

I Am Bilingual: Developing Oral Language in Preschool

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Rationale

It is free choice center time and I observe Wendy, Monica, Pricilla, and Vicente playing in the dramatic play area. Wendy and Monica were both in my preschool classroom last school year and Pricilla and Vicente are experiencing their first year of school. Wendy is using a remote control as a telephone pretending to talk and saying, “oh estoy cocinando, ok yo te espero, bye.” [Oh I’m cooking, ok I’ll wait, bye] Meanwhile Monica is mixing food on the pretend pot on top of the pretend stove. She serves Wendy a plate and says, “come” [eat] to Vicente. Vicente smiles and pretends to eat, but does not attempt to say anything to Monica. Pricilla grabs a phone and pretends to call Wendy, “Are you home, I’m going with mi tia to your casa.”

The first month of school I noticed that my students were not interacting with one another during free choice time. There were only a few students that engaged in conversations, but they usually did not last a long time. I quickly noticed that my preschool students ranged within various levels of competence in speaking and listening. I had students that were pointing and making hand movements in order to communicate. Other students were attempting to speak, but I could not understand what they were saying. There were also the students that I could easily have conversations with, but struggled to hold conversations with peers. As I reflected I came to the conclusion that I would have to make teaching decisions that supported students at the beginning, emerging, developing, or meeting stages of

language. Oral language experiences are pivotal in an early childhood classroom because oral language development is interwoven with learning to read and write.

In order to support my students' oral language development I decided to focus my action research on the implementation of instructional practices that promote conversations and rich interactions amongst students. My students are young dual language learners and are developing two languages at the same time. The majority of their parents or grandparents speak Spanish to them and growing up in an urban setting they are hearing English in their environment. As a bilingual educator, I wanted to ensure students developed their oral language in both Spanish and English. Oral language proficiency has a direct impact in the future development of reading and writing, which in turn predicts a students' academic success.

School Context

This is my third year teaching as a bilingual preschool teacher at Marquette School of Excellence. The school is located in the south west side of Chicago. Marquette is a turnaround AUSL School and it underwent the turnaround process in 2012. The school serves Pre-K to 8th grade students totaling a 1,275-student population. Particularly to preschool, there are 3 preschool classrooms that have two half-day sessions. Marquette offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program (MYP). Students in the IB Program learn Arabic. The school has a fully functional science lab and two computer labs. Marquette enjoys community partnerships with Elev8 and Southwest Organizing Project through a Parent Mentorship Program. The school

demographics are 98.3% low income, 10% diverse learners, 30.4% Limited English, 39.5% Black, and 58.7% Latino.

The school has very strict rules. All children preschool to 8th grade are expected to be at level zero in the hallway and walk in straight lines. Younger children walk down the hallway with bubbles in their mouth, holding their shoulders or hands on their back. Children are discouraged from talking in the hallways and are reprimanded for doing so. I personally struggle with the level zero expectations being developmentally inappropriate for my students.

For the past two years I served as the preschool lead teacher. However, this school year I decided to take a step back and have another preschool teacher take on the leadership. So far I believe we have a strong team that supports each other regardless who is the lead and who are not. However, just like I have in the past, I still find ways to balance both the AUSL high academic demands and engaging my students in developmentally appropriate activities. It definitely feels like a lot of work because I do know what my students are capable of, but I also understand that there are specific developmental milestones they have to undergo in order to be successful in the future. Holistic experiences that focus on process rather than product have a long-term impact on students' development than memorizing facts that have no meaning for them.

I teach 40 preschoolers in a bilingual classroom. The instruction is primarily in Spanish throughout the day. I have two half-day classes. One session is from 8:00am-10:35am and the other from 12:25pm-3:00pm. My students' families are from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Illinois Preschool For All funds the preschool program at my school. I teach in a mixed age classroom ages three to five and my students enter school

with a variety of abilities. Regardless of the challenges, I always strategize with Mr. Chavez on ways that we can meet the needs of all of our students at their varying developmental levels.

On a daily basis I make sure to share with Mr. Chavez, my assistant teacher, my philosophies and strategies that we can use to support all of our students' learning. Mr. Chavez as my classroom assistant since 2012. We have definitely grown a lot in our practice and I would not change my experience working with him at all. We are both committed to the success of our students and truly work as a team always keeping student success at the forefront.

Literature Review

In recent years, the discourse about accessible quality early childhood education for all children, especially those from diverse ethnic and language backgrounds growing up in poverty has guided a lot of the conversations about closing the achievement gap in the United States. We know that children who attend preschool are less likely to drop out of high school and attend college. We also know that children who attend preschool have strong social and cognitive gains and are exposed to an academic foundation prior to entering Kindergarten. However, a lot of times we dismiss the word "quality," and come up with understandings of what preschool education is by ignoring early childhood developmentally appropriate practices. Preschool is not about worksheets and children sitting down in desks. Preschool is about children exploring, questioning, developing oral language, and engaging in provocative play that is intentional and supported by the teachers in the classroom. As the government continues to award grants to several

states, it is imperative that school districts and program administrators truly use the financial support provided to create a quality preschool program that addresses the needs of the students in their neighborhood. As well as support teachers via professional development and access to materials to be successful in the classroom.

A significant amount of research discusses the importance of literacy in the early academic years. It is pivotal for children to be able to read so that they can learn when they read. Reading is essential in every subject and if students cannot read it will reflect in other subjects aside from English language arts. Unfortunately at the school I teach at 13% of the third graders are at third grade reading level various theories behind types of curriculum in preschool. There is the direct instruction where the teacher uses drill and practice lessons that teach specific skills incrementally. In the traditional approach it is assumed that the children will eventually learn if the environment is provided. There is also the cognitive approach curriculum, which was a strong foundation in my development as an educator and continues to guide my teaching. In the cognitive approach learning is seen as an “active exchange between children and their environment, which include[s] the teacher” (Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006).

Youngquist writes that, “dual language learners need to continue learning in their first language, as it serves as a bridge to support their learning of English” (Youngquist & Martinez-Griego, 2014). Nemeth also discusses how there are a variety of strategies that support the literacy skills and language development of dual language learners that monolingual and bilingual teachers can use. In schools usually the conversations regarding bilingual education range from teaching literacy in English, teaching literacy in the early years in the native tongue, or teaching English as a second language to non-

English speakers. However, Nemeth argues that there has to be a purposeful program set in place that views the languages spoken by the children as valuable, teachers who collaborate, and administrators provide the support to develop educators of dual language learners (Nemeth, 2012).

Strong predictors of later reading achievement are experiences involving phonological awareness, oral language proficiency, and print awareness. Pullen and Justice state that all three should be integrated throughout every day activities in a preschool setting. I agree with the authors because phonological awareness, print awareness, and oral language cannot be taught isolated, but rather in purposeful play opportunities that are created and guided by the children and supported by the teachers. Pullen and Justice write that, “increasing explicit engagement in and exposure to phonological awareness activities is more important than relentlessly pursuing mastery of such concepts” (Pullen & Justice, 2003). Phonological awareness activities should be structured, but enjoyed by children and interactive. Writing opportunities should be available for students throughout the day and in every center. Teachers can mediate during play and model writing such as writing a grocery list or a birthday invitation. Interactive storybook reading is an identified approach in the language intervention of literature that will help enhance preschool’s oral language performance. The authors state that there is an, “intricate and robust association between oral language and other aspects of emergent literacy—namely, phonological awareness and print awareness— [that have] importance [in] helping children to develop a strong oral foundation” (Pullen & Justice, 2003).

Researchers have also focused on identifying strategies within a storybook context that promote oral language development. Incorporating repeated readings, story props, expansions, open-ended questions, and praise within the curriculum have demonstrated to accelerate children's print awareness and oral language. Wasik and Bond evaluated a program where teachers used the interactive book reading technique and its effect on the language and literacy development of their 4-year old students. The results show that children in the control group who were read the same books, but did not have the teachers who exposed them to the book more than one time and included props and engagement outside of reading time, knew less vocabulary words than the students in the intervention group with the teacher who used the interactive book strategy, story props, and extension activities (Wasik & Bond, 2001).

In my classroom I am focusing on using story books to support oral language development and print awareness. I am very interested in extending the storybook during center time by adding props that the children will use and make connections with the text. "According to Vygostky children develop an understanding of the world through the medium of play" and play provides a learning context for literacy and vocabulary development (Massey, 2013). When the teacher connects comprehension and play there are vast opportunities for children to enhance student's vocabulary and comprehension language skills. This study discusses four levels of abstraction to differentiate for students. I am definitely going to use the abstraction levels during my planning because as the author suggests concrete and abstract comments and questioning while reading a storybook will support creating cognitively challenging conversations and play. However, in order to achieve the extension of storybooks from the rug to

centers Massey writes that, “purposeful planning of storybook reading, guided play, and targeted conversational input by preschool educators are key components in effective preschool classrooms” (Massey, 2013).

At my school I have the autonomy to try out new strategies in my classroom as long as I have the research that supports it. I see that my action research has two primary purposes. One is to inform my teaching practices based on what my students are learning and how they are developing. The second is to continue the conversation about bridging curriculum effectiveness and assessment. Curriculum should be developmentally appropriate and include best practices for dual language learners and appropriate assessment tools should be used to track their academic progress. Although my action research focuses on the preschool years, it is imperative to understand assessment because of the discourses around the achievement gap and testing that is conducted starting in Kindergarten. Rodriguez and Guiberson argue that standardized assessments written in English without taking into account children’s language diversity are not appropriate for dual language learners because the assessment was written with the assumption that children have the same exposure to English as their English speaking peers. Even when a student is beginning to speak in English, the results from the assessment will not be able to accurately identify the development of language and literacy skills because the assessment was specifically normed for monolingual students (Rodriguez, 2011). The research that discusses the strategies about interactive storybooks with props and extensions to centers does not focus on dual language learners. Thus, I hope to learn more about how exposing dual language learners to interactive read

alouds that are repetitive, include props, and are extended to play centers support their oral language and literacy skill proficiency in both English and Spanish.

Research Question:

What happens in my preschool classroom when I emphasize oral language development?

Sub-questions:

- What happens to the student's oral language?
- How does student writing change over time?
- How do children's interactions with peers and adults change over time?

I first began my research by focusing on developing oral language through interactive read aloud strategies that focused on comprehension, student active engagement, and retelling stories.



Retelling Story – *Goldilocks and Three Little Bears*



Retelling Story – *Little Red Riding Hood*



Retelling Story – *The Paper Bag Princess*

Retelling Story – *The Paper Bag Princess*

However, throughout my research cycle I wanted to provide more opportunities for inquiry and I began to implement strategies such as weekly small group research groups and independent reading time.



Research Groups – Wolves and Foxes



Research Groups – Paper and



Aluminum

I also made sure to be more intentional

about transitions and free choice centers to provide more opportunities for students to practice using vocabulary from the stories we had read and the research that they had conducted.



tute



Transition: Independent Reading Time



Transition: Journal Writing



Intentional Centers



Data Collection Methods

1. Pre-K for All Mandated Assessments/Screening Data
 - a. Pre-IPT Oral English Proficiency Test – The test assesses the proficiency of a student in the domains of comprehension, verbal expression, syntax, and vocabulary ages 3-5. The intent then of the Pre-IPT–Oral English is to assess the performance of students in response to items representative of common English language speech patterns, both inside and outside the classroom.
 - b. Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) - Checkpoints are conducted three times during the school year. TSG is the assessment tool used in preschool where teachers input anecdotal records of observations, checklists, videos, pictures, and voice recordings of students during free

choice center time and throughout the school day. Checkpoints are finalized during the fall, winter, and spring and used to inform instruction and understand where children fall on the development spectrum in the areas of literacy, language, math, social emotional development, cognitive development, physical development, art, social studies, technology, and science.

2. Teacher Journal

- a. I used my journal to reflect after I had implemented a strategy and many times went beyond my focus of oral language. I reflected on my teaching decisions and on the bilingual program at my school, and I also used the journal as a space to reflect on my own philosophies as an educator related to early childhood education and bilingual education. The teacher journals served in a sense as an opportunity to write down about the societal implications I am constantly thinking about. I realize that I am missing a space to vocalize my deep passion rooted in student identity, culture, language, and social justice. Thus, I used my teacher journal to express my concern with education becoming so standards based rather than looking at the whole child. The teacher journal also helped me connect the dots between my frustrations and my constant determination to find ways to expose my students to culturally relevant experiences, a place that promotes child active engagement and inquiry, and one that promotes collaboration, teamwork, and access to play as a form social justice.

3. Videos

- a. I used videos a lot throughout this research cycle because they were a way that I could record data and still support students. In a preschool classroom there is always a lot going on and videos have a way of showing more than what students say, such as their reactions, feelings, and collaboration with peers. A lot of the recording occurred during independent reading time, small group research groups, and centers/student selected play.

4. Writing Samples

- a. Writing occurs throughout the day for students in the classroom. Very rich writing samples have been collected during small group research groups, free writing journal time, and centers/student selected play. I would write down a student dictation and date to recall what the student said about their writing. A writing rubric is used to analyze student writing.

5. Student Interviews

- a. I interviewed five students to get a deeper understanding of how they understand their own language development (in both Spanish and English). I asked them questions such as: What do you like about school? What languages do you speak? How do you feel about speaking those languages? How did you learn to speak those languages?

Analysis & Interpretation of Data

“I guess I think about preschool in a different way than many people. It is not just playing, but developing young minds and letting them develop independently and in their own unique way. Not everyone has to be the same and there isn’t only one right way to do things. I do not believe in telling my students to be quiet because telling them to be quiet is continuing to silence their voices that are already silenced in a literal and non-literal way.” – Journal, 10.3.14

When the school year started I wanted to know what I needed to do in order to make sure that my students learned, felt happy, and engaged in meaningful conversations with peers and adults. I discovered that I would introduce a new strategy and students would really run with it and make it their own. I was very excited to see students loving to use props and retelling stories, but I knew that I could do more and that my students were ready for more opportunities to use vocabulary and engage in conversations. Thus, I saw that my students put in all their effort and I continued to challenge myself to not only emphasize oral language during one specific part of our school day, but during every minute of those two and a half hours every day. I know that strong oral skills lead to strong literacy skills.

As I began the journey to connect the dots between strategies I was implementing in my classroom, reflecting via my teacher journal, and analyzing student work all with the intention to emphasize oral language development in my classroom, I finally made a connection as to why I was so passionate about emphasizing oral language in my classroom. All this time I have been taught to think about what my students know in isolation, rather than seeing them as bilingual and bicultural individual at the age of three, four, or five. The frameworks, the curriculum, the resources are available in Spanish and English, sometimes not in an equitable way, but they are available. However, in my school it is never emphasized that the learning of both languages is connected and that

the development of both are important. English should not be learned at the cost of Spanish and vice versa. When I was able to finally see my findings rather than just feeling it every day through interactions with students, I realized that I was not only emphasizing oral language, but also emphasizing a sense of *orgullo* (pride) in being bilingual, and making myself, parents, and colleagues aware that our bilingual students know more than we think because the assessments set in place do not represent their linguistic abilities. Honoring children's development of two languages, oral language and bilingual preschool, and what does it mean to be bicultural and bilingual to you are the major themes I found within my action research data to answer the question of: *What happens in my preschool classroom when I emphasize oral language development?*

In order to share my story in a way that gives justice to my students' efforts and sheds light to my thinking process to meet my students' needs, I decided to organize the analysis section of my paper using the following sub-sections:

- ***Honoring children's development of two languages*** – In this section I present data in the form of tables and graphs for the 2014-2015 school year that is specific to oral language development. The Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD) data is data that was collected and is representative of the Spanish oral language development of my preschool students; particularly focusing on the use of conventional grammar. The Pre-IPT English Language Proficiency Assessment Table is representative of student's speaking and listening abilities at the beginning of the school year. There are two WIDA Expressive and Receptive English Development tables, one for winter and the other for the spring period that I used to monitor English oral language development. Throughout this

section I explain my thinking process from the beginning of the year to the end of the academic year by analyzing data in three sections: fall, winter, and spring periods. I decided to tell the ‘hard data’ story in this form in order to help the reader visualize a living timeline of my realization of the needs of my students as I analyzed the data and celebrate the efforts of my students.

- ***Oral language and bilingual preschool*** – In this section I share my thinking process in regards to emphasizing oral language development in my classroom from the beginning of the year to the end of the school year. I did not want to take away from the great things my students were doing, and thus I decided to only use qualitative data such as student anecdotes and my teacher journal. The ‘hard data’ was discussed in the previous section as a preface for the reader to understand why I started the school year implementing one strategy and ended up implementing multiple strategies by end of the school year.
- ***What does it mean to be bicultural and bilingual to you?*** – In the final section of the analysis component of this paper I share my student’s stories by highlighting their responses to interviews that I conducted. Interviews were conducted at the end of the year in both Spanish and English with five specific students. My hope is to provide the reader with a lens into the lives of dual language. Latino, first or second-generation preschooler, growing up in the south side of Chicago, and how they define schooling and their linguistic experiences at school.

Honoring children's development of two languages

“Two is better than one, and earlier is better than later” – Journal, November 2014

I teach in a bilingual preschool classroom at a school that has an early bilingual transition program. Basically, children receive bilingual education in preschool (majority of instruction is in Spanish) and the goal is for them to acquire English. However, I have never been given much direction on how to meet the language needs of students since most of them speak Spanish and they are at school for two and a half hours a day. This school year however, as I began to better understand how I could emphasize oral language in my preschool classroom I did it with a different lens; analyzing student data in English and Spanish, but not in isolation even though the assessments are organized in a framework that only includes one language. Based on the data from the graph below I knew that the majority of my students were at a Beginning level of speaking English. However, there were a few students that fell in level B, C, and D which were one of the motivators to develop both languages and make changes the current preschool educational program at Marquette (within my classroom). When I thought about developing oral language in the beginning stages of this project I considered only developing Spanish. However, as I read more of the research and observed that students would use vocabulary in English to express their ideas I began to pay attention to the development of their oral language in both languages.

Pre-IPT Oral Test for Ages 3-5 – Data from BOY

IPT Oral Designation	NES (Non-English Speaking)	LES (Limited English Speaking)			FES (Fluent English Speaking)
		Early Intermediate	Intermediate	Early Advanced	
3 Year Olds	A	B*	B*	C	D, E
	Kayla Miranda Angel Vicente Christian S. Alexander Esmerai Antonio Michelle	Mario Esteban Leslie		Jacob	
4 and 5 year Olds	A	B	C	D	E
	Wendy Christian B. Sofia Cesar Denisse Tania Lorenzo Evangelina Dylan Alexandra Daniel Emily Josemaria Oscar	Gerald Natalie Heidy David Victoria	Moises Pricilla	Noemi	

I used Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment tool to keep running records of students’ oral language development in Spanish, I have data for three periods; fall, winter, and spring of the school year. Although I knew that my students knew more words, because they speak both English and Spanish, the assessment tool looked at language knowledge in isolation. I particularly focused on *uses language to express thoughts and needs*. The following are the tables demonstrating children’s oral language growth in Spanish throughout the school year. The table below demonstrates the developmental bands. My students who are three year olds should be within the range of

the green color and students who are four years old should be within the range of the blue color band. I used the rubric figure out if my students were below grade level (<5), grade level (6), or above grade level (7+).

Developmental Rubric for Objective 9: Uses language to express thoughts and needs

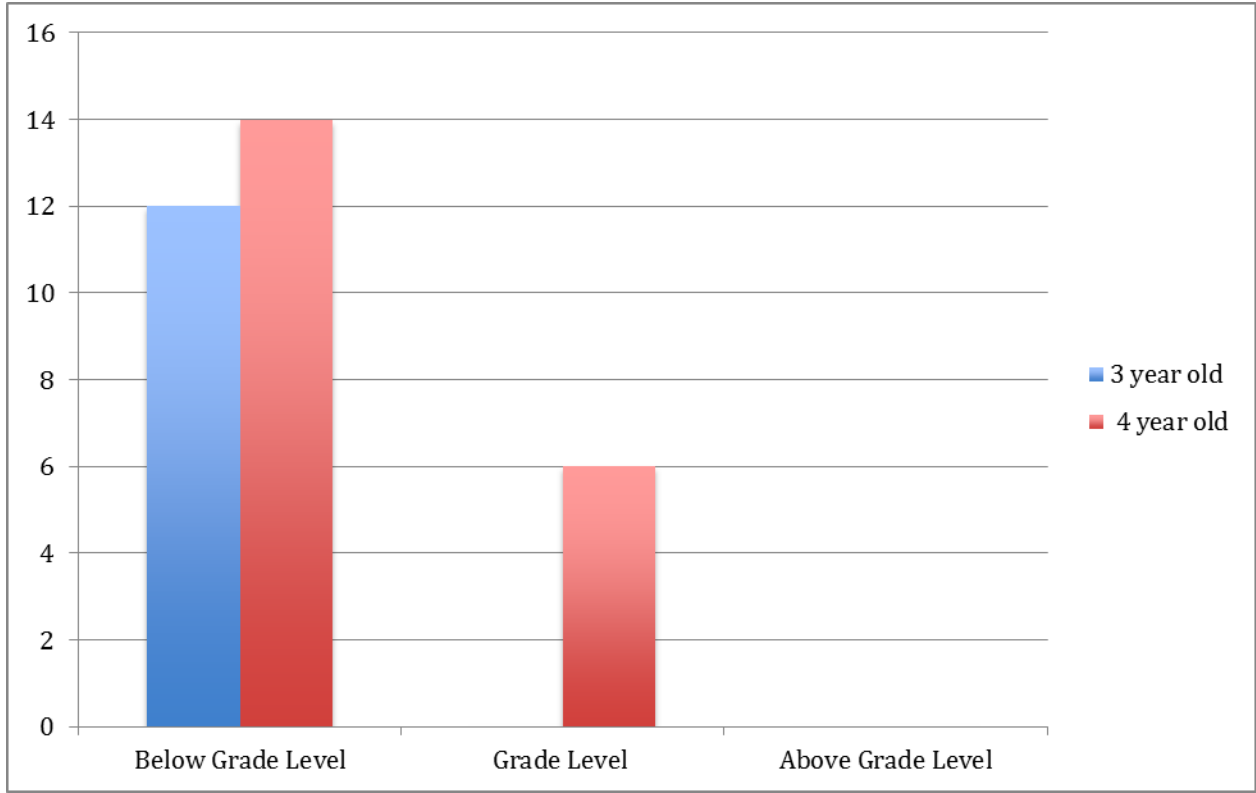
Objective 9 Uses language to express thoughts and needs

c. Uses conventional grammar

Not Yet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	<p>Uses one- or two-word sentences or phrases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks, "More?" Says, "Daddy go." Uses one word, "Juice," to mean, "I want some juice." 	<p>Uses three- to four-word sentences; may omit some words or use some words incorrectly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says, "Bed no go." Says, "Daddy goed to work." Responds, "I want banana," when asked what she wants for snack 	<p>Uses complete, four- to six-word sentences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says, "I chose two books." Says, "We are going to the zoo." Says, "Momma came and we went home." 	<p>Uses long, complex sentences and follows most grammatical rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says, "We are going to the zoo to see the animals. We'll learn where they live and what they eat." Notices when sentences do not make sense; tries to correct them 					

During the fall, 26 of my 32 students (8 students are not included because students transferred out of the school during the fall period) were below grade level in their use of language to express thoughts and needs. The students below grade level used one-or two word sentences or phrases and/or three-to four-word sentences. Students considered on grade level used complete four-to six-word sentences. In the fall there were only six students on grade level and out of the six students, five had been in my preschool classroom the previous school year.

Fall 2014 – Uses Conventional Grammar (TS GOLD data)



After analyzing the Fall TS GOLD data as well as the Pre-IPT assessment I knew that my students needed to engage in conversations with each other and peers and that they were all at different levels. In my teacher journal I wrote about the students who were not talking or struggled to communicate:

“I have noticed that in my AM class Vicente, Jacob, Oscar, and Angel are feeling comfortable in the classroom because of their smiles and their eagerness to be a part of learning activities in the classroom. Oscar and Jacob continue to respond with one or two words in English. Angel is still not making any sounds when he speaks. He moves his mouth, but I cannot hear anything and I am wondering if it is selective mutism, if there is something on with his hearing or his throat, or if he is just acquiring vocabulary. In my PM class Esmerai does very well with talking with

teachers using 3-5 words during exchanges, and has been able to separate from her mom without crying after drop-off at school. Daniel and Lluvia are more connected to the classroom and Daniel is even speaking in 2 word sentences! At the beginning of the year I could not comprehend what he was saying and now I can say that I understand him 50% of the time! Lluvia is still not talking and I am not sure if it is selective mutism, just like Michelle in the AM class, because she does not respond for about 75% of the time and only stares at teachers, smiles, or follows directions with support.” Journal. November 2014

From this journal entry, I can also make the connection that I knew that with the TS GOLD data I was not getting the entire picture of what my students know (in a quantitative way). I had the Pre-IPT data and I could not ignore the fact that some of my students spoke both languages and others used words in English to say colors, numbers, etc. Thus I decided to use the Early Learning WIDA standards to monitor children’s English oral language development in comprehension. I created the following graph during the winter period of the school year because I needed a place to organize what students knew and keep track of their growth.

WIDA Expressive and Receptive English Development – January 2015 (Winter)

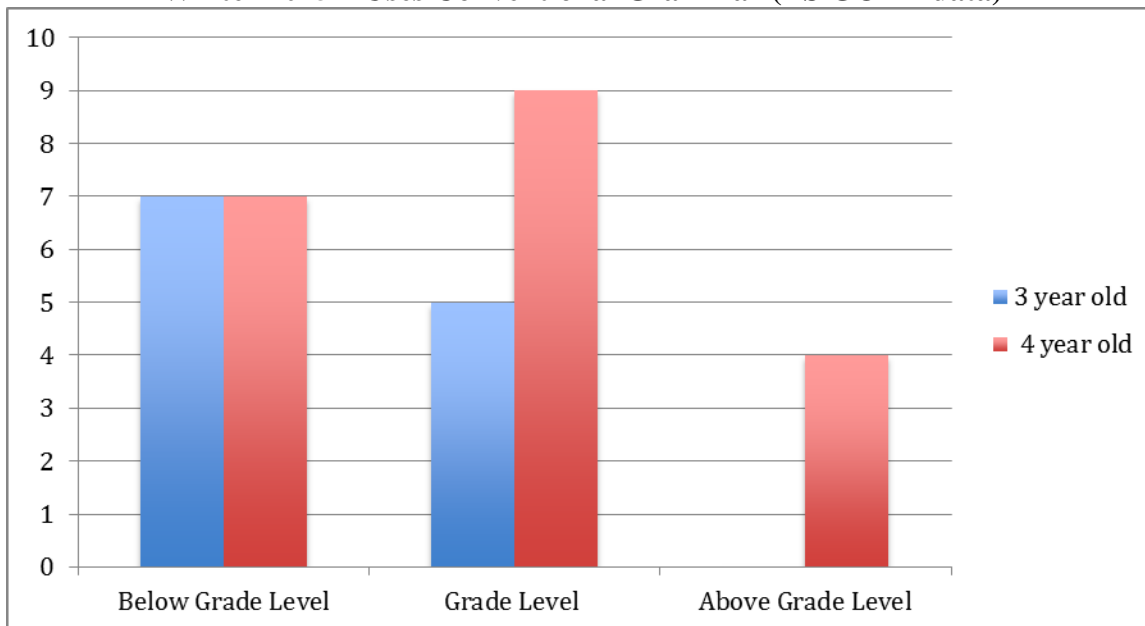
Receptive	Language Criteria	Ages 3.5-4.5	Ages 4.5-5.5
Level 5 Bridging	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage		AM: Pricilla, Moises, Victoria PM: Noemi
Level 3 Developing	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage	AM: Mario, Noel, Jacob, Kayla PM: Leslie, Esteban, Alexander, Antonio, Christian S.	AM: Emily, Joel, Sofia, Gerald PM: Dylan, Natalie, Tania , Denisse, Evangelina, David
Level 1 Entering	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage	AM: Michelle, Vicente, Angel PM: Esmerai,	AM: Cesar, Monica, Wendy, PM: Alexandra, Ashley, Christian B., Daniel, Lorenzo
Expressive	Language Criteria	Ages 3.5-4.5	Ages 4.5-5.5
Level 5 Bridging	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage		AM: Pricilla, Moises, Victoria PM: Noemi
Level 3 Developing	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage	AM: Mario, Noel, Jacob PM: Leslie, Esteban, Alexander	AM: Emily, Joel PM: Dylan, Natalie, Tania , Denisse, Evangelina, David
Level 1 Entering	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage	AM: Kayla, Michelle, Vicente, Angel PM: Christian S., Esmerai, Antonio	AM: Cesar, Monica, Sofia, Wendy, Gerald PM: Alexandra, Ashley, Christian B., Daniel, Lorenzo

During the winter period I also implemented a ten-minute daily instruction that focused on the development of vocabulary and oral language in English. In my teacher journal I wrote about the specific things I had to do in order to prepare and intentionally teach vocabulary in English that children had previous experiences with in Spanish.

For this upcoming week I envision relating the meeting taught in English to entail an activity that builds upon the vocabulary that comes from the books that we are reading in class. Particularly the three little pigs, names of materials to construct, action words, and words that we can add kinesthetic movement to. I am also going to be very strategic in modeling complete sentences and will communicate that with my teacher assistant. -
Journal, January 10, 2015

As shown in the above table, student's oral language expressive and receptive skills improved from the fall to the winter period. The Spanish oral language skills also improved and it is evident that children's demonstrated growth in the first language was evident in the second language. I also noticed that students who were in the beginning stage of English proficiency at the beginning of the year had developed and moved into the developing stage of English proficiency using the WIDA English developmental framework. During the winter period there were 14 students below grade level compared to 26 in the fall period. This means that instead of using between one to 4 words, children were using five or more words in sentences to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings with other students and teachers. There were also four students who moved to the above grade level bands during the winter period. What was very exciting to see was that more than 50% of the class was on grade level or above compared to the fall when more than half of the students were below grade level.

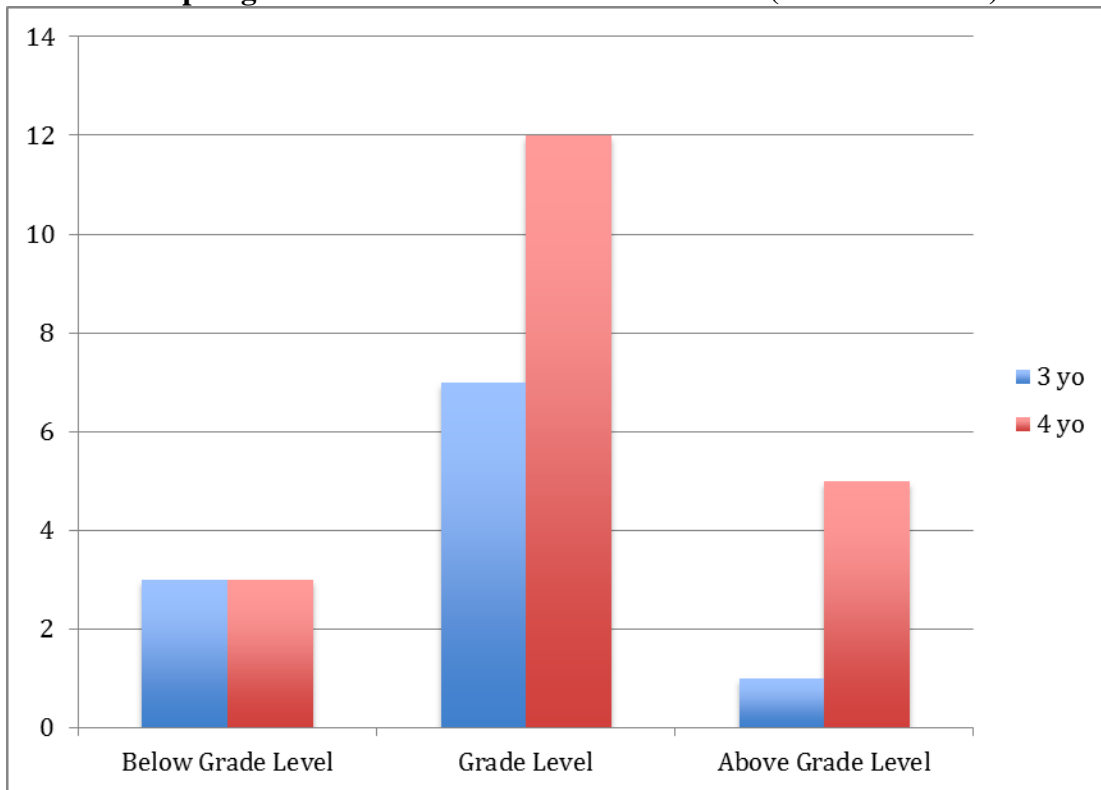
Winter 2015 – Uses Conventional Grammar (TS GOLD data)



As I continued to implement strategies to meet the diverse needs of my students to support their oral language development I was very excited to see how much students grew from the fall period to spring period. In terms of oral language development in Spanish all the students demonstrated growth, even though some stayed in in *below grade level*. The students that particularly stayed below grade level where students who qualified for speech services and never received them throughout the year and students who I had referred for an IEP, but never went through the evaluation process. Although I knew what those specific students needed, it was out of my control to support them one-on-one for a larger period of time because of my teaching obligations. Overall, I was very impressed to see that three year olds were in grade level and above grade level

because this tells me that the upcoming school year they will be able to continue to make a lot of academic growth.

Spring 2015 – Uses Conventional Grammar (TS GOLD data)



By the end of the year not only did I see growth in Spanish oral language development, but also English oral language development. When I discuss oral language, I include both receptive and expressive skills. My students made growth in their receptive skills, which is their ability to comprehend what is being said to them in English. The students that never moved from the entering level since the beginning of the year are the same students that were in the below grade level in Spanish oral language and their ability to use less than five words when communicating throughout the school year. There were also the students that made a lot of growth in their receptive and expressive skills in English. In my teacher journal I write about the excitement that I felt

when I heard students who had never spoken in English using complete sentences demonstrating their ability to not only comprehend, but also express their ideas.

Journal, 3.14.15 - “This past month has been one where I’ve began to see a lot of growth related to my students’ oral language development (both English and Spanish) as well as in their writing. I say this because as I continue to track my student’s progress using checklists, video, and writing (dictations) I have been able to see how much they have grown since the beginning of the academic year. Antonio and Daniel, two students that could barely say their name are now speaking using 3-4 words during each exchange. Just yesterday during our ESL (English as a Second Language) block that Mr. Chavez and I implemented for the duration of 10 minutes every day for the duration of ten minutes I noticed that Tania, Denisse, and Emily could say complete sentences in English such as “I use my eyes to see.” Noemi was able to identify what the word on the board said “touch” because she said “comienza con la t” (it starts with a t).”

WIDA Expressive and Receptive English Development – April 2015 (Spring)

Receptive	Language Criteria	Ages 3.5-4.5	Ages 4.5-5.5
Level 5 Bridging	Linguistic Complexity	AM: Mario, Noel	AM: Pricilla, Moises, Victoria, Emily, Gerald
	Language Usage	PM: Esteban, Leslie	PM: Noemi, Dylan, Tania, Denisse, David, Natalie
Level 3 Developing	Linguistic Complexity	AM: Kayla	AM: Sofia
	Language Usage	PM: Alexander, Antonio, Christian S.	PM: Evangelina, Alexandra
Level 1 Entering	Linguistic Complexity	AM: Michelle, Vicente, Angel J., Angel V.	AM: Cesar, Monica, Wendy,
	Language Usage	PM: Esmerai, Dereck	PM: Ashley, Christian B., Daniel, Lionel
Expressive	Language Criteria	Ages 3.5-4.5	Ages 4.5-5.5

Level 5 Bridging	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage	AM: Mario, Noel PM: Esteban, Leslie	AM: Pricilla, Moises, Victoria, Emily, Gerald PM: Noemi, Dylan, Tania, Denisse, David, Natalie
Level 3 Developing	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage	AM: Kayla PM: Alexander, Antonio, Christian S.	AM: Sofia PM: Evangelina, Alexandra
Level 1 Entering	Linguistic Complexity Language Usage	AM: Michelle, Vicente, Angel J., Angel V. PM: Esmerai, Dereck	AM: Cesar, Monica, Wendy, PM: Ashley, Christian B., Daniel, Lionel

The reality is that when I emphasized oral language development, my preschool students definitely strengthened their oral language skills. I not only emphasized oral language development just in Spanish or just in English, rather than seeing the development of both languages in isolation I began to see them as agents that supported the language development of children. Throughout this process I was also trying to make sense of what I was seeing in my classroom since assessments themselves are not inclusive of children who are learning and developing two languages at the same time. For example, on my journal I wrote:

“Yes, children learn English quickly, but those that continue to strengthen their first language transfer on those skills to the second language. For example, since we came back from winter break I have been implementing ten minutes when my teacher assistant and I teach in English we transition “1,2,3 hablamos en ingles” (1,2,3 we speak in English). Everything we introduce the students to in English is content that we have taught them in Spanish already. Thus, they have background knowledge about what we have taught them and it is more about English language development skills rather than comprehension skills. My students are definitely

strengthening their English oral language abilities at various levels. I notice that those students that have stronger Spanish oral language skills are easily able to transfer those skills to English. Emily is speaking with Pricilla in English (Pricilla speaks more in English) and she is using 2-3 exchanges in English. I also notice Antonio says words like see and touch because he has learned that is how to say “mirar” and “tocar” in English.”
– Journal, 3.14.15

It is evident that as I continued to emphasize oral language in my preschool classroom, I was challenged to evolve as an educator and make changes within the praxis of my pedagogy. Through daily interactions with my students, they showed me that there was more to just getting them to talk and begin to use more than five words in complete sentences with at least three exchanges. The students demonstrated that they were capable of developing oral language, but I had to change my mindset around what oral language development looked like in my classroom because my students were developing two languages within a school context that views the development of languages in isolation.

Oral language and bilingual preschool

So how exactly did I emphasize oral language in my classroom? I made sure that I used a variety of strategies to encourage children to engage in conversations. I was also very purposeful about the messages children heard in the classroom related to language. During large group activities they all knew when we were learning in English and when we were learning in Spanish, but also knew that they could respond to questions in either language. I honored their responses, and if a student would respond in English I would make sure other children knew what a students said by re-stating it in Spanish if the

lesson was being taught in Spanish. Eventually children began translating for each other. In my journal I wrote about my observations earlier in the teacher and how I noticed that children would communicate using Spanish, English, or both languages.

“Something I have also noticed is that in each class there are a few students that speak in the classroom using English. Since I teach in a bilingual classroom all the students had to be assessed using the Pre-IPT screener, which tests English language development. The range is from A to E with E being the highest and A the lowest in English development. Most of my students are in level A and B and a few in C and D. What is interesting is that Pricilla, Oscar, and Jacob use English or a mixed of English and Spanish to respond to questions and engage in conversations, but they did not “pass” the Pre-IPT screener. However, I am now making the connection that they did not necessarily pass the test because their English has not developed, but because their expressive or comprehension skills are still developing in English, thus causing them to not answer questions correctly. I guess what I am trying to say is that they are learning both English and Spanish at the same time and they comprehend, or sometimes seem to comprehend in one language and other times in another. I am more concerned about Oscar and Jacob because they are the ones that are less expressive. Pricilla will respond coherently in English or Spanish and will usually mix both languages using vocabulary from both. I notice the same thing happening in the PM class, but only with Natalie.” Journal, November 2014

I knew that I wanted students to develop their oral language skills and I could only implement strategies successfully if I was well aware about how to meet my student’s diverse language needs. In my journal I wrote about how used relevant research, collaboration with my assistant teacher, changing the daily schedule, and using intentional strategies and vocabulary to meet the diverse language needs of my students.

“After reading more relevant research about dual language learners and how I can support the development of both languages in my classroom I first discussed my ideas with my assistant teacher and then decided on a plan to teach a class meeting in English for about 10 minutes every day. We decided to start with ten minutes every day so that we can gather data related to student English comprehension and expressive skills. So far we have been doing it for a week and the students responded very well. It was also interesting to hear myself teaching in English again after almost 3 years since my first year of teaching. One student asked, “maestra porque esta hablando en ingles?” (teacher why are you speaking in english?) and I responded, “I’m speaking in English because I am bilingual and so are all of you! I want to continue to practice my English, do you all want to?” The students said, “yes” and we continued on with the feelings activity that I put materials together for. I started with a feelings activity because all of the students in my classroom can identify sad, mad, sleepy, surprised, scared in Spanish and they would be able to use their background knowledge (even if it is in Spanish) to participate. The activity went along with the tune of “If you’re happy and you know it.”
Journal, January 10, 2015

While I was trying to wrap my mind around changing the daily schedule and making sure I was consistent and communicated daily with my assistant teacher, I was also reflecting on the overall two and half hours of learning my students engaged in during every day. I began to think about the moments my students were talking to each other and not talking to each other. The reality was that it all depended on the child because their oral language abilities varied. I decided to focus on the independent reading transition after bathroom break, interactive read alouds and storytelling, as well

as implement research groups. I specifically used those strategies in my bilingual preschool classroom to support oral language development.

Since my classroom did not have a bathroom, my assistant teacher and I would take the students on a bathroom break. Sometimes due to scheduling conflicts the boys would finish using the bathroom a lot faster than the girls or vice versa. At first children would just select a book and they all sat on the rug for about five minutes. The time the students actually varied, depending if they did not have to wait longer to use the bathroom because another classroom may have been using it. However, my assistant teacher and I began to talk about how we could make those five minutes very purposeful for the students. It first started by adding multiple copies of books in the two bookshelves that we had previously read in the classroom and books related to topics we were learning about. The students were very excited to get to read the books that we were reading independently. They were so interested that they wanted to read to each other and students just wanted to interact with another students who were reading one of the copies of a book that was no longer available on the bookshelf. The students now not only had an opportunity to interact with books and learn how to use them appropriately, but they also had an opportunity to use vocabulary from texts read in class as well as interact with peers as they read they story together. The students also wanted began to ask if they could read in the classroom library or the rug in the block area. Eventually independent reading time was not so independent, in terms of students reading on their own. The students selected a book after their bathroom break and could sit in any area of the classroom that they wanted. They just had to make sure that they were reading or talking about a story while treating the book with respect. Independent

reading time was definitely not quiet because students were re-telling stories or reading to friends. Some of the patterns of folding books, turning multiple pages at once, or not focusing on one book that I noticed in the beginning of the year were not evident by the end of the year.

I believe that students would not have demonstrated such interest and engagement during independent reading time if I had not intentionally planned interactive read alouds and intentionally connected materials to different areas in the classroom for center time. In my journal I write about my dissatisfaction with read aloud time and promoting language development.

“However, as I continue to think about our current read aloud time I realize that some of my students do not have the vocabulary or language to express their thoughts and ideas.” - Journal, 10.3.14

During an interactive read aloud the teacher should model using props, puppets, and different voices while reading stories. Then the materials can be made accessible to children during center time and independent reading time for children to retell their stories, practice speaking, selecting a role/character, and collaborating with other peers by using language to communicate. During center time teachers should introduce students to materials that are related to the theme, unit, or study to promote oral language development and student use of vocabulary learned throughout the unit. This will provide students with vast opportunities to interact with materials on a daily basis and easily engage in conversations with teachers and peers. At this point in the school year I knew what my students needed, but I had to figure out a plan on how I was going to make

it happen and implement the strategies effectively to emphasize oral language development in my bilingual classroom.

As an early childhood teacher and through the training that I have gone through, I know that there are three teachers in the classroom. The three teachers are the teacher, the students, and the classroom or environment. Since I wanted to have centers that were interactive and gave children an opportunity to practice vocabulary they learned in stories and be able to re-tell stories in various forms during center time I had to adjust the classroom environment. I also knew that some of my students who needed more language support needed story time to be differentiated to meet their language needs. My assistant teacher and I decided to break into two groups during story time to support students during read aloud time. In my teacher journal I wrote about the changes that I made and my thought process.

“Today I stayed after school to re-arrange certain areas of my classroom. This began from my experience introducing props and materials to retell the story of Goldilocks and The Three Bears and then seeing that my students were excited, but the space in the library did not allow them to truly engage in the re-telling. I also noticed that some of my students were easily distracted during read alouds (Oscar, Jacob, Gerald, Vicente, Leslie, Esmerai, Natalie). I also feel that some students are more outspoken than others and there are students who take longer to participate or provide a response. Having two groups to read the story at the beginning of the week will provide the children with an opportunity to have greater participation during read aloud time. I also thought about writing and materials that promote writing in the classroom. I took pictures of before and after and I have those in my ipad that show how the room is more open for the students and just supports learning through retelling stories and making connections.” – Journal, November 25, 2014

I arranged the classroom so that all materials were assessable for students in a safe way. I moved the classroom ELMO (camera) so that it could also be at children's eye level and they could use it to project stories on the white board and pretend reading stories to their friends. It took a lot of trust and communication from my part and my assistant teacher, but the students were very excited and the environment change was very visible to the students and they definitely utilized it as one of the teachers in the classroom. In my journal I write about how my students responded to the environment change and how I began to implement more intentional center time that was related to topics we were reading about during story time with the goal of emphasizing oral language development.

“Today my students said they loved how the room looked. They were really excited about the new materials that were added to the centers, the materials that were donated through donors choose. They were able to use the props in the dramatic play area and continue to play birthday party and going to a party. I think that they have had a lot of experiences with birthday parties and dressing up which is the reason why they are able to engage in these play experiences. There is a video recording and it is phenomenal to see how students who usually never played together are playing together and waiting their turn and just collaborating. I also introduced an animal hospital in the science area since I noticed that the children have been truly intrigued by our turtle. I was thinking of a way that I could encourage writing, conversations, play, and collaboration. So far the students have loved writing prescriptions on post-it notes and discussing what is wrong with the dog and the monkey animals that we have in the dramatic play area.” Journal, December 1, 2014

As I began to implement activities I became more confident in what I was doing and able to differentiate and changed plans on the spot based on student responses, interactions, and level of engagement. I definitely communicated a lot with my assistant

teacher so that he could do the same when he would read a story to a group of students or during center time when he engaged with children. I selected books to read based on the studies that we were focusing in our classroom that were provided as preschool curriculum. In my journal I write about how I prepared to emphasize oral language in my classroom through storytelling.

“Today I used the felt-board to retell the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Again, as a large group read aloud it was very successful in both classes. All the students were attentive and they repeated along and enjoyed that I used different voices for the different characters. I do realize that it definitely takes a lot of time to plan for re-telling in the classroom and getting all the materials ready and making sure that there are specific connections to the book in each center. For next week I will be reading The Paperback Princess and I feel a bit more prepared, although I still have to have the re-telling materials ready by Thursday. A difference this week thought is that the small groups connect with different components of the story as well as centers in the classroom.” - December 4, 2014

From my journal entry it is evident that my planning became more intentional and I was setting up all of my students for success because they had multiple opportunities during the school day and week to engage with vocabulary and content that they were learning about. Everything was connected and made sense and thus, students’ growth was very evident and every student was engaged even though they ranged in their oral language development. During the reduce, reuse, recycle study I decided to read The Paper Bag Princess, a story that the students responded to with a lot of engagement. In my journal entry I write about planning, implementation, and outcomes for the Paper Bag Princess book.

“During the month of December we only had class for two weeks. The first week of December we read the Paper Bag Princess. I created props for the students to wear and re-tell the story. One set of props was to be used in the doll house/block area with small figures. The students were initially excited about it throughout the week. They used the props and continue to retell the story. Some students even built castles in the block area and were using language from the story; just like Noemi whom I recorded. I also created props that they could wear (2 crowns, an alligator mask, and a paper bag that was cut in the middle with a whole to wear as a dress. The students were also really into re-telling the story. However, they needed a lot of my support and prompts in order to be able to re-tell the story and use language from the text. This is most likely due to the fact that they only had that week of exposure to the book. This really got me thinking about the books that I am introducing to students, the order, the reasoning, and the overall connection per unit of study. Thus, I brought it up to the preschool team, since we have to plan together, that we should brainstorm what book we will focus on each week and that will facilitate with backwards planning and material gathering. They were totally for the collaboration. I think that we all brought in our different perspectives and ideas behind planning using webbing/graphic organizer. We definitely decided as a team the books we would read every week for the upcoming unit as well as ideas of activities/materials to add to centers and small group instruction. As a team we did not get to thinking about objectives, goals for our students for the end of the six-week unit, but I worked on those independently and shared them with my assistant teacher. I feel like I always need to know what I want students to achieve by the end of a unit (definitely keeping in mind developmentally appropriate practices and milestones of 3-5 year olds), but it helps to keep me accountable. We decided on focusing on four different versions of the three little pigs. This will definitely help me moving on and collecting data because I will see how student’s language, reading comprehension,

and story telling develops throughout the four to six week period since everything is related to a similar genre of books.” – Journal, January 10, 2015

My students became experts in re-telling stories that they would come up with their own stories during center time, use props, and create roles for each other. They began to engage in conversations and interact with one another without me encouraging them to talk. They felt more confident and enjoyed the freedom that they had during center time to create or re-create stories. In my teacher observations I wrote about an instance when students were retelling the story *Swimmy* by Leo Leonni and when students created their own story about driving a car and getting ready to leave to their destination.

Teacher observations:

- **Re-telling *Swimmy*:** David and Tania retell the book *Swimmy* by Leo Leonni. Tania leads most of the conversation by pointing to David and Luis what to do as she is reading the story. Lorenzo joins in to read the story with the students. Tania does a lot of the talking by pointing to the title of the book and having David come up to the board and point to the title of the story. He says “Nadarin” (*Swimmy*). Tania then continues to ask David and Lorenzo to explain what they observe on the cover page. Lorenzo walks away, and comes back. Tania and David are using the magnetic characters to retell the story, but it is a lot of Tania leading retelling the story (acting as the teacher) and calling on David and having him point to what is next in the book.
- **Creating a story - Driving a car in dramatic play:** Denisse, Esteban, Alexandra, and Alexander are moving around and getting food ready to go on their trip. Denisse guides a lot of the play by telling student what to do next and they all follow along. Not a lot of back and forth

dialogue is occurring between students, but they are all engaged playing together and using some exchanges.

Another strategy that I implemented daily was research groups. Research groups was another opportunity for me and my assistant teacher to work with a smaller group of students and get students to learn about non-fiction topics that usually stemmed from the fiction we were reading, use writing as a form of documenting their learning, and promote conversations and critical thinking. During research group time that lasted about fifteen minutes every day students were exposed to not only fiction but also non-fiction texts at an early age. They use critical thinking and collaborate amongst each other to exchange ideas about their research topic. The students have access to iPad's and books related to the topic. Once they have discusses what they learned they write their findings. Children continue to investigate and write their findings. They share with their peers and then present to the other half of the class that was researching another topic.

For the first research group students had the option to learn about wolves or foxes. My assistant teacher and I decided to select those two topics because we noticed that students were confusing the two animals since they had read a lot of stories that had a wolf or fox as a character. The first day the students met in a large group and talked about the topics. Some background knowledge was shared via a story, pictures, video, or music. Then the students selected a topic. The next day the students would meet in their research group and the teacher would introduce a KWL chart. Students would first share with a partner and then the teacher would write down what students knew. The student's browsed books related to the topic and used the ipad and mostly looked through google

images. Then they would write about the facts that they learned during their research time. The following day I would ask students to think about something they wondered about the topic specifically or about something that they had learned the previous day. I would reference or KWL chart and asked them to tell me what they were wondering. The questions varied from ‘what to they eat?’ to ‘where do they live?’ and ‘why are their teeth sharp?’ Once we had written down questions the students had an opportunity to browse books related to the topic and use the ipads to find answers to their questions and at the end wrote about their findings. The students would show each other the pictures that they found in the books or on the ipad. They would ask me to read captions or the text to learn more.

As I learned more about how to implement research groups in a preschool setting through action research I began to think about studies in the classroom in a total different way. The last research group that we had during the school year was in my opinion the most successful. The students were learning about reducing, reusing, and recycling and I decided that the research group topics would be plastic and aluminum. The students interacted with garbage that was made out of the material plastic or aluminum. They went through the same research cycle that I explained above. However, there was another component that was added. Eventually the students had to think about what they wanted to create using recycled materials. Once they decided what they wanted to create then they wrote a list of recycled materials they needed, how they planned on using the material, and some even wrote how many they needed. Once all of the thinking behind their project was done the students began to create their masterpieces. They created cars, giraffes, robots, castles, airplanes, dogs, and cats just to name a few. Then during a

parent workshop they presented to their parents and showcased what they had made. The parents also contributed earlier during the study by donating recycled materials to our classroom. I was truly amazed at how capable my students demonstrated to be and how willing and excited they were about learning, collaborating, and talking with each other.

Throughout the process of being more conscious about the language assets my students brought to the classroom, I was also reading about new strategies I could implement and attended four conferences this school year to continue to evolve as an educator. I mention this because I believe that through praxis, I was able to better understand who I am as a teacher and as a result create a learning community of young learners in my preschool classroom. In my journal I write about my constant struggle to work for an institution that is not set up to be inclusive of students, particularly my students and educators like myself.

“I always find myself having to defend play and use words such as intentional play and planned out play so that administrators see that I’m just ‘not playing’ although that is what I am doing, but using strategies to support children’s learning. Administrators don’t realize that children also create knowledge and experiences and those are valuable and great learning opportunities; not everything is created and taught by the teacher. The students also create knowledge based on their creative minds and previous experiences and learn from one another. For example, in the dramatic play area my students created an imaginary bus and began to pack clothes to go to the beach. They were packing swimming attire and also packing a lunch. Each had a role and they were singing the wheels on the bus as they drove away. If I pay close attention to their play and what they were saying it was all related to our clothing unit, vocabulary from eh books that we have read, and honestly things I was saying when I joined their play the first time they decided to create a bus a few days ago. I think

that they were excited about a bus because we were going to go on a field trip to the pumpkin patch and they saw it on our school calendar. I then asked them: What is your destination? Where are you going? A student yelled out, “the beach” which was interesting because just that day we were dressing up our teddy bear on our smart board projector for a sunny day at the beach.” – Journal, November 2014

What does it mean to be bicultural and bilingual to you?

“I worry about students transitioning to English in the primary years because I know that it will have an impact as they grow and develop their identities. When a child cannot communicate with their families they will lose a tie to their ancestors and their people. When a child is told that English is more powerful than their native tongue that is telling them to be something that they are not and that what they are is not good enough or powerful enough.” – Journal, 10.3.14

As a bicultural and bilingual educator my students’ experiences really resonated with mine and teaching became not only my job, but also my life path. I feel a sense of responsibility to give back to my community and advocate for the recognition of the cultural capital that they and their families bring to schools. Early in the year I wrote in my journal I my thoughts related to schooling and cultural capital.

“I want my students to have the opportunity to learn about themselves, their families, their neighborhood and from there create a sense of pride about their identity because they are important even though they are from the south west side of Chicago. It was that pride in my heritage, my ancestors, my family that gave me the courage and grit to continue even when I was failing and struggling because I did not receive a quality education like my more affluent peers did. I do not believe that preparing for college or your future begins until you get to high school, but it really starts now, in the early years.” – Journal, 10.3.14

The literacy strategies that I implemented in my classroom in order to emphasize oral language are not unheard of and have been utilized in primary grades. Some teachers and researchers have even used the literacy strategies in preschool and they were very influential in my decision making regarding what to implement in my classroom to get my students to converse with one another. My students demonstrated growth and the majority by the end of the year they felt confident to talk with peers and adults. The majority of students used at least five words during each exchange while holding a conversation. However, it is very important to recognize that I reflected a lot about my students' language development not just in Spanish, or just in English, but began to think about both of them supporting oral language overall. I was very cognizant about my student's experiences, their culture, and my teacher actions. Honestly, I do not believe that I would have seen the academic growth that I witnessed as well as my own professional growth if I did not recognize the cultural and linguistic capital my students brought to the classroom. This is cultural and linguistic capital that no assessment in preschool recognizes to be valuable.

In order to document how students viewed themselves I decided to interview a few students at the end of the year. Interviews were conducted one-on-one in both English and Spanish. I recorded the interviews and decided to share my students' responses to the following questions: 1) What do you like about school? 2) How do you feel about speaking two languages?



Noemi

What do you like about school?

Art, because you could build something. I make hearts; it's like the number two. Bloques, because you can do stuff like a castle or a dragon. You can make up stories there. Like the dragon, caperucita roja.

How do you feel about speaking two languages?

"Happy, I speak English and Spanish. Nobody told me, I just know. Happy, because I had learned so many things. Because I want to go to Kinder and learn."



What do you like about school?

"I can make turtles, dogs, cats, flags, trees...you know where me make invitations, the art center. Plastelina, cuz I can make people. Just make a circle, straight lines for legs I can even make a mermaid like that and like that (moving hands). Juego dramatico cuz my friends go there all the time Emily, Victoria,



Emily

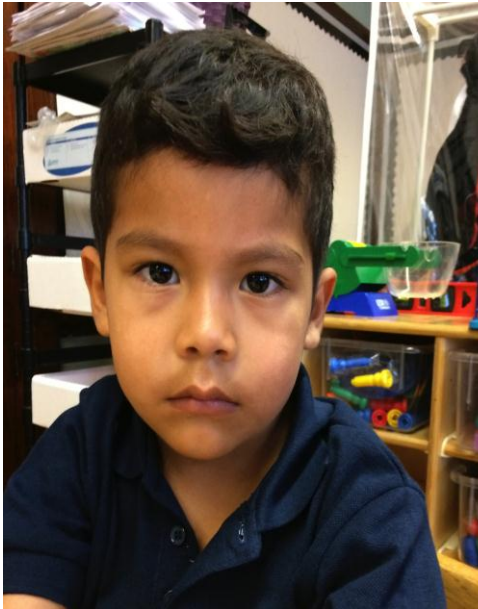
What do you like about school?

Mmmm toys. I can play with playdough and I can with my doll for making dresses with playdough. I just squish the playdough and next I cut it and next I make the decorations. Table toys because I can make a castle for my doll we can make a bed with legos. I can play with dolls like King and princess

How do you feel about speaking two languages?

"Good, because my brother showed me to speak English and my mom (Spanish)"

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Moises

What do you like about school?

“I learned about how to become a great student by learning about the school and I want to share all the things that I do in school. Umm learn and and count. I like computers mmm playdough.”

How do you feel about speaking two languages?

“Mmm happy cuz I could help myself to to speak more. My brother told me to speak English and just mmm just move your tongue like you’re speaking English.”



Tania

What do you like about school?

Arte, because I can make titeres. Pictures with paper. Bloques, umm computers. Mmm play umm with Noemi. I play outside.

How do you feel about speaking two languages?

“Because my mom taught me to speak English. I like it. I can speak in English a lot. I like speaking the two, because I can speak the two. Me siento feliz.”

Conclusion

“Overall I want to engage my students in dialogues that are usually ignored or left behind because of high stakes testing and being on grade level. Their education and schools should be representative of their identities, neighborhoods, family, language, and should promote awareness about their histories to begin to heal the violence and traumas in their communities.” Journal, 10.3.14

I started my action research project wanting to know how I could get my students to talk with each other. I wondered what would happen in my bilingual preschool classroom if I emphasized oral language. Through my action research I challenged myself to implement new strategies and become more knowledgeable about dual language learners, bilingual students, and the impact that I have as an educator about how students perceive themselves and their identities. I wanted my students to be successful academically, but not at the cost of the languages they speak or not valuing the cultural capital they brought to the classroom. I implemented independent reading time, interactive read alouds, intentional centers, research groups, and an ESL block within the daily schedule. I re-arranged my classroom environment to emphasize oral language development and I also collaborated and communicated a lot with my assistant teacher. I

also shared what I was doing with the other preschool teachers so that planning could be more intentional since at the school it was mandatory to meet and plan together.

However, this action research experience continues to push me to be more critical about my teaching. In my journal I wrote,

“Yes we want children to have concepts about print, for them to know book mechanics, and be able to say the setting, characters, etc. However, I think that the deep why questions are extremely important and books should also speak to the children who are being read to; to their experiences, their neighborhood, every day life.” – Journal, October 2014

Ultimately I learned how I could emphasize oral language development in my classroom via the use of multiple strategies and learned that children are very capable of learning and teaching each other. In the upcoming school year I hope to be more intentional about the books that I read and if they are representative of my students and their community. My goal is to learn more about how social and racial justice teaching looks like in preschool classroom. To end, in my teacher journal I wrote about an instance when students did not want to play with the black baby in the classroom. Throughout the school year I made sure to recognize their linguistic and cultural capital and emphasize oral language, but I want to continue to learn on how I can engage students in critical discussions about their surroundings.

“It's never too early to engage in critical discussions about race with children. Today I had a conversation with three students (3-5 year olds) about the black and brown baby in our dramatic play area. They both wanted the same baby and were having trouble sharing. I suggested someone could play with the other baby. They said no, and I asked them why. One student said, "I think she doesn't want to play with that one" (She was alluding to the black baby). "She wants to play with the white one" (pointing to the brown baby). I said, "Hmm, I'm going to have

to disagree with you. This baby's skin tone is like mine and I don't identify as white." Our conversation continued, but it was obvious that my students didn't have the words to express their actions and rationale. Critical race theory, equality, and justice is relevant in our schools and in early childhood classrooms.” - Journal, December 5, 2014

Policy Recommendations

1. Promote children interactions and discussions by using strategies throughout the day such as turn and talk and small group instruction.
2. Enhance oral language development by introducing sensory and hands on materials that are first modeled by the teacher and available for students to use independently during small groups or center time.
3. Teachers should support student oral language development by interacting with students during play centers and focus on one language as they interact with a child rather than directly translating after each conversational exchange.
4. Encourage student conversations by intentionally planning centers that are connected to student interest and books read to the children.

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