanish	Yes

of proficiency and English language usage (Gutiérrez-Clellen & Kreiter, 2003). So, several sources of information were used to categorize children's home language exposure: (a) parent demographic data reported to the school district, (b) teacher reports on language exposure, and (c) the Pre-Idea Proficiency Test – Oral English (Ballad & Tighe, 2010b) and Pre-Idea Proficiency Test – Oral Spanish (Ballad & Tighe, 2010a). They are standardized measures developed expressly to assess English and/or Spanish oral language skills.

Spanish-speaking participants completed the Pre-Idea Proficiency Test-Oral Spanish (Ballad & Tighe, 2010a) to obtain a language proficiency level at the beginning and end of the study. Previous research studies (Roberts & Neal, 2004; Schrank, Fletcher, & Alvarado, 1996) have evaluated this assessment with DLL preschool populations. Test–retest reliability of 0.77 is reported in the technical manual.

To complete the assessment, the examiner uses a storyboard and felt pieces to encourage children to respond to questions and point to appropriate items on the storyboard. Levels A and B are testing children's understanding of simple vocabulary items (father, mother, boy, girl, shoes, dog). For Levels C and D children respond to lengthier and more syntactically complex questions and indicate their ability to name three colors. The most difficult item for Level E asks the child to construct and retell facts from the story. Children are assigned a level from A to E based on raw scores that range from 0 to 40 and age norms. Scores are converted to standard scores and percentiles. The standard scores are used in the designation of three-year-old children to five-year-old children as non-English speaking (Levels A and B), limited English speaking (Levels C and D), or fluent English speaking (Level E). The age norms for children of ages 4 to 5 years are Levels A and B, a non-English speaker; Levels C and D indicate a limited English speaker; and Level E designates a fluent English speaker. These levels were changed to a 1–5 scale for data analysis. The *Pre-Idea Proficiency Test – Oral English and Oral Spanish* provided important information for determining English proficiency levels.

Retelling assessment

The method by which a story is presented to a child can affect how the story is retold. Researchers (Stadler & Ward, 2010; Wasik & Bond, 2001) have presented stories orally or paired with visual stimuli, such as pictures, props, or puppets. A protocol was designed to assess children's ability to sequence bilingual storybooks weekly. Teachers and researchers examined the bilingual books and selected four pictures from each book that represented the sequential order of the text. Pictures were scanned, laminated, and used to measure children's story retelling. Mandel-Morrow (2011) recommended instructing children to concentrate on what happened first, second, and so on when testing sequencing skills. Therefore, our protocol used directions to have children put pictures in sequential order. The assessment was scored as follows: 2 = proper sequence, 1 = partial sequence, and 0 = no sequence. Previous studies (Pelligrini & Galda, 1982; Wasik & Bond, 2001) have also credited the child for partial recall or for recounting the gist of an event.

Procedural fidelity

Vartuli and Rohs (2009) discussed the importance in early childhood research of using 'fidelity measures to assess adherence to curriculum and explore fidelity outcomes' (p. 503). The researchers observed and recorded treatment fidelity weekly. The instrument was developed by faculty specifically for this study to capture the degree teachers implemented the treatment of fairy tales and discussion mediators. Two domains of fidelity were assessed: routines and teaching activities. The domain of routines addressed the degree to which teachers implemented the routines of the Story Lab (e.g. reading the story in English and Spanish and having play props

available, if applicable). The domain of teaching activities addressed the degree to which teachers implemented the required activities and actively demonstrated the teaching strategies in the condition to which they were assigned. Teachers were rated on each dimension on a scale ranging from 1 (indicating a low level of fidelity) to 5 (indicating a high level of fidelity). Across the two months of the study, teachers were rated as maintaining a consistent level of fidelity to routine (F [2, 1] = 0.40, p = .96) and to teaching activities (F [2, 1] = 1.00, p = .58). Teachers' average level of fidelity to routine and fidelity to teaching activity was significantly higher than 3 (representing a moderate level of fidelity; t [2] = 14.00, $p < .01$; t [2] = 16.00, $p < .01$, respectively).

Procedures

To assess participants' English comprehension, the *Pre-Idea Proficiency Test – Oral English assessments* was administered at the beginning and end of the research study. Additionally, Hispanic participants were tested with the *Pre-Idea Proficiency Test – Oral Spanish assessments.* Classrooms 2 and 3 listened to the fairy tales in English and Spanish every Monday and Tuesday (Table 1). Classroom 1 also listened to the fairy tales for two consecutive days, but the classroom teacher read English versions. Fairy tales were selected by the researchers for story reading and reviewed by the teachers to insure that the fairy tales were culturally sensitive and understandable for preschool children.

Following *Story Lab* practices, a weekly discussion mediator was introduced for the two-month intervention (Table 2). In addition, the university classroom (classroom 3) introduced book-related play props to familiarize the children with vocabulary and support story comprehension. The play prop boxes for *The gingerbread man*, *Little red hen*, and *Little red riding hood* were miniature objects with additional objects to enhance oral language. Puppets for *The three bears*, *The three little pigs*, and *Three billy goats gruff* came in sets of four that specifically related to the characters in the fairy tales.

The same weekly discussion mediator was used for the two-month intervention in all classrooms. *Story Lab* provides *Tools* teachers with specific directions to help children understand stories read aloud and engage in meaningful conversations related to story characters, vocabulary, or similar fairy tales. All classrooms followed *Tools* procedures for use of discussion mediators. The following were the specific steps for implementing discussion mediator cards. First, all

Table 2. Bilingual fairy tales, mediators, and play props.

Intervention	Trade book	Discussion mediators	Play props
Week 1	*The three bears*	Character empathy	Puppets (three bears and goldilocks) (dollhouse, three different size chairs, bowls, and beds)
Week 2	*The gingerbread man*	Visualization	Play prop box (gingerbread man, snake, goose, fox, cookie sheet, play oven, and cookie cutters)
Week 3	*Little red hen*	Vocabulary	Play prop box (hen puppet, pig, cow, dog, wheat, basket, hay, and seeds)
Week 4	*The three little pigs*	Character empathy	Puppets (three pigs and wolf) (empty box bricks, sticks, and hay)
Week 5	*Three billy goats gruff*	Text to text	Puppets (three goats and troll) (curved blocks)
Week 6	*Little red riding hood*	Text to self	Play prop box (wolf, grandma, red riding hood doll, basket, cookie sheet, and cookies)

classroom teachers showed the book and the discussion mediator card. Next, the teachers oriented the children toward the mediator card and reminded them how the card helps them remember something about the story. The teachers read the title and names of the author, and took a short picture walk through the first three or four pages of the book. After the teacher finished reading the book, she pointed to the mediator card and asked the children to turn to a friend and talk about the book. For example, when the teachers read the book *The three bears* they held up the character empathy discussion mediator and asked the children to discuss how Goldilocks felt when the bears found her sleeping in their bed. Finally, the teacher summarized some of the children's comments. The three classrooms implemented the *Tools* curriculum and, therefore, used *Tools* discussion mediators.

After the completion of each story, all classrooms invited children to engage in dramatic play. Classrooms 1 and 2 did not use storybook props during dramatic play. *Tools* teachers are trained to scaffold play to promote important skills that build up the foundations of emergent literacy, especially important for children from low-income backgrounds. To determine if play props, in addition to the mediator cards, would increase preschoolers' English proficiency and story recall, the university classroom provided play props and puppets related to each fairy tale (Table 2). Below is a description of the procedures for use of play props in classroom 3.

Play props and puppets were used while the story was read to the children. The centers were available to all children during the intervention. The university classroom was the only classroom that used book-related play props during center time. In the university classroom, three centers were opened to allow two rotations with book-related play props. The three centers were (a) literacy/dramatic play, (b) blocks, and (c) math/table toys. The literacy and housekeeping/dramatic play center were combined for additional classroom space to reenact fairy tales and play with book-related play props for the two-month intervention. Play props were placed in the literacy–dramatic play center after the university teacher/author read the story on Monday. For each fairy tale, the props were chosen to represent elements or characters related to the story. *Tools* teachers are trained to scaffold play and learning. The university teacher/author varied the degree of assistance according to the children's needs so they used the story-related objects and actively participated in story dramatic play.

Before teachers read the fairy tale aloud, two of the article's authors visited each classroom and conducted a pre-assessment of the weekly story. The pre-assessment involved individually assessing children's ability to sequence four scanned images from the text. First, we showed children the cover page and asked them if they were familiar with the story. The research setting was a low-income district and it was not surprising that the fairy tales were unfamiliar to the children. Two children said they had heard the story when the researchers pointed to the cover page. When the researchers prompted these children to talk about the story the children were not able to construct metalinguistic story schemes (e.g. the beginning or ending, characters in the story) so the pre-assessment was administered to these children. The researchers placed the four scanned pictures on a table and asked the children to tell or put the pictures in sequential order using the retelling protocol. Post-assessments were administered on Friday using the same procedure. Pre- and post-assessment scores were recorded for each child in the study. The study ran for two months due to public school holidays and vacations. The *Pre-Idea Proficiency Test was* administered at the end of the research.

Results

To examine change over time in children's English oral proficiency, we examined children's percentage scores on the *Pre-Idea Proficiency Test -Oral English*, measured at the start and the end of

the study. Overall, there was a significant improvement from pre-test ($M = 16.46$, SD $= 18.16$) to post-test ($M = 28.05$, SD $= 22.40$; $F [1, 78] = 21.40$, $p < .001$).

To examine whether the amount of change differed with classroom instruction, we conducted a mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA). This 3 (English-only instruction without play, bilingual instruction without play, bilingual instruction with play) × 2 (time) ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between classroom instruction and change over time ($F (2, 76) = 17.25$, $p < .001$). Follow-up analyses, examining change over time among each of the three classrooms, revealed that the change over time in the English-only instruction with no play classroom was not significant ($F (1, 21) = 2.10$, $p = .16$). In contrast, the change over time in both the bilingual classroom with no play and the bilingual classroom with play were significant ($F (1, 29) = 19.35$, $p < .001$; $F (1, 26) = 43.27$, $p < .001$, respectively). As can be seen in Figure 2, English proficiency increased over time in both of these bilingual classrooms. Additionally, although there was a significant difference in English proficiency across the three classrooms at both the start of the study ($F (2, 76) = 5.94$, $p < .01$) and at the end of the study ($F (2, 76) = 3.95$, $p < .05$), the nature of this difference changed over the course of the study. At the start of the study, post hoc Tukey analysis revealed that the children in the English-only classroom had higher English proficiency scores ($M = 27.14$, SD $= 24.25$) than children in both the bilingual classroom with no play ($M = 12.50$, SD $= 15.11$) and the bilingual classroom with play ($M = 12.15$, SD $= 11.23$). At the end of the study, post hoc Tukey analysis revealed that children in the English-only classroom had *lower* English proficiency scores ($M = 20.67$, SD $= 17.07$) than children in the bilingual classroom with play ($M = 37.19$, SD $= 24.05$).

Next, we returned to retellings. We examined the difference between pre-test and post-test scores in children's retelling scores averaged across the six fairy tales. On average, children's retelling scores increased from the pre-test ($M = 0.40$, SD $= 0.27$) to the post-test ($M = 1.02$, SD $= 0.55$; $F (1, 78) = 116.10$, $p < .001$).

As with English proficiency scores, we examined whether the degree to which pre-test scores differed from post-test scores varied across the three types of classrooms using a mixed ANOVA. There was a significant interaction between classroom and time, indicating that the degree to which children improved in their retellings from the pre-test to the post-test differed across the three classrooms ($F (2, 76) = 3.92$, $p < .05$). This interaction is depicted in Figure 3. Within-

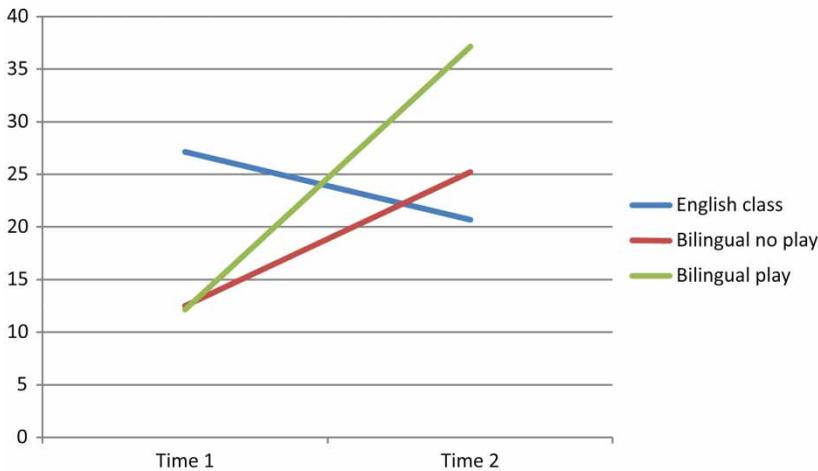Figure 2.   Change in English proficiency over time. English-only class with no play, bilingual class with no play, and bilingual class with play. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.
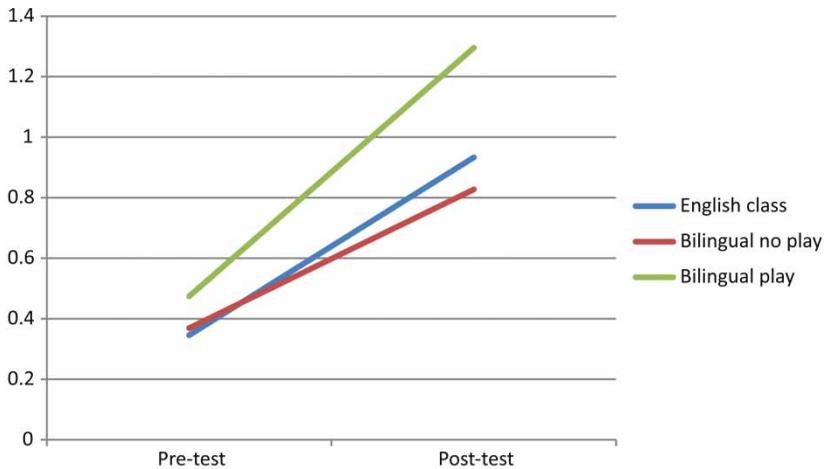
Figure 3.   Change in retelling performance over time. English-only class with no play, bilingual class with no play, and bilingual class with play. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

subjects ANOVAs examining each classroom separately revealed that children's retellings improved significantly in the English-only classroom with no play (F (1, 21) = 31.25, p < .001), in the bilingual classroom with no play (F (1, 29) = 25.35, p < .001), and in the bilingual classroom with play (F (1, 26) = 77.85, p < .001). Comparisons of the three classrooms' pre-test scores revealed no significant difference across the three classrooms (F (2, 76) = 1.65, p = .20). However, there was a significant difference across the three classrooms with respect to post-test scores (F (2, 76) = 6.24, p < .01). Post hoc Tukey analyses revealed that students in the bilingual play classroom had significantly higher post-test retelling scores (M = 1.30, SD = 0.51) than students in the bilingual classroom with no play (M = 0.83, SD = 0.50) and students in the English-only classroom (M = 0.93, SD = 0.54).

Discussion

This study investigated preschool teachers' use of bilingual fairy tales and story drama to improve English proficiency and story recall. The classroom teachers implemented the *Tools* curriculum and were trained in the use of a Vygotskian theoretical framework. From a Vygotskian approach children's make-believe play can promote development in the domains of social competence, cognition, and language. *Tools* teachers systematically integrate play into the curriculum in carefully structured ways to benefit the language, literacy, and social competence of the children involved. The present study illustrated how a Vygotskian approach to storybook reading and the use of play props increased children's English proficiency and story recall.

Specifically, this study had two hypotheses: (a) to predict if story drama as play pedagogy (Roskos & Christie, 2013) would improve English comprehension when fairy tales were read in English and Spanish and (b) to predict if preschoolers' ability to recall a fairy tale would increase when given play props and an opportunity to reenact the fairy tale during play time. First is a discussion of the effects on preschoolers' English comprehension when fairy tales were read in English and Spanish, and storybook play props are discussed. Second is an examination of the effects of preschoolers' ability to retell the fairy tale when given time for play.

The data suggest that bilingual instruction during storybook reading led to increases in English comprehension and oral language over the course of the study. Thus, the first hypothesis

is supported. Children who heard English versions of the fairy tales (classroom 1) had higher English proficiency scores at the start of the study, but lower scores than the classrooms that read the fairy tales in English and Spanish (classrooms 2 and 3). These results suggest that reading fairy tales in home and school languages, as well as allowing for daily make-believe play, can allow DLL students to show better progress in acquiring English proficiency. Conclusions are further supported by research (Gillanders, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2013) indicating that teachers who make curricular decisions that honor children's (and their families') stories, cultural and linguistic practices, and background experiences will show progress in acquiring English. Gillanders (2007) developed Spanish communication skills with her Latino preschool children during a school year and found her bilingual children not only improved in their English proficiency but also actively played with English-speaking peers. There is also a recent conceptual framework developed by the Center for Early Care and Education Research (CECER-DLL) indicating that DLLs enter preschool with literacy skills in English that are lower than those of monolinguals, but make significant progress during their preschool experience (Castro, Garcia, & Markos, 2013). Castro et al. (2013) claim that 'play as a context for learning' (p. 2) is important for DLLs, but the use of DLLs home language must be supported through intentional instruction. The results presented in the present study bring out the significance of reading fairy tales in English and Spanish and promote playful story drama practices.

The second goal was to examine if the effectiveness of preschoolers' story recall would increase when given play props and an opportunity to reenact the fairy tale during playtime. The hypothesis that the play conditions would be more effective was supported by post-test data for the bilingual class with play. It appears that the effectiveness of story recall was due to the additive nature of the use of play props and an opportunity to reenact the fairy tale with concrete objects during classroom play. Children in classroom 3 were introduced to play props and had higher post-test scores than the other classrooms. Children in the bilingual class (classroom 3) played with props and puppets related to each weekly fairy tale as they acted out the fairy tale scenario in the play centers. *Tools* teachers are trained to guide children's attention and learning through modeling. The teacher in classroom 3 guided her children by using play props as an instructional tool for story recall. The use of play props and story drama provided children with the opportunity to link real objects to the text (Justice & Pence, 2005), to provide motivation to label and learn the props' names and uses to organize story elements (Wasik & Bond, 2001), and provided to offer concrete tools for story retelling and linking to world experiences (Rowe, 2007).

Classroom 3 used play props and read storybooks in both English and Spanish to assist the children's language skills and recall of fairy tale stories. This classroom had additional opportunities to play with props and dramatize the events and characters in the fairy tales. Not only do these results demonstrate some positive effects on English proficiency, story recall, and play, but also have policy and practical implications.

Implications

DLLs need much support for and opportunities to practice oral English language development to become proficient in English. Teachers trained in providing strategies and skills and who use concrete objects will be able to help children transfer English knowledge back into their home language. It is important that teachers scaffold children's language so that the students realize that there are links between the two languages. It is also important that teachers continue to provide young children, preschoolers, as well as kindergarten and first-grade children opportunities to play and use related language each day so as to practice their language skills in a comfortable setting.

Play in early childhood classrooms in the USA is being challenged because teachers are under enormous pressure to emphasize achievement of academic skills (Miller & Almon, 2009). Playtime is often sacrificed for structured literacy or math skills. However, J. Almon from *Alliance for childhood* recently suggested teachers use puppets and story drama in classrooms to teach important language and literacy skills (personal communication, May 16, 2013). Bilingual children are able to convey their knowledge, needs and desires, and likes and dislikes in their home language long before they acquire verbal competence in English. They can do this through gesture, expression, and use of objects and puppets in interactive play with peers.

Play can support academic skills and concepts to further children's language and literacy abilities (Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2004). Sutton-Smith (2001) believes that play with toys is 'mediated through social interactions and social traditions' (p. 8) in many ways. Bilingual children in this study appeared to benefit from reading fairy tales in English and Spanish combined with the use of play props and puppets. In order for children, especially bilingual children, to visualize and comprehend story details they need hands-on activities. Rowe, Fitch, & Bass (2003) and Rowe (2007) investigations connecting dramatic play and children's comprehension and response to meanings encountered in books confirm the present study's connection between play props and language and literacy. Children in our study used the props to act out and dramatize scripts during dramatic play. Teachers with culturally and linguistically diverse preschoolers should try to include concrete objects or pictures while reading aloud. Children learn to not only take on the character roles they dramatize from a book (Welsch, 2008), but also realize significant cognitive processing while using props and engaging in drama (Rowe, et al., 2003; Rowe, 2007). Children question, organize story elements, solve problems, and begin to monitor their thinking.

Given the potential of bilingual fairy tales and play reported here, future research could consider following monolingual and bilingual students over an entire year to better capture the process of oral language with the use of story drama. Many questions arise: first, would the results be similar if the teachers were using different curricula? *Tools* teachers were trained in a Vygotskian approach to learning and development. *Tools* teachers are trained to scaffold dramatic play and use props and discussion mediators during *Story Lab*. There are other curricula that purport to be researched based and geared toward closing the gap between bilingual and monolingual preschoolers. A comparative study could be conducted where *Tools* is compared to another play curricula to try to better understand the relationship between teacher scaffolding and early language and play. Second, what was the dominant language used by children while dramatizing fairy tales? Were conversations in English or Spanish? Did the children code switch? As children engage in theme-based play scenarios they will frequently code switch and use two languages to act out characters or roles in imaginative play (Han, Benevides, & Christie, 2001). The use of two languages may offer opportunities for children to negotiate their speaker identities within their peer play culture (Blum-Kulka, 2005; Kyratzis et al., 2009).

Implications of this study must remain tentative because data were collected in one public school setting and differences in teaching styles were not considered. An interesting result that was not hypothesized was the finding that the English-only classroom's (classroom 1) scores were higher on the pre-test, but lower at post-test time than the bilingual class with play props (classroom 3). These gains could be attributed to differences in teaching styles. This is consistent with studies by Dickinson and Smith (1994) and Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) who found a teacher's style or approach to reading storybooks to children has effects on language and literacy development. This research did not assess teacher and student interactions while reading weekly fairy tales.

With a growing number of preschool DLLs, successful acquisition of English in the early years may support school success. Children can use their knowledge of their home language to enhance acquisition of English. Teachers need to have a better understanding that language

acquisition takes time and not assume that DLL children have deficits based on traditional developmental competencies (Castro et al., 2013). In sum, early educators are concerned about the language and literacy skills of DLL children as they enter kindergarten, as these skills are the foundation for additional learning that occurs in elementary school. Without a rich vocabulary, the ability to retell a story, and opportunities to learn language through play, our preschool children are likely to be at a disadvantage for current and future successful learning interactions. And while this affects all preschool children, it particularly impacts low-income Spanish-speaking children who are using knowledge of their primary language to enhance acquisition of a second language.

Acknowledgements

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