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The Arts, the Common Core, and English Language Development in the Primary Grades

by Christa Mulker Greenfader & Liane Brouillette – 2017

Background/Context: Throughout schooling, English learners (ELs) perform well below their monolingual English-speaking peers on literacy assessments, and Hispanics make up the majority of EL students in the United States. There is a strong consensus about the importance of early English oral language skills for ELs' literacy development, yet teachers are not adequately prepared to meet the needs of these young learners. Historically, policy has not provided incentives for educators to focus on oral language development in the classroom. However, the recently adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) emphasize oral language skills.

Purpose/Objective: This study examines a professional development program that equipped early elementary teachers in five urban schools with arts-based strategies to promote the oral English development of ELs. A second line of inquiry looked at the extent to which the creative drama and dance activities were aligned with CCSS.

Participants: There were 3,792 K-2 Hispanic ELs (treatment: $N = 497$; control: $N = 3,295$) from Title I schools in a large school district in California.

Intervention: The Teaching Artist Project (TAP) was a two-year K-2 arts and literacy professional development program consisting of 28 weekly 50-minute lessons (14 theater and 14 dance). The project provided classroom teachers with in-service training on utilizing movement, gesture, and expression to promote stimulating English verbal interactions. TAP was specifically intended to engage non-native English speakers in classroom dialogues, facilitating their oral English development.

Research Design: This study utilized a mixed methods design. To address the first research question, schools were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Multiple regressions were run on data from the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to investigate the impact of the program on the English speaking abilities of K-2 Hispanic English learners. To address the second research question, document review was used to compare the K-2 CCSS speaking and listening standards and the TAP lesson plans.

Findings: The treatment group was found to significantly outperform the control group ($B = 0.13$; $p < 0.05$) on CELDT speaking scores. Additional review suggested that the performing arts activities corresponded well to the CCSS speaking and listening standards.

Conclusions/Recommendations: Creative drama and dance activities provide rich verbal classroom interactions, boost English oral language skills of ELs, and align with the CCSS. Yet concerns are raised about the lack of speaking assessments on tests created by the Smarter Balanced and PARCC consortiums and the potential subsequent distortion of K-2 instruction.

The past quarter century has witnessed ambitious efforts to reform public education in the United States. From Goals 2000 to the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and the recent widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), these reforms have had the declared objective of raising the academic performance of all students. NCLB explicitly sought to close the achievement gap between mainstream and disenfranchised students, including students from low-income families, racial minorities, English learners, and

students with special needs (Hess & Petrilli, 2006). However, in the wake of NCLB, achievement gaps continue to persist. Might the Common Core State Standards and their assessments also end up leaving vulnerable students behind? This article considers the situation of one vulnerable group.

English learners (ELs) have historically—and presently—performed well below their monolingual English-speaking peers on reading and math assessments (Hoff, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). This gap persists throughout schooling (Lee & Burkam, 2002; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011), and much of the gap is attributable to differences in English oral language, or vocabulary, skills at kindergarten entry (Hoff, 2013; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). The majority of school-aged ELs are Hispanic (Krogstad, 2014); Hispanic children also constitute the single largest group of children living in poverty (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Since poverty is an established risk factor for delayed vocabulary development (Hart & Risley, 1995; Kieffer, 2010), Hispanic children are doubly at risk for slower English development (Mancilla-Martinez & Vagh, 2013). This is troubling in light of the overwhelming consensus about the importance of early oral language skills for both monolingual and bilingual literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006; Uccelli & Páez, 2007).

As of August 2015, the CCSS had been adopted by 42 states (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2015). This presents a potential opportunity for early elementary educators to focus on effective strategies to equip young ELs with the oral English skills they will need to succeed. At the K-2 grade level, the CCSS speaking and listening standards emphasize rich verbal dialogue among students and with adults. At the upper grade levels, the CCSS have important implications for ELs because they require sophisticated English vocabulary in both English language arts (ELA) and other content areas. Yet preliminary research on the implementation of the CCSS indicates that the teacher preparation and professional development needed to fully implement the CCSS may be lacking (McLaughlin, Glaab, & Carrasco, 2014). Other research suggests that early elementary teachers of ELs lack the training and preparation necessary to successfully meet the needs of their students (Samson & Lesaux, 2015). Further, many classroom teachers do not feel that they are—and in fact are not—adequately prepared to instruct young ELs (Elfers & Stritikus, 2013; National Education Association, 2008; Samson & Lesaux, 2015).

Therefore, *how* to effectively assist educators in providing young ELs with the English language skills they will need—not only to meet the CCSS, but throughout their academic careers—becomes a pressing question. Research on bilingual education is encouraging, but most elementary teachers in the United States speak only English (Elfers & Stritikus, 2013). Also, some states have mandates limiting instruction to English only. Additionally, in light of limited resources and tight school budgets (Oliff & Leachman, 2011; Oliff, Mai, & Leachman, 2012), any new curriculum developed must be relatively low-cost if it is to be widely adopted and sustainable over the long term.

This article examines how a school-university partnership helped K-2 teachers use performing arts lessons to promote lively verbal interactions with young ELs. In recognition of the need for professional development programs that align with educational policy, we look at both the impact on student speaking skills, as measured by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), and how well this arts-based curriculum aligned with the California CCSS. Our findings offer evidence that instructional strategies that integrate creative drama and dance can significantly boost the English-speaking abilities of K-2 Hispanic ELs and provide teachers with standards-based professional development in fostering oral English development. We conclude with a discussion of the unfortunate impact that the backward mapping of NCLB reading and writing assessments has had on the K-2 curriculum and the likelihood that the absence of required measures of speaking skills on the current CCSS assessments will lead to similar distortions in the instruction of K-2 English learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study focuses on two performing arts disciplines, creative drama and dance. In the K-2 drama lessons the emphasis was on speaking skills, whereas in the dance lessons the emphasis was more on listening and vocabulary-building. However, although these were admittedly unique practices, we look at creative drama and dance together because they were both used in the program that we are investigating, and we do not have a way of teasing apart the impact of the two (e.g., pre- and post-tests of each). We do not find this problematic because, in the early elementary grades, these two disciplines are less distinct than in later grades; dance lessons tend to embody creative movement and gestures as opposed to specific dance steps. In addition, both the creative drama and dance lessons were designed with the clear objective of pairing movement, gesture, and expression with language or thematic content (e.g., vocabulary words, a nursery rhyme, or a story). For example, during certain dance lessons, students were asked to physically depict various adjectives that they were learning. We will discuss the differences and similarities between the lessons below, when we describe the intervention.

We use the terms *arts-based instruction*, *arts-based activities*, and *arts-based strategies* to differentiate between arts-integrated instruction (and/or activities and strategies) delivered by a teaching artist (or classroom teacher)

and a program of standards-based sequential arts instruction presented by a certified arts specialist. The term *arts integration* refers to the practice of employing arts-based strategies to build skills and teach content across various non-arts disciplines, including reading, math, science, and social studies. When arts integration is implemented effectively and with rigor, students receive both high-quality arts instruction and engaging subject-matter instruction (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011). The lessons we investigated all included arts-based strategies that teachers could also utilize outside of these lessons and in diverse curricular areas.

In earlier work (Greenfader, Brouillette, & Farkas, 2015), we proposed a theoretical model of the potential mechanisms through which performing arts activities such as drama and dance contribute to the English language development of ELs. This model drew upon multimodal research (e.g., Gersten & Geva, 2003; Hardison & Sonchaeng, 2005; Kress, 2009; Moses, 2013; Peregoy & Boyd, 2008; Rieg & Paquette, 2009; Silverman, 2007), grounded-cognition theories (e.g., Barsalou, 2008; Glenberg, 2010, 2011), and social theories of language acquisition (e.g., Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kress, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Moses, 2013; Tomasello, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978; Walqui, 2006). We suggested that embodied language (i.e., pairing language with creative movement, gesture, and expression) boosts the comprehension of all learners, especially second-language learners, helping them to both acquire vocabulary and understand thematic content. In addition, social theories of language acquisition support the integration of arts activities, on the grounds that such learning is interactive, allowing teachers to scaffold concepts and young learners to use social referencing cues to boost comprehension.

A primary purpose of the present study is to further test this proposed model, as we specifically investigate the impacts of an arts-based literacy program on the English speaking skills of K-2 Hispanic ELs.

CALIFORNIA'S POLICY, STANDARDS, AND RESOURCES

There are more than six million students enrolled in California's public schools, of whom over 50% are Latino (California Department of Education, 2014) and nearly 25% are classified as EL (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Over a decade ago, Koski and Weis (2004) examined the implications of California's standards-based reforms and accountability structure. They found a misalignment between the standards and accountability structure, urging "the provision of necessary educational conditions and resources to ensure that all children in California have an opportunity to achieve at the high levels prescribed by the state" (p. 1910). A primary problem they noted was the insufficient preparation of elementary teachers to teach to the English Language Arts standards. They observed:

Perhaps most apparent from even a cursory reading of the English-Language Arts standards, early grade teachers must be equipped with a deep understanding of reading psychology and development; the structure of the English language; and how to apply best practices of reading instruction. More specifically, teachers must be able to provide instruction and support in ... oral English language conventions, and listening and speaking skills (pp. 1930-31).

Koski and Weis (2004) found that, among other resource deficiencies, teachers did not receive relevant and thorough training. In light of this mismatch between policy and preparation, they asserted that it was unfair to hold teachers and students accountable. Their analysis concluded with the recommendation that California reassess both its standards and resources, so as to develop a comprehensive curricular strategy inclusive of the appropriate resources and conditions that would be required to meet its standards.

California's educational policy has changed since the Koski and Weis analysis, particularly with the transition to CCSS. Yet, there is evidence that the state continues to be hampered by the insufficient support made available to teachers. In a report on the recent CCSS adoption in California, McLaughlin, Glaab, and Carrasco (2014) identified implementation hurdles, including teacher preparation and professional development, citing teacher anxiety about both learning new skills and receiving the support and resources necessary to deliver instruction based on the California CCSS.

Former California Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig (2014) pointed to a gap in curriculum development: "The Common Core State Standards state what students should master, but they are not a curriculum. Jumping from the standards to create lesson plans misses a crucial middle step of developing a coherent curriculum." Further, Honig indicated a relatively low level of district curricular support, citing a survey conducted in 2013 by the Consortium for the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the County Offices of Education, representing over 80% of California's public school enrollment. The survey found that "only about one-third of school districts have created a scope and sequence for the Common Core standards in either English language arts or mathematics" and "only about half the districts are creating units or lessons, or aligning existing units or lessons to the Common Core standards" (Honig, 2014).

These findings indicate a fissure in California's educational policy: the misalignment of standards and assessments with resources, teacher preparation, and curriculum. Neither Koski and Weis (2004) nor McLaughlin et al. (2014) passed judgment on specific standards and reforms. Instead, they criticized the logistics behind their implementation, calling attention to inadequate resources—specifically, the absence of the tools teachers need to successfully prepare their students to meet new standards and to demonstrate their proficiency through the associated assessments. This misalignment between standards and resources is not unique to California. Researchers in other states have noted implementation challenges, as well as inadequate teacher preparation and support (Kober & Rentmer, 2014).

Additionally, since 1998, California's educational policy has mandated English-only instruction, which severely restricts bilingual instruction in public schools by requiring students to be taught in English-only environments (Gándara et al., 2010) unless their parents specifically request a bilingual program. Massachusetts and Arizona have similar policies. Such policies exist despite research that has shown clear cognitive and academic benefits for ELs who are taught in dual-language environments (Callahan & Gándara, 2014; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). In November 2016, California voters passed Proposition 58, which will essentially repeal the English-only mandate; however, even with this step forward, the limited bilingual skills of most U.S. teachers (Elfers & Stritikus, 2013; NEA, 2008) restrict the implementation of bilingual education. California currently has far too few bilingual teachers for the number of dual immersion programs to become a widely available option in the near future.

On a practical level, the arts-based strategies for teaching oral language that are discussed in this article can be implemented in combination with either English-only or bilingual teaching methods. In fact, the inspiration for the strategies used in this project came from the Waldorf Schools and International Baccalaureate Primary Years programs that one of the authors had observed in Europe. Both of these well-regarded private school networks encourage the early learning of more than one language. Whether a U.S. public school follows an English-only policy or uses a bilingual curriculum, early literacy development begins with oral language.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

For this discussion, we define oral language based on a framework presented by Storch and Whitehurst (2002), who conceptualized it as (a) semantic knowledge (receptive and expressive vocabulary), (b) syntactic knowledge (structural and grammatical rules), (c) conceptual knowledge (topic understanding), and (d) narrative discourse (story construction and/or recall). A child's early oral skills have been found to predict future literacy, academic success, and other life outcomes (August & Shanahan, 2006; Hoff, 2013; Snow & Dickinson, 1991; Spira, Bracken, & Fischel, 2005).

Like all developmental processes, oral language development is influenced by a multitude of interrelated factors. One such factor is input: Simply stated, for children to learn language, they need input (Huttenlocher, Haight, Bryk, Seltzer, & Lyons, 1991; Kuhl, 2004; Locke, 1993). Related to input is the time-on-task hypothesis (Gass & Varonis, 1994), which makes intuitive sense as it suggests a relationship between the amount of language input and the resultant level of skill in that particular language. Because children who come from homes where little or no English is spoken have less English exposure and oral English practice, it is not surprising that they do not perform on par with monolingual-English students on English language assessments (August & Shanahan, 2006). What is concerning is the fact that the significant gap between ELs and non-ELs in such foundational English skills as vocabulary and syntactic knowledge, evident at kindergarten entry (Hoff, 2013), persists throughout schooling (Lee & Burkam, 2002; NCES, 2013), even though many ELs acquire vocabulary at a faster rate than their non-EL peers (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011; Snow & Kim, 2007).

Monolingual-English and bilingual learners follow similar trajectories for language acquisition, with an important exception pertaining to background English vocabulary knowledge (Snow & Kim, 2007). Monolinguals often utilize prior knowledge of familiar English vocabulary in a sentence or passage to aid their comprehension. ELs, on the other hand, often do not have the requisite level of English vocabulary knowledge and therefore must turn to different strategies for comprehension (Snow & Kim, 2007).

ELS' CONCEPTUAL VOCABULARY AND FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Even though bilingual children may not understand certain English vocabulary words, this does not mean that they cannot recognize the object or idea that the word represents. ELs possess conceptual vocabulary knowledge (i.e., knowledge in both languages) that is not reflected in English-only assessments (Hoff, 2013). Research has shown that young Spanish-English bilinguals who perform well below the mean on English-only assessments exhibit language skills within normal ranges and/or on par with their monolingual peers when conceptual knowledge is considered (Bedore, Peña, Garcia, & Cortez, 2005; Gross, Buac, & Kaushanskaya, 2014; Mancilla-Martinez &

Greenfader, 2014).

Although this seems intuitive, it is important for classroom teachers to (a) have an accurate understanding of their EL students' knowledge, (b) utilize methods that tap into ELs' conceptual abilities, and (c) approach English language development in a way that recognizes these young students' assets. ELs possess "funds of knowledge" that may not be accessed in typical English-only classroom interactions (Meyer, 2000). The funds-of-knowledge literature highlights the knowledge and competencies that come from life experiences (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Moll, 1994) and recognizes households as containing "ample cultural and cognitive resources with great *potential* utility for classroom instruction" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 134). Educators can exploit such resources to engage students, especially those ELs who are often marginalized by English-only instruction, in ways that promote learning.

UTILIZING ARTS ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

One way to allow ELs the opportunity to draw upon their funds of knowledge and conceptual vocabulary understanding as they receive instruction in English may be to use movement, gesture, and expression to convey the meaning of words, sentences, and stories in the new language (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013; Greenfader et al., 2015; Medina & Campano, 2006). Certainly, ELs need opportunities to adapt the words they hear to their own needs and fill them with their own intentions (Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008). It has been argued that arts education in general enhances performance in non-arts academic content areas, such as literacy and mathematics (Catterall, 2009). In an effort to answer questions about whether arts education really has positive effects on non-arts skills, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published *Art for Art's Sake? The Impact of Arts Education* (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). The authors found strong evidence that theater education in the form of enacting stories in the classroom (classroom drama) does strengthen verbal skills. They also found that activities that involve auditory training strengthen phonological skills and the ability to hear speech in a noisy environment.

Research linking dance activities to language skills is less clear; however, one study found positive effects from using gesture and movements for the math vocabulary instruction of Spanish-speaking first-graders (Church, Ayman-Nolley, and Mahootian, 2004). Both ELs and non-ELs performed better on English comprehension assessments when gesture was included in the instruction, and the authors conjectured that, because gesture involves communicating concepts through universal representations, students—especially ELs—can utilize cues from motion and expression to aid their comprehension. In addition, interview data from earlier implementations of the program investigated in the current study suggested that teachers found dance to be effective in boosting the language comprehension skills of ELs (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013). We found that when teaching artists used a call-and-response instructional technique in which the response was a physical movement, dance could be an effective medium for improving the vocabulary and listening skills of K-2 ELs. Children could learn new vocabulary and self-correct simply by watching the movements of the teacher and the other children. Teachers cited two main reasons for this impact: increased student engagement and active participation, as well as students "physicalizing" language, leading to enhanced understanding.

Arts activities certainly add a lightness and energy to classrooms. They are fun for all students and spawn creativity (Dewey, 2005; Greene, 1995) as well as positive social interaction (Brouillette, 2010; Catterall, 2009). Previous research has shown that incorporating arts activities into K-2 classrooms can boost the engagement of all students (Brouillette, Childress-Evans, Hinga, & Farkas, 2014). Yet despite the apparent value of such activities, creative drama and dance have essentially disappeared from public early elementary education in the United States (Grey, 2009; Parsad, Spiegelman, & Coopersmith, 2011). A study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that, in 2009-10, only 4% of elementary schools offered drama instruction and just 3% offered dance instruction (Parsad et al., 2011). Some attribute this decline to NCLB and the resulting focus on accountability measures (Abril & Gault, 2006; West, 2012). Certainly, budget cuts and the threat of sanctions for schools that fail to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets appear to have led to the curtailment—or elimination—of such subjects as arts, history, and foreign languages in many schools (Grey, 2009).

However, the widespread adoption of the CCSS may present an opportunity to reintegrate the arts into early elementary classrooms and enable teachers to use arts-based strategies to engage and support young EL students. Because the standards are very general, teachers want and need specific guidance about how to promote the oral language development of ELs while complying with the Common Core standards. This raises the question: What would effective implementation of the CCSS speaking and listening standards look like in a kindergarten, first-grade, or second-grade classroom? With this question in mind, we utilized data from the 2012-13 implementation of the Teaching Artist Project (TAP). TAP was a professional development program for K-2 teachers that integrated performing arts activities with literacy lessons. TAP provided early elementary teachers with (a) two paid, daylong training workshops; (b) one year of weekly in-class training from professional teaching artists; (c) detailed lesson

plans to facilitate rich verbal interactions, with creative extension activities for teachers wishing to apply arts activities to other curricular areas; and (d) an online video bank of recorded lessons led by teaching artists. Funding for TAP came from a U.S. Department of Education Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination (AEMDD) grant.

PRESENT STUDY

The current study analyzed the impact of a revised version of TAP, in which teachers spent an additional hour per week using creative movement, gesture, and expression to enhance oral language skills. The project took place in an urban California school district that, during the 2012-13 school year, served 133,183 students (pre-K to 12). The student population of the district was 46.4% Hispanic; 23.5% White; 10.3% Black; 14.2% Filipino, Indo-Chinese, and other Asian; and 5.3% multiracial. ELs comprised 28% of the students; 59% of all students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL). TAP focused on five elementary schools, which were randomly chosen from the 118 in the district that qualified for Title I funding. In the present study, our objective was twofold: to investigate both the effectiveness and the current relevance of TAP in light of the recent introduction of the CCSS.

The first line of inquiry focused on the overall effectiveness of the program. Work on earlier implementations of TAP suggested that the program was effective in boosting the oral English skills of all ELs (Greenfader et al., 2015). However, because of the growing number of Hispanic children in U.S. public schools and the differing rates at which Hispanic and Asian ELs attend prekindergarten programs (Espinosa, 2008), the current study sought specifically to examine the program's impact on Hispanic ELs. Our previous work examining ELs from all language backgrounds suggested that the students with the lowest baseline English speaking abilities gained the most from participating in TAP, whereas the ELs with the strongest English speaking skills did not reap further benefits from participating in TAP (Greenfader et al., 2015). We were interested in whether this pattern held true for Hispanic ELs; additionally, we wanted to investigate other patterns of differential impacts to understand which students benefited most, and which not at all, from the TAP activities. Our first research question consisted of two parts:

1a. Does pairing creative drama and dance activities with language arts instruction boost the speaking abilities of K-2 Hispanic ELs?

1b. Are there any patterns of differential impacts that emerge for K-2 Hispanic ELs:

with varying levels of baseline English speaking abilities?

from different socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds (as measured by parent education)?

in different grades?

Our second line of inquiry focused on the relevance of the TAP lessons in light of the widespread adoption of the CCSS and the subsequent need to align curriculum with California's current standards (Koski & Weis, 2014). Given the resource and training challenges that have thus far accompanied the implementation of the CCSS, we sought to determine whether this project might provide a viable model for K-2 teachers looking for guidance in incorporating the new CCSS into their classrooms. Our second research question, therefore, was:

2. To what extent do the TAP lessons align with the California CCSS?

We use a mixed-methods design to address these two questions. Our intent in using such an approach aligns with the *extension* purpose articulated by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989). We will use the quantitative portion of the analysis to assess the intervention outcomes and the qualitative portion to examine the processes of the intervention. Document review will elucidate the (potential) relevance of the project.

METHOD

INTERVENTION

The TAP curriculum consisted of 28 weekly 50-minute lessons: 14 theater and literacy lessons and 14 dance and literacy lessons at each grade level. For the first year that a teacher participated in TAP, a visiting teaching artist came to the teacher's classroom and guided the weekly lessons, modeling the activities with the students and explaining the pedagogy to the classroom teacher. The teaching artists were performing artists who were hired

based on their expertise in their fields (i.e., drama or dance) and their ability to teach children, as well as to mentor teachers. They received training in the TAP lessons and how to integrate the literacy lessons with the arts activities.

For the second year that a teacher participated in TAP, the classroom teacher implemented the lessons on his or her own. During this second year, the teachers were able to access resource teachers, online lesson plans, extension activities, and videos of the lessons led by a teaching artist. Our analysis focused on the first year of TAP, as the weekly visits from the teaching artists ensured consistency and fidelity of implementation. First-year teachers were also encouraged to spend a weekly class period (formerly designated for physical education) practicing the TAP lesson with their students on their own.

The TAP lessons were initially conceived as a way of integrating the K-2 California English-language development (ELD), English language arts (ELA), and drama standards. The project directors had noticed similarities among these three sets of standards and decided to map the overlaps. Specifically, they were interested in incorporating these overlapping standards into a curriculum consisting of fun and engaging activities that fostered rich verbal interactions, ultimately boosting the oral English skills of ELs. The key standards incorporated in TAP lessons included following directions and answering questions, engaging in conversations with peers and adults, speaking audibly and clearly, listening actively, evaluating language choices, and expressing opinions. The main language skills fostered by TAP were voice projection, vocabulary, dialoguing or narrative discourse, story construction, and story recall.

All lessons consisted of three main components: warm-up, modeling/guided practice, and debriefing/evaluation. The warm-up enabled children to transition into the lessons; typically, this consisted of vocal exercises and a review of concepts or activities from previous lessons. At the heart of each lesson was the modeling/guided practice section. During the modeling portion of the lesson, the teaching artist would introduce the primary activity for the day. For example, an early kindergarten theater lesson utilized the story “Going on a Bear Hunt.” The teaching artist first read the story to the children, then discussed the different settings involved (e.g., tall grass and sticky mud). S/he first asked for suggestions about how to evoke the different settings through sound and gesture, then proceeded to model the suggestions. During the guided practice, the children worked with their peers to create their own dramatic depictions of the story. Finally, during the debriefing section, the teaching artist and the children would discuss the students’ interpretations of the story and settings, with the teaching artist posing a set of open-ended questions to the children (e.g., *How did adding movement to the sounds make the story more interesting?*).

Regardless of their level of English proficiency, all children were able to participate in the activities from the very beginning of the school year. For example, the warm-up activity for the first kindergarten dance lesson had the children identify parts of their bodies that they could move. Children who did not know English very well were quickly engaged because they could see the teaching artist, teacher, and other students waving hands, wiggling noses, and tapping feet. This is important in light of research that has shown the benefits of multisensory instruction, such as incorporating gesture and expression into early elementary classrooms, to the language comprehension and memory of ELs (Gersten & Geva, 2003; Hardison & Sonchaeng, 2005; Peregoy & Boyd, 2008; Rieg & Paquette, 2009; Silverman, 2007).

In the warm-up activity for the first kindergarten drama lesson, the children practiced introducing themselves in an audible, clear voice. Next they looked at pictures of common objects and activities (e.g., a dog or playing soccer) and were asked to choose gestures and expressions that would enable them to represent those concepts through mime. Many of the lessons focused on vocabulary. For example, in a first-grade dance lesson, children learned about different qualities of movement (e.g., shake, vibrate, sharp, smooth, swing, twist, wiggle, and spin) and then had the opportunity to physically portray them. Likewise, in drama they learned adjectives such as happy, sad, angry, jealous, and excited; they used gesture and expression to portray these feelings and later discussed how these feelings fit within different stories.

By second grade, the children became more creatively involved in the activities and the debriefing discussions. Students in a second-grade dance lesson participated in a circle dance and a procession dance. The teaching artist introduced relevant vocabulary words (e.g., “procession” and “pathway”) and then guided the class through a discussion about personal space. Students were challenged to think of different circumstances in which the circle dance or the procession dance might be performed and the reasons why. In one of the final second-grade theater lessons, the teaching artist read nursery rhymes to the students, who then acted out the nursery rhymes using different voices (e.g., different dynamics or diction) and expressions to convey the emotions of characters. The students used voices and expressions of their own choice, then discussed the reasons for their choices. At each grade level, the lessons often incorporated storyboards and activities that enabled children to further demonstrate their comprehension—for example, by arranging illustrations of the events of a story in their proper sequence.

The TAP lesson plans, along with videos of teaching artists teaching the lessons in classrooms, have been made available online, free of charge.¹

PARTICIPANTS

School-Level

TAP was initially implemented in two waves, in 2010-11 and 2011-12. Based on positive findings from these waves, a third wave was implemented in 2012-13. The present study examines data from the third and final wave of TAP, the 2012-13 school year. Schools were randomly selected from a list of Title I schools within a large Southern California district. For a school to receive the treatment, all K-2 teachers had to agree to participate in the program. This was done to ensure buy-in from the participating teachers and to allow for and encourage cooperation between grade-level teachers. The researchers offered no incentives to encourage teachers to receive the treatment, apart from the opportunity to have teaching artists provide drama and dance lessons to their students. During the 2012-13 school year, all five of the schools that were randomly selected to receive the treatment opted to participate in TAP.

Schools that were not randomly selected comprised the control group. They did not receive an alternative treatment, but rather conducted “business as usual,” which most likely consisted of little or no instruction in drama and/or dance and Structured English Immersion practices for EL students (Greenfader et al., 2015). Schools that participated in TAP during the first two waves were excluded from this analysis; they were not included in the control group.

There were two modifications that set the third wave of TAP (the focus of this article) apart from previous implementations. Both revisions were based on analysis of earlier results and on feedback from teachers. First, teachers were encouraged to dedicate a weekly class period (formerly designated for physical education) to rehearsing TAP drama and dance lessons with their students between teaching-artist visits. Previously, teachers had been asked to practice TAP strategies between teaching-artist visits, but there had not been a designated time for such practice. However, we did not observe classrooms in order to determine the extent to which teachers complied.

Second, there was a revision of the final five lessons in both drama and dance (10 lessons out of a total of 28). In earlier years, some teachers had spontaneously organized culminating experiences for students at the end of the drama and dance lesson units. This turned out to be popular with attending parents. Teachers wished for more freedom to collaborate with their teaching artist in creating a final performance based on a picture book (such as *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters*). This led to more diversity in how the final lessons were implemented, along with more focus on strategies for deepening children’s understanding of texts. For example, when there was an action word in a read-aloud book (e.g., *Mean Jean Recess Queen*), a teacher might ask students to act out the verb: “How is she standing?” By physically projecting themselves into the story, children brought the action that was taking place to life and increased their comprehension.

Student-Level

Although assignment to TAP was done at the school level, we focused on student-level outcomes. We restricted our analysis sample to include only students who were designated as EL and of Hispanic heritage. *English learner* is the term used by the California Department of Education to describe students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken and have not been designated as *English-proficient*. The EL designation is initiated by a parent home-language survey conducted for every student upon school entry. Children from homes where a primary language other than English is indicated are given an English assessment. Any child who does not meet the English-proficient criteria is classified as an EL. All ELs are required to take an annual California English Language Development Test (CELDT) each September. We used the scores from this assessment (if the student had CELDT scores for the September before and after the intervention) to generate our sample.

In the full sample, 84% of the students were Hispanic, and, as mentioned above, our analysis sample included only these students. Students were identified as Hispanic based on district demographic data taken from parent surveys conducted at school entry. The resulting analysis sample consisted of 497 students in the treatment group and 3,295 students in the control group.

The sample was reasonably balanced between male and female students: 52% of all students in the overall sample were male. The largest group of students had parents who had not graduated high school (47% of the treatment group and 48% of the control group). Approximately 37% of students in the treatment group and 35% in the control group had parents who had graduated high school; only 17% of TAP students and 16% of control students had

parents who reported completing some college or more. The students in both the treatment and control groups were also relatively evenly distributed among grades; of the combined sample, 34% were in kindergarten, 37% were in first grade, and 29% were in second grade.

Students in the treatment and control group were also comparable in baseline speaking abilities. The mean baseline CELDT speaking score for kindergarteners was 430.73 for the treatment group and 423.81 for the control group, with the mean for both groups falling within the intermediate range prescribed by the state (CDE, 2015). For first grade, the mean baseline CELDT speaking score was 485.03 for the treatment group and 472.68 for the control group, with both groups falling within California’s early advanced range (CDE, 2015). For second grade, the mean baseline CELDT speaking score was 468.46 for the treatment group and 478.28 for the control group. The scores for the treatment group fell within the state’s intermediate range, whereas the scores for the control group fell within the early advanced range (CDE, 2015).

Descriptive statistics for both the TAP students and the students in the control group are displayed in Table 1. In order to test for group differences between the treatment and control students, we conducted *t*-tests on the continuous variables and chi-square tests on the categorical variables. As indicated in the table, we found significant differences ($p < 0.05$) on baseline CELDT speaking scores between the TAP and control group students in first and second grade. In first grade, the treatment students had significantly higher baseline speaking abilities than the control students, whereas, in second grade, the control students had significantly higher baseline speaking abilities. However, when we tested all grade levels together, we found no significant differences between the treatment and control group on baseline speaking abilities, indicating that balance was achieved on all covariates. Though we looked within treatment and control conditions to examine differences between the two groups of students, the randomization of the study helped ensure that the children within each of these experimental conditions were comparable to one another, or equal in expectation (Murnane & Willett, 2011).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of students in TAP and control groups

| Student characteristics | TAP | | | Control | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------|--------------------|---------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | N | Mean % of sample | Standard deviation | N | Mean % of sample | Standard deviation |
| Gender: male | 497 | 51.31 | | 3,295 | 52.32 | |
| Parent education | | | | | | |
| Did not graduate high school | 390 | 46.67 | | 2,663 | 48.14 | |
| Graduated high school | 390 | 36.67 | | 2,663 | 35.49 | |
| Completed some college or above | 390 | 16.67 | | 2,663 | 16.37 | |
| Grade | | | | | | |
| Kindergarten | 497 | 30.78 | | 3,295 | 34.99 | |
| First grade | 497 | 37.83 | | 3,295 | 36.84 | |
| Second grade | 497 | 31.39 | | 3,295 | 28.16 | |
| Baseline CELDT speaking score | | | | | | |
| Kindergarten | 153 | 430.73 | 67.74 | 1,153 | 423.81 | 68.73 |
| First grade | 188 | 485.03 | 76.08 | 1,214 | 472.68* | 62.64 |
| Second grade | 156 | 468.46 | 49.23 | 928 | 478.28* | 51.14 |

Note. *T*-tests for differences in means were conducted for continuous variables, chi-square tests for categorical variables. CELDT scores are unstandardized. The range for CELDT speaking scores is 140-630.

* $p < 0.05$.

MEASURES

The key independent variable was a dummy indicator of the students’ participation in a school that implemented TAP. The key dependent variable was a measure of the student’s oral language skill.

California English Language Development Test (CELDT)

We used data from the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to measure the students’ oral language abilities. All designated ELs in California are required to take the CELDT annually until they are

reclassified as language proficient. The CELDT is derived from the California English language development standards and used to (a) identify students who are not proficient in English; (b) determine the level of English proficiency of those students; and (c) assess the students' progress in English skills (CDE, 2013). There are five levels of proficiency: *beginning*, *early intermediate*, *intermediate*, *early advanced*, and *advanced*.

The CELDT has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of English-language proficiency; Cronbach's α ranges between 0.73 and 0.92 (CTB/McGraw Hill, 2009). The CELDT includes a total score as well as scores for four subtests: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We used the speaking subtest score, as it best aligns with our oral language framework (Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). The speaking subtest is administered individually to students and assesses their ability to answer questions and express thoughts. For example, the test examiner will show pictures to the students and ask them to describe what they see. The students must be able to name the objects that they see and their uses and tell stories based on the pictures. Scoring is based on the amount and usage of vocabulary.

Covariates

We used school-district demographic data to generate a set of covariates, including gender, socioeconomic status (SES) as measured by parent education, and grade level, which enabled us to adjust for the departures from randomization and increase the precision of estimates. Parent education has been found to be a reliable predictor of SES because of its stability and relationship with other factors of SES, such as occupational prestige (Hollingshead, 1975). In addition, parent education is correlated with the home language environment and exposure that a child receives (Tabors, Snow, & Dickinson, 2001); therefore, using it as a covariate enabled us to control for this potential variation. A lagged dependent variable was also included in the model to control for the child's baseline speaking skills. Finally, we considered the likelihood that students within the same school are similar to one another; to adjust for such clustering within schools, we employed the cluster command in STATA to achieve correct standard errors.

Missing Data

Not surprisingly, our sample included missing demographic data. In the case of the treatment group, 22% of students did not have data on parent education; for the control group, 19% of students were missing parent-education data. These missing data resulted from either nonresponse or parents indicating that they preferred not to disclose the information. To adjust for these missing data, we used multiple imputation to generate values representative of the overall properties of the sample. This was done in STATA, using the `augment` command to generate weights derived from probabilities of response. Data were imputed 20 times. Predictive mean matching was used for the continuous variables (CELDT speaking scores), and logistic imputation was used for the dummy variables (treatment indicator and demographic covariates).

TAP Lesson Plans

In order to assess whether and to what extent the TAP lesson plans aligned with the CCSS (research question 2), we analyzed nine lesson plans for each of the disciplines (drama and dance) for all grade levels (K-2). A total of 54 lesson plans were used for this analysis. The lesson plans were each approximately 10 pages long and consisted of an overview of the lesson's content, detailed instructions for each of the segments of the lesson (warm-up, modeling, guided practice, and debriefing), and any necessary materials (e.g., nursery rhyme text). As previously indicated, the lesson plans are accessible online.

California CCSS: Speaking and Listening Standards

We also utilized the speaking and listening standards for K-2 students from the California CCSS (CDE, 2013) to address our second research question. At each grade level there are six standards. The standards differ slightly between grade levels; we utilized the appropriate standard for each grade-level lesson we analyzed. Because a primary goal of TAP was to foster oral language skills, it seemed most logical to consider the speaking and listening skills of the CCSS when searching for overlapping patterns between the CCSS and TAP lessons. The California CCSS are available online.²

ANALYSIS PLAN

To determine whether K-2 Hispanic ELs who had received the arts intervention exhibited better oral English skills than those in the comparison group (research question 1a), we used a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to predict CELDT speaking scores. Our first model was a simple bivariate logistic regression of participation in TAP predicting CELDT speaking scores. Because students tend to be heavily clustered within

schools, Model 2 included the clustering control to account for between-school variation as well as our principal predictor (participation in TAP), and the lagged dependent variable to control for prior speaking abilities. Model 3 included our principal predictor and the full set of covariates, including the clustering control, the lagged dependent variable, gender, parent education, and student grade level.

So that the regression coefficients could be interpreted as effect sizes, we standardized the CELDT speaking scores. According to Cohen (1977), the thresholds for small, medium, and large effect-size magnitudes are 0.10, 0.30, and 0.50, respectively; however, effect sizes in behavioral and social science research often fall below Cohen's thresholds and should not be overlooked (Hill, Bloom, Black, Black, & Lipsey, 2008; Valentine & Cooper, 2003).

To ascertain whether there were any differential impacts of TAP on specific groups (research question 1b), we created seven interaction terms between the dummy treatment variable and

the student's baseline CELDT speaking score,

Parent education levels:

not a high-school graduate,

high-school graduate,

some college or more,

Student grade levels:

kindergarten,

first grade, and

second grade.

We then utilized an OLS regression model similar to that used in Model 3 (including our principal predictor and the full set of covariates) and proceeded to run seven different regressions, each incorporating a different one of the above interaction terms, to determine whether there were any differential impacts of TAP.

For research question 2, we employed a document analysis technique (Bowen, 2009) in which we coded for overlapping patterns between the California CCSS K-2 speaking and listening standards and the TAP lesson plans. We first separated each lesson plan by activity (warm-up, modeling/guided practice, and debriefing/evaluation) and noted any corresponding standards found within that activity. Two research assistants worked with the lead author on this task; to ensure inter-rater reliability, we verified a minimum of 90% consistency for 20% of the lessons analyzed.

To gain a specific understanding of the patterns of overlap, we investigated which TAP activity (warm-up, modeling/guided practice, or debriefing/evaluation) drew upon the largest number of standards and which standards most frequently recurred within each lesson (in each of the three lesson segments). For both of these questions, we looked at each discipline separately for each grade level. To understand which TAP activity drew upon the largest number of standards, we averaged the number of standards (1-6) found for each activity for all the lessons within each grade and discipline. To learn which standards most commonly recurred within each lesson, we looked across activities and summed the number of times a standard appeared (with a maximum of one occurrence per activity, resulting in a scale of 1-3). We then averaged the occurrences across the lessons for each grade level and discipline.

RESULTS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

Table 2 displays the results of the logistic regressions predicting the impact of TAP on K-2 Hispanic ELs' CELDT speaking scores. In the simple bivariate regression (Model 1), K-2 Hispanic ELs who participated in TAP performed significantly better on the CELDT speaking test, on average, than those who did not participate in TAP ($B = 0.18, p < .001$). Model 2, which included the clustering control and lagged dependent variable, indicates that the EL students who participated in TAP performed better than their peers on the CELDT speaking assessment ($B = 0.13, p < .05$), after accounting for their prior speaking abilities and within-school similarities. Similarly, when we included the full set of covariates (Model 3), this result held ($B = 0.13, p < .05$).

Table 2. Impact of TAP on the Speaking Abilities of K-2 Hispanic ELs

| | CELDT speaking score | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| Participated in TAP | 0.18*** (0.04) | 0.13* (0.05) | 0.13* (0.05) |
| Baseline speaking score | | 0.57*** (0.02) | 0.57*** (0.02) |
| Intercept | 0.21 (0.01) | 0.23 (0.02) | 0.12 (0.05) |
| <i>N</i> | 3,792 | 3,792 | 3,792 |

Note. Significant coefficients are indicated in bold. Standard errors in parentheses. Scores are standardized. Models 2 & 3 include adjustments for clustering within schools, and Model 3 includes covariates (centered at their mean): baseline achievement (measured by prior CELDT speaking score), gender, parent education, and grade level.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

The regression coefficient for receiving the TAP treatment can be interpreted as an effect size, indicating a 0.13 effect of TAP on the speaking skills of Hispanic K-2 ELs when including the full set of covariates. This is a small effect according to Cohen's scale of effect-size magnitudes (1977), but, especially when looked at in light of the literature on effect sizes in behavioral and social science research (Hill et al., 2008; Valentine & Cooper, 2003), this small effect is important and may have noteworthy implications.

As a robustness check, we ran our final regression model (Model 3) on balanced sizes of the treatment and control group (i.e., $N = 497$ in each group). We pulled 12 random samples of 497 students from the overall control group. Ten of these samples showed no significant differences from the treatment group on the baseline variables; results from these ten regressions yielded similar results to our original models. Eight of ten were significant, one was marginally significant, and one was not significant.

Our regression models showed that there were no differential impacts of TAP resulting from baseline English speaking abilities, parent education, or grade level (research question 1b). In each of the seven regressions that we ran, the interaction term was insignificant, indicating that participating in TAP did not benefit certain K-2 Hispanic ELs more than others.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

We found that all of the TAP drama and dance lessons at the kindergarten and first-grade levels contained all six of the corresponding California CCSS speaking and listening standards. For second-grade drama, all but one lesson contained the six standards; lesson 7 included four of the six standards, missing standards 4 ("tell a story") and 5 ("create a visual display to clarify ideas"). All of the second-grade dance lessons contained five of the six standards, excluding standard 4 ("tell a story").

Figure 1. Drama: Number of standards per lesson, by activity

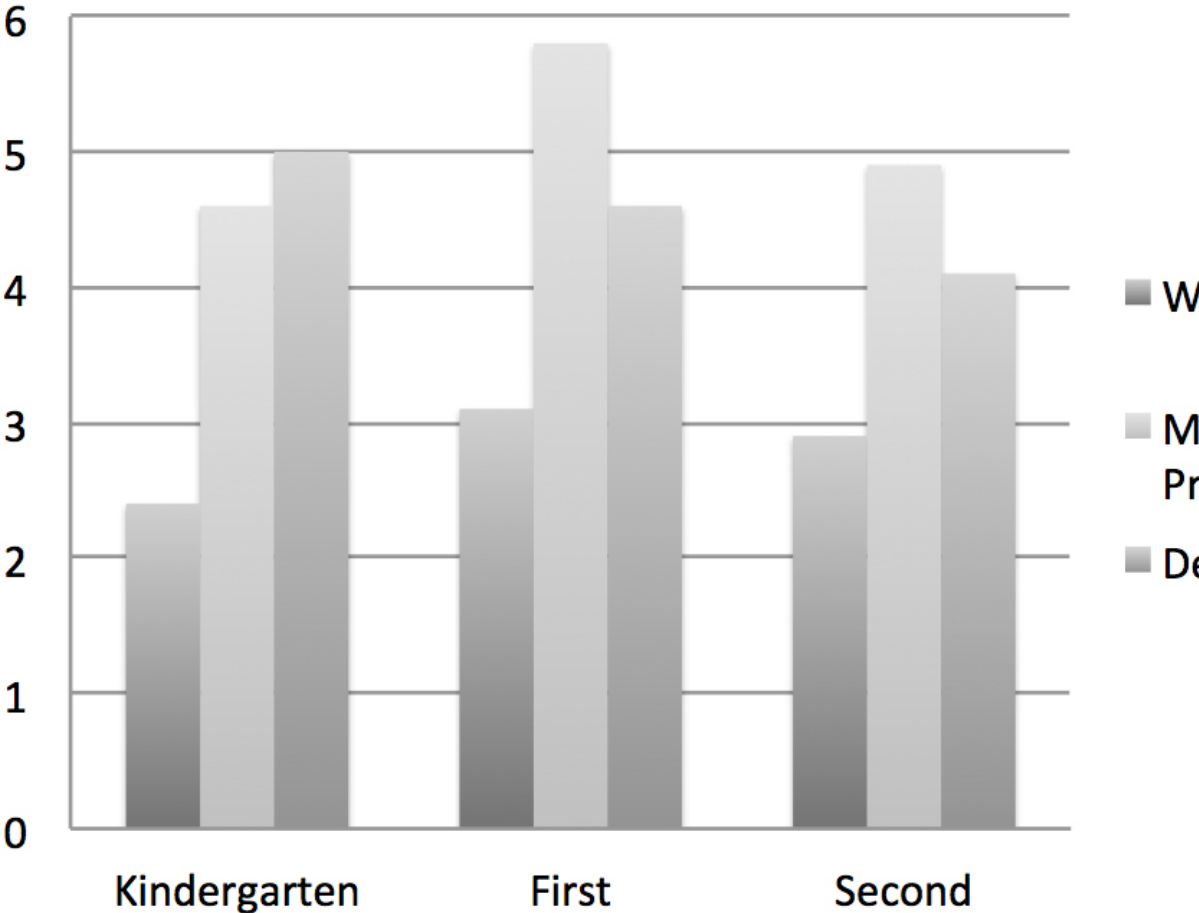


Figure 1. Average number of standards (1-6) per each activity within the TAP drama lessons. W data from lessons 1-9 for each grade level.

Figure 2. Dance: Number of standards per lesson, by activity

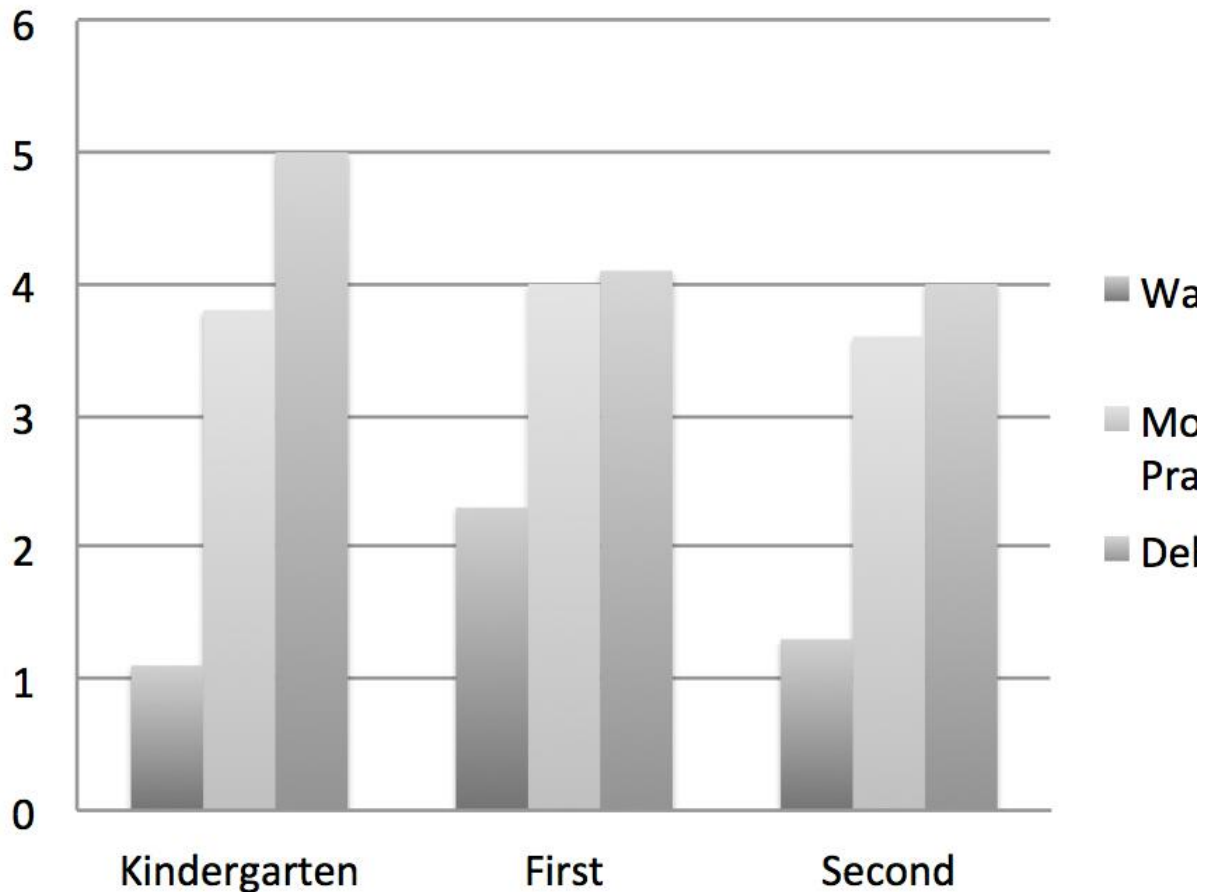


Figure 2. Average number of standards (1-6) per each activity within the TAP dance lessons. We used data from lessons 1-9 for each grade level.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the average number of speaking and listening standards included in the drama (Figure 1) and dance (Figure 2) lessons by grade level. The drama lessons utilized more standards than the dance lessons. This was not surprising to us, because the drama lessons offered more opportunities for dialogue and conversation than the dance lessons. For the kindergarten drama lessons, the debriefing and evaluation activities included the largest number of standards (an average of five), whereas for the first- and second-grade drama lessons, the modeling/guided practice activities included the most standards, averaging 5.8 and 4.9, respectively. For the kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade dance lessons, the debriefing and evaluation activities included the largest number of standards, averaging 4.1, 4.9, and 4.0, respectively. Not surprisingly, in both disciplines the warm-up activities, which were primarily meant as icebreaker activities that would help to transition the class into the TAP lessons, drew upon the lowest number of standards out of the three activities.

Figure 3. Average frequency of standards within each lesson, by grade level

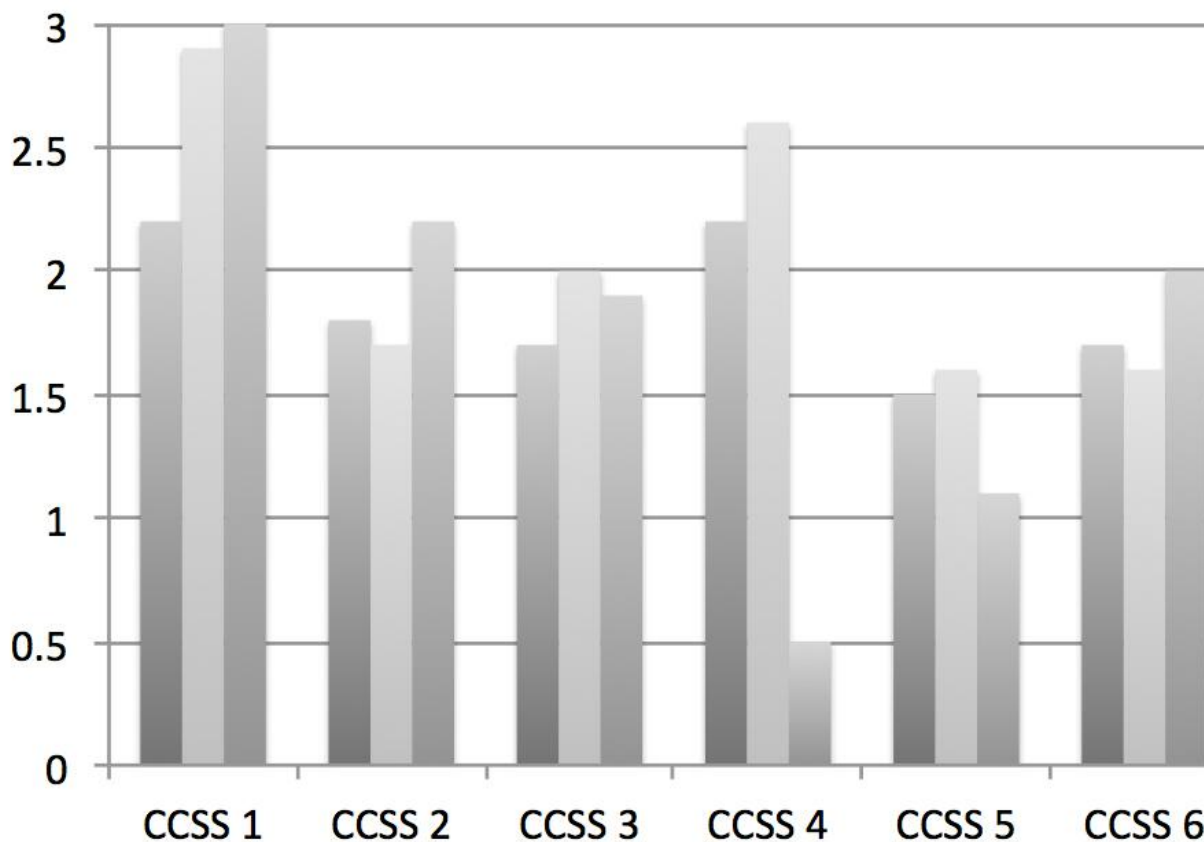


Figure 3. Average number of times each standard appeared within the lessons. Range is 0 – 3, based on three sections within each lesson: warm-up, modeling/guided practice, and debriefing and evaluation. Drama and dance lessons are combined to create a composite.

When we looked at the average frequency of standards within the lessons, we found a similar pattern between drama and dance; thus, we created a composite of the two (Figure 3). Across grade levels, the most commonly occurring standard was standard 1, which is similar for all grade levels: “Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners” (CDE, 2013). At the kindergarten and first-grade levels, the next most frequent standard was number 4, which involves “describ[ing] familiar people, places, things, and events” (CDE, 2013). This was not the case for second-graders; in fact, number 4 was the least frequently occurring standard at this grade level, primarily because the second-grade standard 4 is “Tell a story” (CDE, 2013), which was not often included in the dance lessons. For second grade, the second most frequent standard was standard 2, “Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media” (CDE, 2013). Interestingly, standard 5, “Add . . . other visual displays” to descriptions or stories was the least frequently occurring standard across grade levels. Although adding such displays, through movement, gesture, and expression, was at the heart of all of the TAP lessons, this did not constitute as large a component of the lessons as the conversations that took place about these activities.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes two important findings. First, our results offer evidence of the positive impact of integrating creative drama and dance activities with language arts instruction on the English-speaking skills of K-2 Hispanic students who come from homes where little or no English is spoken. This is important in light of the large body of

research that clearly demonstrates the necessity of equipping young ELs with oral English skills (August & Shanahan, 2006; Hoff, 2013; Uccelli & Páez, 2007). Second, the TAP lessons align very well with the California CCSS. Therefore, instruction modeled on TAP may prove to be an effective tool for K-2 teachers looking for curricular models to assist them in designing lessons around the Common Core standards. This may be especially helpful for teachers of early elementary ELs who may feel underprepared to effectively instruct young learners from different language backgrounds (Samson & Lesaux, 2015).

Specifically, the findings from our regression models indicated that the K-2 Hispanic ELs in our sample who participated in TAP drama and dance lessons showed improvements in their speaking abilities in comparison with those who did not participate in the lessons. In addition, we found no evidence of differential impacts of TAP on students with varying levels of English-speaking abilities, parent education, or grade, suggesting that TAP worked in a similar fashion for all the K-2 Hispanic ELs who participated. These findings echo the results from our prior work, which looked at ELs of all ethnicities (Greenfader et al., 2015). However, there are two important differences. First, in our previous analysis of the first two years of TAP data, our results indicated that the impact of TAP on the English-speaking abilities of ELs was only marginally significant. Second, this previous work suggested that those ELs with the most limited English abilities benefitted most from TAP, whereas the ELs with the most advanced English abilities did not appear to advance their speaking skills by participating in TAP.

This raises the question of whether the narrower focus of this study on Hispanic ELs may explain the differences in our findings. To investigate this, we conducted a post-test on the full sample of ELs of all ethnicities, utilizing the same regression models that were used in the present analysis; the findings mirrored those reported in Table 2. We therefore speculate that the differences from the analysis of the first two years of data may be attributable to two modifications that were made in the third year of implementation: Teachers were encouraged to use one physical-education period per week to rehearse the last TAP lesson the teacher had co-taught with the teaching artist (potentially doubling the class time that the teacher and students spent on TAP), and the final five lessons in both drama and dance were revised based on teacher feedback and suggestions.

The findings from our second research question indicated that the TAP lessons strongly aligned with the California CCSS speaking and listening standards. Although the standards were included with higher frequency in the drama lessons than in the dance lessons, both disciplines included activities based on at least five of the six standards in each lesson. The most frequently occurring standards involved K-2 standard 1, “participat[ing] in collaborative conversations with diverse partners” (CDE, 2013), and K-1 standard 4, “describ[ing] familiar people, places, things, and events” (CDE, 2013), or grade 2 standard 2, “recount[ing] or describ[ing] key ideas or details from . . . information presented orally” (CDE, 2013).

These findings illustrate one of TAP’s main objectives, which was to foster rich verbal interactions within the classroom; they also suggest why utilizing performing arts activities may be an effective way to promote English oral language. The TAP lessons utilized the more arts-specific portions of the lesson as conversation starters, encouraging students to discuss how they would portray a story or idea and then talk about how and/or why the portrayal worked. This is important because so much of the typical school day is teacher-directed. Drama and dance activities provide opportunities for EL students to become active participants in discussions with both the teacher and other students.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study randomly assigned whole schools to treatment and control groups, which meant running the risk that the schools differed on a host of dimensions, not just the arts. Although we rigorously controlled for possible confounding variables, further study is needed—for example, replication of the findings in other contexts. Ideally, such a study would randomly assign children to a school that used TAP or an identical school that did not simply conduct business as usual but offered a different ELD intervention and then track their progress over time. Another approach would be to randomly assign classrooms within a school to treatment and control groups, making sure that there was no systematic difference in pretest scores. Longitudinal studies are also needed to compare the academic progress of students who participated in TAP (or a similar program focused on oral language skills) with a control group.

An additional limitation was the cumbersome nature of our secondary analysis, in which we investigated the patterns of overlap between the California CCSS and TAP lessons. The CCSS are broad, and therefore it is difficult to evaluate how they function in a specific curriculum. It is perhaps even more difficult to interpret such an analysis. However, we recognize the need for curriculum that aligns with standards (Honig, 2014), and the analysis in this study sheds light on how an arts-based literacy curriculum can be an effective means of incorporating the CCSS into early elementary classrooms. A final limitation of this study was that, for lack of other available speaking assessments, we utilized data from the CELDT, which was not designed as a CCSS assessment. Further

work is needed to evaluate the alignment between curriculum, standards, and the CCSS assessments.

IMPLICATIONS

Facing up to Unintended Consequences

In recent decades, the early elementary curriculum has been transformed. The changes are most noticeable in kindergarten, which has been converted from a playful interlude focused on children's social, emotional, and moral *development* to the beginning of serious academic *instruction* (Russell, 2010). First and second grade have similarly become more academic. Scholars have argued that the backward mapping of expectations from standardized tests has warped practice (Graue, 2009), causing even the kindergarten curriculum to become one-sidedly focused on teaching academic content.

There is a strong consensus in the research literature that oral language skills are crucial to literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006; Uccelli & Pérez, 2007). The TAP lessons, which focus on dramatic play and movement, bring back elements of traditional K-2 education. If adding one to two hours of creative drama and dance instruction per week can significantly boost the speaking skills of ELs, this suggests that a hybrid curriculum—integrating a traditionalist emphasis on child development with the current focus on teaching content—may boost EL achievement. The speaking and listening sections of the K-2 CCSS for ELA would appear to encourage such integration. In addition, our analysis of the CCSS and TAP lessons suggests that the widespread adoption of the CCSS presents an opportunity to reintegrate the arts into early elementary classrooms, enabling teachers to use arts-based strategies to engage and support young ELs.

Unfortunately, the beneficial effects of the CCSS-ELA for the primary grades could easily be overshadowed by the impact of the new assessments developed by the Smarter Balanced and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortiums. The *Smarter Balanced English Language Arts & Literacy Stimulus Specifications* (2014), which provided item writers with guidance on appropriate kinds of texts, grade level-appropriate topics and complexity, etc., requested only one-minute audio presentations to measure listening skills; there was no mention of an assessment of speaking skills. In 2013, PARCC released a request for proposals to build both speaking and listening assessments (PARCC, 2013). However, one year later an update was issued stating that the speaking and listening assessments were being made optional for states (PARCC, 2014).

This is troubling because school districts have historically prioritized the allocation of resources to content areas that are seen as critical to raising test scores (McGuire, 2007). In the five years following the passage of the NCLB legislation, 62% of school districts reported increasing the time spent on ELA and/or mathematics in elementary schools; among districts reporting increases, the average increase was 43% per week across the two subjects combined (McMurrer, 2007). In light of this historical pattern, it seems improbable that school districts will expand time spent on speaking and listening skills unless these skills are included in the CCSS assessments.

Developing effective, efficient ways to assess speaking skills with standardized tests is, of course, challenging. While listening skills can be tested by asking students to listen to recorded prompts and answer multiple-choice questions, the evaluation of speaking skills traditionally requires face-to-face interactions with students. Therefore, testing speaking skills is expensive and introduces the problem of inter-rater reliability. Nevertheless, such live assessments have advantages over multiple-choice tests, in which even children who do not understand a question may still guess the answer. Most important are the risks associated with high-stakes tests that do not assess the full range of skills described in the standards and can therefore distort classroom practice.

The NCLB Act of 2001 provides an example of the unintended consequences that can be associated with high-stakes tests. NCLB placed great weight on the number of students who scored at or above specified proficiency levels and penalized low-performing schools that failed to raise test scores. This provided an incentive for teachers and principals to target those children who were approaching the *proficient* level for extra attention. By contrast, there were weak incentives for teachers to devote extra attention to students who either were clearly proficient already or had little chance of becoming proficient in the near term. Research indicates that these incentives influenced where teachers focused their attention (Neal & Schanzenbach, 2007). Instead of insuring that no child was left behind, NCLB inadvertently gave teachers in low-performing schools an incentive to focus less attention on the least proficient students.

The danger that the impact that the Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessments will end up further distorting the K-2 curriculum is exacerbated by the trend, promoted by the U.S. Department of Education (Delisle, 2014), for states to require that teacher evaluations be linked to the performance of students on CCSS and other standardized tests. With all but six states expected to have such an evaluation system in place by the 2016-17 school year (Porter, 2015), the careers of teachers across the nation will be on the line when their students sit

down to take the CCSS assessments. Although children in the primary grades will not be tested, the pressure on K-2 teachers to prepare children for the high-stakes tests that will be given in grades 3 to 8 could become intense.

Even if the CCSS-ELA assessments are revised to assess the full range of skills described in the standards, this can only be seen as a partial solution. As discussed earlier, the misalignment of standards and assessments with resources, preparation, and curriculum that has been identified in California (Koski & Weis, 2004; McLaughlin et al., 2014) is also present in other states (Kober & Rentmer, 2014). If the CCSS are to have the impact their supporters hope for, adequate curriculum materials and teacher preparation will be needed. For teachers of K-2 ELs, there is research evidence showing that classroom performing-arts activities strengthen verbal skills (Greenfader et al., 2015; Winner et al., 2013). In addition, arts-based curricula like TAP are designed to work in diverse classrooms, allowing young participants to inject their own experiences and ideas into the classroom dialogue (Medina & Campano, 2006). This encourages children from all linguistic backgrounds to share and utilize their individual funds of knowledge—an opportunity that seldom occurs in contemporary English-only classrooms (Meyer, 2000).

Still, if early elementary teachers are to become adept at boosting verbal skills, they will need support. To make the school's academic vocabulary their own, ELs need opportunities to connect the words that they hear with their own experiences and fill them with their own intentions (Fisher et al., 2008; Moll et al., 1992). Likewise, teachers need help in translating the CCSS speaking and listening standards into school-level practices that enable K-2 ELs to go beyond passively listening to their teacher's words and allow them to take ownership of their new English vocabulary by using it in interpersonal interactions.

THE NEW CALIFORNIA ELL/ELD FRAMEWORK

Recently, California has taken important steps toward addressing the problem that former Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig pointed out in 2014, when he noted that the Common Core State Standards “are not a curriculum. Jumping from the standards to create lesson plans misses a crucial middle step of developing a coherent curriculum.” The *California English Language Development (ELD) Standards* were updated in 2012 to correspond to the CCSS ELA standards. The new ELD Standards are designed to be used *in tandem* with the ELA standards and other content standards to ensure that students strengthen their abilities to use English while they simultaneously learn content through English.

The California ELD Standards are organized so that they focus first on meaningful interaction; a focus on knowledge about the English language and how it works comes afterward. The expectations communicated in the standards assume that ELs are provided with an appropriately designed curriculum, effective instruction, and strategic levels of scaffolding as they progress through the ELD continuum. This means that content teachers need to know enough about language development to support their ELs at different English language proficiency levels, enabling the ELs to maintain a steady trajectory along the ELD continuum. In addition, ELD teachers and ELA specialists need to know enough about content to ensure that ELs are developing the language skills needed to be successful in their core content coursework. Collaboration across disciplines is vital.

Both the CCSS ELA and the ELD standards emphasize the importance of oral language development. Opportunities for oral language are crucial for children's language development. However, the emphasis put on written language in the aftermath of the passage of NCLB has left many teachers with little experience in fostering active verbal interaction. Publication of the *California English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework* (California Department of Education [CDE], 2015) provides these teachers with a key resource, explicating the standards for ELA/Literacy and ELD by grade level; included are the ways in which the standards work together for specific purposes. The *Framework* also provides numerous examples that illustrate ways in which schools and teachers can best organize instruction for powerful teaching and learning for all students.

Unfortunately, the existence of such a resource does not guarantee that it will be widely used. Two of the implementation hurdles—teacher preparation and professional development—that were identified in 2014 by McLaughlin et al. have not yet been dealt with. History indicates that the character of the mandated Common Core assessments will help to determine whether funding to address these remaining hurdles is likely to be forthcoming.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

This article began with a question: Might the Common Core State Standards and their assessments end up leaving vulnerable students behind? The answer depends on whether we are able to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. When states mandate high-stakes testing, they have a responsibility to make sure that the tests do not distort the school curriculum. Moreover, how much testing is advisable remains an open question. The 2015

PKD/Gallup Poll found that 67% of public school parents believe there is too much emphasis on standardized testing in their community's public schools (PKD International, 2015).

So how important is it to test every student every year? The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is given to a representative sample of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 each year, is one of the most trusted standardized tests in the United States. The influential Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test is given to a sample of students once every three years. What if students only took the Common Core assessments every second or third year? This would give schools the time to study the test results and work out strategies for improvement during the non-test years. The funding saved on testing could support teacher professional development and planning.

One of the leading arguments made in favor of the current yearly testing regime is that the tests can provide useful information to teachers, students, and parents. However, for schools to respond effectively, they need time and resources to focus on those areas where student performance has been weak. For example, to boost the oral language skills of K-2 ELs, teachers will need support in developing strategies for bringing rich dialogue into schoolrooms. This would mean investing resources (saved on testing?) in helping educators find satisfying responses to Vivian Gussin Paley's (2013) question: "How do we use [children's] love of play to bring good conversations into the classroom?" (p. 48).

Notes

1. Drama: <http://sites.uci.edu/class/theater-grades/>; dance: <http://sites.uci.edu/class/dance-lessons-grades/>
2. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finaelaccsstandards.pdf> (The K-2 speaking and listening standards are found on pages 27-28.)

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