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Supporting Teachers in Arts Integration Strategies to Foster Foundational Literacy Skills of Emergent Bilinguals

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Abstract

Oral language skills are essential to the future literacy of students in kindergarten and first grade, especially emergent bilinguals (EBs). Yet, U.S. teachers receive few professional development opportunities that prepare them to use effective strategies for promoting oral language development. Since teacher education is compartmentalized into curricular silos, methods for literacy instruction are taught in one course, methods for arts instruction in another, and so on. This article argues that well-designed arts integration can meet a key need of young, linguistically diverse students by providing opportunities for oral language practice across content areas. Experimental evidence that arts-based instruction benefits the speaking skills of EBs is presented; the underlying mechanisms are explored. An example of a fieldwork program that provided pre-service teachers with hands-on experience in K-1 classes is included, showing how they learned to enhance the verbal skills of EBs through integration of drama, music, and movement.

Keywords: elementary teacher education, classroom drama, arts integration, primary grades, linguistic diversity, emergent bilinguals, English learners, diversity, teacher preparation, kindergarten

In a recent interview, a school district curriculum specialist casually observed, “I got a chance to talk to the literacy department, *finally*. Our department (Visual and Performing Arts) had never been able to get an audience with them!” This seemingly innocent comment alluded to a culture of content area compartmentalization that has become characteristic of U.S. public school districts (Augsburg & De Barros, 2011). Ironically, when educators and researchers are asked to explain what qualities make for good teaching, a majority mention educator collaboration and curricular integration (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). Yet, such integration remains rare.

Grinning, the arts specialist described the outcome of her meeting with the reading specialists: “[We] talked about creating robust vocabulary lessons through integrating singing and drama. They went to a classroom, watched what the kids were doing, and loved it! So now they are saying, ‘This is really good stuff.’” The lesson the reading specialists had observed was part of a professional development program that equipped K-2 teachers in diverse urban schools with arts-based strategies created to promote the oral English development (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013) of emergent bilinguals (EBs). Designed to engage all children in classroom dialogues as part of a standards-based drama and dance curriculum, these strategies have been found to

significantly enhance the oral language skills of EBs (Greenfader, Brouillette & Farkas, 2015; Greenfader & Brouillette, 2017).

Despite the consensus among researchers that a child's oral abilities in the early elementary grades are critical to his or her future literacy and overall academic success (August & Shanahan, 2006; Hoff, 2013; Snow & Dickinson, 1991), newly certified teachers continue to arrive in schools with little experience in encouraging oral interactions among K-2 students. Given the strong pressure to prepare children to do well on written standardized tests, teacher credential programs tend to spend little time on teaching effective strategies—such as dramatic play—for promoting oral language development. In this article, we argue that this disadvantages EBs in the primary grades.

Understanding the Needs of Young Emergent Bilinguals

Across the United States, students who are still developing proficiency in English comprise a large and growing subpopulation. The number of school-designated English learners enrolled in public schools nationwide increased by 51%—from 3.5 million to 5.3 million— between the 1997-98 and the 2008-09 school years (NELA, 2011). These young EBs have unique learning needs. Not only are they learning a second language, but they are also developing proficiency in their home languages (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). EBs need frequent opportunities to engage in structured academic talk with teachers and peers who know English well and can provide accurate feedback (Francis et al., 2006; Wong-Fillmore, & Snow 2000). Most experts agree that oral English proficiency is an essential first step toward English reading development (Goldenberg, 2008). Early intervention is pivotal since oral language has been found to predict future literacy, overall academic success, and improved social dispositions (Spira, Bracken, & Fischel, 2005). Yet, paradoxically, the national focus on reading—enforced by standardized tests—has come at the cost of time spent on oral language (O'Day, 2009).

It is not surprising that EBs do not initially perform on par with monolingual-English speaking students on English-language assessments (August & Shanahan, 2006); many of these children come from homes where little or no English is spoken. What is concerning is that the vocabulary gap between EBs and non-EBs that exists at kindergarten entry (Hoff, 2013) persists throughout schooling (Lee & Burkam, 2002; NCES, 2013), despite the fact that many EBs acquire vocabulary at a faster rate than their monolingual-English peers (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011; Snow & Kim, 2007).

Bilingual and monolingual-English learners follow similar trajectories in language acquisition, except for usage of background English vocabulary knowledge (Snow & Kim, 2007). Monolinguals often rely upon prior vocabulary knowledge to map new vocabulary words and concepts, boosting their comprehension. However, EBs—who are still building their English vocabularies—are unable to utilize this strategy and therefore must turn to different strategies to achieve comprehension (Snow & Kim, 2007). Yet, the fact that EBs may not understand certain English vocabulary words does not mean that they cannot recognize the object or idea that the word represents. Indeed, many EBs possess conceptual vocabulary knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the vocabulary in their home language *or* English) on par with monolingual English-speaking students (Mancilla-Martinez & Greenfader, 2014). For example, a young EB from a Spanish-

speaking home may know “*mesa*,” the Spanish word for “table,” but not yet know the English equivalent. This child’s abilities differ from those of a child who does not know the word for “table” in any language; the implications for educators also differ.

Classroom teachers must have access to meaningful activities that engage young EBs and allow them to tap into such conceptual abilities. Additionally, teachers of EBs must approach English language development in a way that recognizes these young students’ assets. As articulated by the “funds of knowledge” framework, EBs possess a wealth of knowledge and competencies that come from life experiences (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; González et al., 1994; Moll, 1994). Yet these skills might not be accessed in typical English-only classroom interactions (Meyer, 2000). In order to narrow the achievement gap between EBs and their peers, it is therefore pivotal for teachers to be able to implement methods that draw upon young EBs’ skills and knowledge.

Leveling the Playing Field through Arts Integration

Teachers and school districts often feel the need to make tradeoffs between instruction in reading and/or math and instruction in the arts. Yet arts experiences can be especially important to children from linguistically diverse families—or with diverse capabilities—as these children are less likely than their peers to have attended preschool (Laughlin, 2013), primarily due to lack of access (Greenfader & Miller, 2014). So EBs may have had little exposure to English outside of school; many of these children, especially those who struggle with language learning, might benefit from arts integration activities to foster English language development. There is an urgent need to provide effective ways of enabling these children to master English, so that they can go on to successfully learn other subjects. Ironically, the time spent learning English while at school limits their capacity to learn other content areas (Newhouse, 2007). However, well-designed lessons in math, reading, and science that integrate the arts to help bridge the language gap can provide emergent bilinguals with a highly motivating first step (Brouillette, Childress-Evans, Hinga & Farkas, 2014).

Too often children who have language delays—or speak a language other than English at home—become isolated from much of the literacy curriculum. Although they may receive differentiated instruction, in practice these lessons tend to be watered down. Children who also have decoding challenges may receive additional support in word recognition and spelling, but they do not generally get the same instruction in comprehension skills as typically achieving children. As a result, they are inadvertently deprived of needed assistance in constructing meaning from text. For these children, arts-based instruction can prove invaluable. Drama activities have been shown to boost emergent literacy skills (Podlozny, 2000; Mages, 2006); also, dramatic play comes naturally to young children, providing rich opportunities both for expressing themselves and for interacting with others.

EBs need frequent and structured opportunities to use and respond to oral language (Hoff, 2013). Arts lessons provide this, along with rich opportunities for vocabulary development. In contrast to contrived vocabulary drills, classroom drama activities help to significantly increase vocabulary in authentic and meaningful contexts, while also enhancing the higher-level thinking skills needed for deeper understanding. The challenge is for K-2 teachers to learn to deliver such

lessons effectively, as few have had much arts experience. Even teachers who are enthusiastic advocates of such scripted activities as readers' theatre may be unfamiliar with the improvisational classroom drama techniques that can help young children to improve their oral language skills.

Successful arts integration programs show teachers how to create a bridge between the arts and the language arts aspects of the curriculum, so that arts integration amplifies English language development and learning in the language arts. This provides additional support for EBs by enriching the curriculum with visual images, creative movement, and interpersonal interactions, along with memorable rhythms, rhymes and patterns. Such support accelerates the learning of children who are not yet fluent in English and therefore struggle with the language-based explanations they encounter in English immersion classrooms.

Well-planned theatre/drama and dance lessons that are linked to the English language arts (ELA), English language development (ELD), and visual and performing arts (VAPA) standards can provide all students with the opportunity to meaningfully respond. Further, cognitive research on multimodal learning suggests that incorporating movement, gesture, and expression supports language comprehension and retention (Gersten & Geva, 2003; Hardison & Sonchaeng, 2005; Kress, 2009; Rieg & Paquette, 2009; Silverman, 2007). Arts activities then become a tool for enabling EBs to engage, on a deeper level, with the same curriculum content as other students.

Arts activities can also be strikingly efficient. In traditional instruction, the teacher questions only one student at a time. In contrast, drama activities can allow many children to respond at once, enabling a teacher to assess the comprehension of all students in the class at the same time. When checks for understanding show that EBs are becoming confused, scaffolding can be provided, enabling EBs to gain access to the curriculum on an equal basis with native speakers. Here is an example from a [drama-literacy integration lesson](#) from the Teaching Artist Project (TAP), discussed earlier.

“Actors – stand up and make a circle!”

Twenty kindergartners eagerly jump up and form a circle, standing in “5-point position,” with their hands at their sides, head high, feet together. The teacher who directs the drama lesson is using complex vocabulary words. However, the children follow along easily because he is simultaneously demonstrating the posture. Many observers would not guess that most of these children speak a language other than English at home.

“Stretch your right hand toward the middle of the circle.” As they begin the warm-up exercises, some children have trouble telling their right from their left hand. When this happens, the teacher walks around the circle, gently showing those children which hand is right or left. Most easily follow along. The children pretend to be “raisins,” then “grapes.” When they are raisins, students “shriveled up” (by squatting down with their arms tightly wrapped around them). Then they grow into big grapes (by standing tall with their arms outstretched). Their giggles and smiles make it clear that the theatre/drama class is one of the high points of the week. State literacy tests affirm that these children are learning English vocabulary quickly.

In another TAP class, children learn a literacy lesson taught through dance. This restless group of kindergartners missed recess due to rain and need to work off their pent-up energy. Before starting the lesson, the teacher shows the children how to avoid collisions with classmates by creating their own personal “body bubble.” Each child pretends to blow a soap bubble large enough so that he or she can stand inside it with arms outstretched. To keep the bubble from popping, each child must stay far enough away from other children so that their bubbles do not touch, activating multisensory processing from both the children’s visual and kinesthetic intelligences (Gardner, 2006). This not only avoids collisions but also enhances each child’s awareness of space and respect for the personal space of others.

The teacher encourages the children to experiment with comparison/contrast. As the music starts, each child mirrors the teacher’s motions. They reach high and bend low; first they wiggle, then they freeze. Following the movements of the teacher, the children experiment with ascending movements (moving upward like smoke, a flower, a bird) and descending movements (melting, sinking, spiraling). At the same time, children learn the basic vocabulary of dance by carrying out movements that are “high,” “middle,” and “low” with respect to the floor. They also do *axial movements* in which the body stays in place (swinging, swaying, wiggling, bending, stretching). By first grade, this practice is transformed into a *vocabulary lesson*, where students silently portray adjectives such as *proud, scared, grumpy, tired*.

As they become more comfortable participating in group movement, the children are invited to experiment with *locomotor* movements where they walk, hop, slide, bounce, shuffle, skip, etc. This allows for a greater level of creative spontaneity. By second grade, this locomotor activity will be turned into a grammar lesson by expanding the discussion to the pairing of verbs and adverbs. Any locomotor movement can be modified, at the teacher’s suggestion, by matching it with an appropriate adverb such as *quietly, angrily, happily, smoothly, sluggishly* (e.g. *shuffle sluggishly*).

Impact of Classroom Drama/Theatre and Dance.

Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin (2013) found strong evidence that enacting stories in the classroom (i.e., drama) strengthens verbal skills. A handful of studies has also linked dance activities to language skills. Church and colleagues found that Spanish-speaking first-graders performed better on English comprehension of math topics when instruction included gesture (Church, Ayman-Nolley, and Mahootian, 2004). All students, and especially EBs, were able to utilize cues from motions and expression to aid their comprehension. In our previous research, K-2 teachers have reported that dance is effective in boosting EBs’ language comprehension skills (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013). Teachers cited increased engagement and the comprehension that resulted from students “physicalizing” language as mechanisms that facilitated vocabulary growth.

Further, arts activities are fun for all students; they spawn creativity (Dewey, 2005; Greene, 1995) as well as promote positive social interaction (Brouillette, 2010; Catterall, 2009). Previous research has shown that incorporating arts activities into early elementary classrooms can boost all students’ engagement (Brouillette et al., 2014) and help foster positive social- emotional development (Brouillette, 2010). The idea that the arts are tied to emotional development is not

new. In 1897, Leo Tolstoy shocked the literary world when he published the book *What Is Art?* Upending Plato's dictum that art is the imitation of nature, Tolstoy called into question the creative merits of Shakespeare, Dante, and even his own novel *Anna Karenina*, arguing that true art is not the production of pleasure or pleasing objects. Instead, he saw the essential role of art to be providing a vehicle for communication and empathy among human beings, so that individuals were joined together in the same feelings. Given the importance of this role, Tolstoy saw the arts as indispensable to progress toward the well-being of individuals and humanity.

Through learning to recognize, label, manage, and communicate about their own emotions, then to perceive and try to understand others' emotions, children build skills that connect them with family, peers, and teachers. These developing capacities help children to negotiate increasingly complex social interactions, participate effectively in relationships and group activities, and reap the benefits of the social support that is crucial to healthy human development. Young children who exhibit healthy social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment are also more likely to do well academically in elementary school (Cohen, Onunaku, Clothier, & Poppe, 2005; Zero to Three, 2004). Therefore, implementation of an arts-based curriculum that promotes healthy social-emotional development may also boost academic achievement in schools.

Effective Teacher Professional Development.

EBs constitute one in nine students in the United States; in California they represent one in four students (ETS, 2009). Yet, many teachers feel—and are, in fact—underprepared to teach these students (Téllez & Waxman, 2005). More than two-thirds of American teachers report that they have not had even one day of professional development in supporting the learning of EBs during the previous three years (Hirsh, 2009). Yet, we know that some professional development methods do work.

Classroom-based coaching has been shown to be effective in helping teachers to expand skills, sustain change over time, and improve student achievement (Speck & Knipe, 2001). Other research (Veenman, Denessen, Gerrits, & Kenter, 2001) suggests that for coaching to be most useful, it may need to be embedded in broader efforts to build professional knowledge. As Guskey (2000) noted, quality professional development is “a process that is (a) intentional, (b) ongoing, and (c) systemic.” Teachers find it difficult to apply new knowledge from professional development programs unless it is both ongoing and job-embedded (Sparks, 1994).

Effective professional development programs must also provide sufficient contact hours for teachers to become proficient in using new skills. An analysis of well-designed experimental studies found that a set of programs offering substantial professional development contact hours (ranging from 30 to 100 hours in total), spread over six to 12 months, showed a positive and significant effect on student achievement gains (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Unfortunately, few teachers in the United States receive such support. On the 2003-04 National Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), a majority of teachers (57 percent) said they had received no more than 16 hours (two days or less) of professional development during the previous 12 months on the content of the subject(s) they taught (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

The challenge then becomes, given the budgetary constraints currently faced by public schools, how a cost-effective coaching model may be designed to provide sufficient hours of professional development to teachers to raise the total to the level needed to boost student achievement (Yoon et al., 2007), while also providing learning that is both ongoing and job-embedded (Sparks, 1994). One successful program, the K-2 Teaching Artist Project (TAP) in San Diego, addressed this problem by bringing teaching artists with specialized preparation into the classroom as coaches (Brouillette, Grove & Hinga, 2015). TAP was funded by a USDE Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination (AEMDD) grant. Therefore lesson plans and videos of the lessons have been made available to all teachers, free-of-charge. (Please see Note at end of article).

Following a two-day introductory workshop held just before school began in fall term, professional development activities took place primarily in each teacher's own classroom. Eight teaching artists (TAs) across the two disciplines (drama/theatre and dance) implemented 28 lessons in all of the schools that received the TAP lessons. The consistency in the curriculum, teaching artist expertise, and the professional development that TAs received helped ensure fidelity of implementation. The 14 weeks of drama lessons focused on enhancing EBs' speaking skills (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013); the 14 weeks of dance lessons were designed to enhance the children's listening abilities as they responded as a group to the artist's directions. Both types of lessons included a debrief section, where students openly shared their experiences. As the series of lessons unfolded, the teachers took a more and more active role in co-teaching the lessons. The teachers also received continuing support from the district's resource teachers during each classroom teacher's second year in the program.

Our research on the 2010-13 San Diego K-2 Teaching Artist Project (TAP) (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013) showed that teachers found it easier to remember and implement arts integration strategies if: 1) a limited number of strategies were presented at a time; 2) most of the professional development was carried out via collaboration with a teaching artist in the teacher's own classroom; and 3) video clips of lessons and other implementation materials were made easily accessible for review online. Through working with teaching artists, teachers learned the skills and strategies needed to integrate standards-based visual and performing arts lessons with the English language arts curriculum they were already teaching. Also, teachers learned how to use arts-based strategies to increase the level of verbal interaction in their classrooms, thus providing EBs with effective nonverbal arts-based cues as to the meanings of words.

Establishing Causality

Two studies (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2017; Greenfader, Brouillette & Farkas, 2015) have been carried out to evaluate the impact of the K-2 Teaching Artist Project. In both of these studies, we used scores from the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) as outcome variables to determine the impact of the intervention on EBs' early literacy skills. The CELDT evaluates the speaking, listening, reading and writing skills of EBs; it is given yearly to all California EBs who are not yet English-proficient. Reliability of the CELDT, as measured by Cronbach's α , ranges between .73 and .92 (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 2009). Our previous analyses have focused on the speaking and listening subtests; the listening subtest assesses how well students comprehend information heard in English.

The first pre/post study focused on the results of the first two waves of the research project (Greenfader, Brouillette & Farkas, 2015), examining each teacher's first year in TAP (when weekly visits from trained teaching artists ensured that the lessons were administered consistently). Results showed that, after controlling for prior achievement, K-2 EBs who participated in TAP ($N = 902$) performed marginally better ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = .05$) on the CELDT speaking assessment than those students who did not receive the TAP lessons ($N = 4,338$). We did not find a significant difference between the listening scores of participating EBs and those of the comparison group.

A second study focused on the results of the third wave of the same research project (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2017). This study differed from the study discussed above in two ways: 1) in the third year, participating teachers taught a second arts lesson per week on their own, so that students received two arts lessons per week instead of one; 2) the study focused on Hispanic EBs, as opposed to EBs of all ethnicities. The speaking abilities of 3,792 K-2 Hispanic EBs (TAP group: $N=497$; comparison group: $N=3,295$) from five Title I schools were examined. The TAP group was found to significantly outperform the comparison group ($\beta = 0.13$; $p < .05$) on CELDT speaking scores. To investigate whether these findings were due to the focus only on Hispanic EBs, we conducted a post-test on the full sample of EBs of all ethnicities; the findings mirrored the initial findings that focused on Hispanic EBs.

These findings are in line with earlier research on classroom drama, which suggests that such activities boost literacy skills and facilitate English oral language development (Hanna, 2008; Mages, 2008; Podlozny, 2000). Yet, such research has not generally attracted the attention of reading specialists or researchers who focus on the English development of young emergent bilinguals. Curriculum silos in teacher education programs may contribute to this.

Silos within Universities

The curricular design of teacher education programs, which separate foundational and methods courses, contributes to the construction of silo cultures in education (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009), creating a fissure between conceptual ideas and practical lessons and applications. Compounding this separation, teacher preparation is segregated by specialty, e.g. special education, bilingual education, general education, multicultural education (Rueda & Stillman, 2012). This compartmentalization of pedagogy and curricula results in a failure to provide pre-service teachers with an integrated set of tools to meet the needs of the linguistically and culturally diverse students whom they will face in contemporary public schools (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). By approaching content areas separately (in different courses), future teachers lose the opportunity to explore connections between content areas – especially how skills acquired in one content area might reinforce learning in another area – that they may have discovered had courses emphasized cross-disciplinary exploration and applications.

This is evidenced by how teacher credential programs tend to approach literacy instruction. Even though oral language is part of the English language arts curriculum, the pressures exerted by the test-driven K-12 curriculum have caused teacher education programs to increasingly ignore listening and speaking skills, focusing instead on reading and writing. As research increasingly

shows the critical importance of oral language to the academic success of young readers, especially EBs (Hoff, 2013), it becomes ever more important to tap into the skills nurtured by a related content area (e.g., drama) to find the needed expertise in supporting oral language development.

Concern about the compartmentalization of teacher preparation programs – and the subsequent costs – is not new. There is a growing body of research that looks at ways to prevent and deconstruct intellectual silos. Much of this research is grounded in a framework that: (1) emphasizes the importance of teacher preparation courses that synthesize core concepts across subject areas, providing a rationale for educating teachers in effective ways to integrate curriculum (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009); and (2) addresses the linguistic and cultural needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Rueda & Stillman, 2012).

This body of research complements a related line of inquiry on culturally relevant and linguistically relevant teaching (Banks & Banks, 2012; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Lucas et al. (2008) postulate that general education teachers should receive professional development in specific academic pedagogies that teach them how to be linguistically responsive to all students. They suggest preparation in classroom activities that include: modifying oral language practice, giving students time to pause, practice, and repeat; increasing social activities and time for students to work with each other; and utilizing creative scaffolds to help students. Performing arts activities provide teachers with practical tools that support such practices, so it would be useful for teacher educators to utilize arts-based literacies as they prepare pre-service teachers.

Student-borne costs

As a result of the segregation of teacher education programs by specialization, new teachers enter K-12 classrooms with compartmentalized mindsets, unknowingly and unwittingly replicating and reproducing the silos they encountered in teacher education programs. This creates an environment of isolated practices, which stifles integration and collaboration. Math is taught separately from science and theater is taught separately from the oral language portion of the English language arts curriculum. The impact not only handicaps teachers, but also is felt by students.

Young learners do not receive instruction in important cross-disciplinary skills that could be critical to their future success (NRC, 2012). Oral language practice, interactive learning, and engaging projects are especially important to emergent bilinguals, who are deprived of much-needed opportunities because of curricular silos (Castro, Pérez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011; O'Day, 2009). As a result, they struggle academically. Evidence that the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of the public school population are not being adequately served is clearly apparent in the persistence of the achievement gap in U.S. classrooms (Howard, 2010).

Integration through Teacher Preparation in the Arts

Previous research on teacher preparation and professional development in arts-based activities suggests how professional development in the arts can provide educators with tools and

strategies to bridge curricular areas and meet the needs of a linguistically and culturally diverse body of students (Medina & Campano, 2006). For example, arts activities promote oral language practice and opportunities. Research supports the necessity of oral practice (e.g., reading out-loud, phonics practice) for literacy learning and language development (National Reading Panel, 2000). Beginning readers need to hear speech sounds to understand sound and symbol relationships and pair verbal instruction with non-verbal cues (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000). Students without English-speaking backgrounds need such practice even more; an interactive language environment is essential if they are to build early literacy skills (Goldenberg, 2008).

The sound-manipulative nature of many performing arts activities highlights an important component of oral language practice, phonemic awareness, which is “the understanding that speech is composed of a series of individual sounds” (Yopp, 1992, p. 696). Having this awareness allows students to recognize the sounds that letters make individually and together when creating words (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). To distinguish between the 44 English sounds or phonemes, students need to engage in sound-manipulative activities. For example, in a TAP lesson, children are guided through a [bear hunt](#), inserting their own sounds to create the setting. Similar to what many children commonly do with their parents (Brouillette, 2010a), they learn to first create the sound of rain with their hands – patting their legs softly at first and then loudly as the rain gets heavier. Next, they play with vocalizations for squishy grass, gooey mud, deep river, dark cave, etc. But, unfortunately, it appears that such “oral activities are being seriously neglected” (Armstrong, 2003, p. 116). Arts activities are an excellent way in which to incorporate oral practice opportunities throughout multiple curricular content areas. It is therefore essential that teachers have opportunities for professional development that acquaints them with methods and strategies for utilizing such activities.

Now, more than ever, youth require cross-disciplinary, 21st century skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking (NRC, 2012). Also, teachers need ways to cultivate and hone these skills in their students. Classroom arts activities foster the development of interdisciplinary skills, encourage supportive oral language practice, and promote student collaboration. Yet aspiring teachers do not receive instruction in how to utilize such strategies in traditional preparation programs (Brouillette, 2010b). Few in-service professional development opportunities are offered and research on utilizing arts-based teaching as a means to both effectively integrate curricular subject areas and appeal to an increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic population of students is scant.

Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries

Shulman (1986) proposed criteria for scholarship on teaching and learning that may be helpful in assessing the value of interventions created to bridge the interdisciplinary silos that grew up in the wake of the fracturing of teacher education along disciplinary lines. He argued this work 1) must be made public, 2) must be available for peer review and critique according to accepted standards, and 3) must be made available in such a way that other scholars are able to reproduce and build on the work. The K-2 Teaching Artist Project in San Diego met each of these standards. Of course, TAP is not the only project that has done so. Others, such as the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education, have proven their value. The important question is: How might the arts integration strategies utilized in such successful projects be transmitted to pre- service

teachers, so that they can be better equipped to work with young emergent bilinguals when they begin teaching?

In the next section we describe a small, qualitative pilot study that looked at a fieldwork class that was part of a program for aspiring teachers at the University of California, Irvine. This class combined field experience with arts-based methods for teaching K-1 literacy skills. In contrast to the K-2 Teaching Artist Project, the arts integration aspect of this program was not created in-house; it was made available through a partnership with the Reading in Motion- (RIM) program in Chicago. Aspiring teachers carried out their fieldwork in K-1 classrooms at a local school with a linguistically diverse student population.

Pre-service Practicum using Reading in Motion

Research suggests the importance of including units on cross-disciplinary planning, as well as pre-service practice, in teacher preparation programs (Cheng, Chan, Tang, & Cheng, 2009; Nilsson, 2008). This fieldwork program provided university students with the opportunity to teach weekly arts-and-literacy lessons to children who spoke a language other than English at home. The K-1 Reading In Motion (RIM) curriculum was an arts-based, early literacy intervention designed to boost literacy achievement in inner city Chicago schools. The curriculum was shared with UC Irvine through the ArtsBridge America service learning program.

Previous research on RIM established its effectiveness as an early reading intervention (McMahon, Rose, & Parks, 2003). RIM provides children with the opportunity to verbalize using dance-based strategies that use the whole body, utilizing muscle memory to support rehearsal of oral language skills. Like TAP, the K-1 RIM program targets oral language; it makes use of rhythm, tempo, and call-and-response lyrics embedded in a series of sequential lessons to target three areas of phonetic awareness: (1) initial sound fluency (ISF); (2) phoneme segmentation fluency (PSF); and (3) nonsense word fluency/word decoding (NWF). For EBs and children with language delays, lack of attention to these pivotal components of literacy development can limit further progress. But, when well taught, each step builds upon the previously mastered skill, laying a foundation for proficient reading. Language is not only understood but it is retained, enabled and reinforced by multimodal inputs (Gersten & Geva, 2003; Hardison & Sonchaeng, 2005; Kress, 2009; Rieg & Paquette, 2009; Silverman, 2007).

For the aspiring teachers, using the RIM strategies for integrating music and movement with literacy instruction provided a tool to make sure that struggling students were not inadvertently left behind. The carefully designed, sequential RIM lessons served as an effective learning aid for the future teachers, who are able to see how one skill built on another. They saw how children who began the year significantly behind their grade-level peers began to steadily close the gap in literacy skills. Through teaching the concepts through enjoyable lessons infused with rhythm and music, the pre-service teachers gained confidence in their ability to support a wide range of learners in attaining a grade-appropriate level of reading fluency.

Learning to Recognize Children's Needs

This section examines the experiences of four undergraduate students who were given the opportunity to teach 20 weekly, 45-minute RIM lessons to emergent bilinguals and children with language delays at a local elementary school. The undergraduates in the UC Irvine project implemented the RIM lessons in two different classrooms: (1) a combined Kindergarten/First Grade class of EBs; and (2) a combined Kindergarten/First Grade special day class (SDC) that served students with learning disabilities. These two classrooms were chosen because the children in both classrooms needed additional practice in oral language skills. Prior to beginning the RIM lessons, each undergraduate visited the classrooms, met with the classroom teachers, and observed typical daily activities, familiarizing themselves with student abilities and needs.

While engaged in this project, the undergraduates were also enrolled in a weekly seminar where they became familiar with the literature on arts education, language development, and early literacy. The undergraduates also discussed the progress of children participating in their RIM lessons, sharing their observations and reflections on the needs of particular students. This primed the pre-service teachers to be observant and sensitive to the children, while also gaining confidence in their ability to effectively tackle classroom challenges. After collectively reflecting upon the prior week's experiences, they developed an action plan for the following RIM session, adjusting their teaching strategies to accommodate the needs of individual children. Finally, they rehearsed the arts and literacy activities planned for the upcoming RIM lesson.

Interviews with the undergraduates who participated in the RIM pre-service fieldwork study, along with an analysis of their written logs, revealed a transformation in their attitudes as they gradually became more sensitive to the needs of individual children over the course of the year. The aspiring teachers also reflected on their own future use of arts integration strategies. One of the undergraduates noted: "The greatest benefit for me, as someone who is becoming an educator, is how... musical activities can be beneficial for helping children remember language/literacy patterns."

Another university student noticed that the emergent bilinguals often exhibited low levels of energy. Through consultation with the classroom teacher, she determined that the children were spending too much time in the carpet area; they were typically seated on the carpet when the undergraduates arrived and remained there after the RIM lessons. To provide more variety, the undergraduates revised the RIM lessons so that they could 1) be partially taught outdoors and 2) include time with children sitting at their desks, where cues in a song gave them a chance to alternately stand and sit at their desks.

In contrast, the children in the special day classroom found transitions very difficult. Many were bothered by loud noises. To replace the noisy rhythm sticks, the aspiring teachers purchased popsicle sticks and painted them blue. Each child received one smooth popsicle stick and one ridged popsicle stick, so that they could simulate the effects of rhythm sticks without the banging. The university students also decided to sing most of the songs *a capella* (voices only, without instrumental accompaniment) to facilitate a quieter atmosphere and allow for a more flexible pace.

Interview data (from participating undergraduates and the classroom teachers from both settings), along with analysis of the undergraduates' weekly logs, indicated multiple benefits of

the program. Not only did the undergraduates gain valuable classroom teaching experience, but they also learned how to implement strategies that integrated arts and literacy, transcending traditional curricular silos. In the process, they learned to connect with students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Involvement in this integrated music and literacy intervention also afforded prospective teachers with the opportunity to learn arts-based tools for responding to the special needs of both emergent bilinguals and students with disabilities.

Classroom teachers found the RIM project beneficial and were willing to allocate classroom time to implement the RIM program in part because it included kindergarten and first grade music activities that are often not available in contemporary classrooms (Grey, 2009). For the undergraduates, the impact of the arts integration component of this program could not easily be separated from the reflective teaching (Calderhead, 1989; Dewey, 1933; Richards, 1991) and action research (Mertler, 2009) elements. However, the arts integration component provided a pathway for these aspiring teachers to learn to integrate knowledge and skills that are traditionally isolated in content area silos.

Discussion

As the student population in the United States becomes more linguistically and culturally diverse, changing demographics raise the costs that both teachers *and* students incur from the current silo structure in education. Now, more than ever, teachers require creative strategies and methods to meet the needs of a changing student population (Howard, 2010). Shulman introduced the idea of pedagogical content knowledge back in 1986, pointing out that there is no universal mode of representation by which educators influence learners. He argued that, lacking a single proven methodology, teachers should be well-versed in a full palette of instructional methods and strategies, so as to have a large set of the tools at their disposal.

Unfortunately, in the ensuing decades, the portion of that palette that represents the arts has been shrinking. Since 2007, almost 71% of schools nationwide have reduced – or eliminated – instructional time in such subjects as arts, music, history, and language (Grey, 2009). Because there is now less demand for teachers with skills in the arts, new teachers have received less arts coursework in their credential programs. In interviews, one of the most common reasons (next to time constraints) that TAP teachers gave as to why they had not utilized – or had *underutilized* arts activities in the past was their feeling that they lacked experience in teaching the arts.

A veteran second grade teacher remarked that, although she was a 42-year veteran, it was not until participating in TAP that she saw the arts as an effective literacy instruction tool. “I never thought of arts as standards-based. I never even thought about *what* it was you were supposed to teach in arts.” Theatre lessons helped her students to learn and to practice language skills. “This is fun learning! They actually know stuff, they know vocabulary words. Characters have a voice.” Dance helped to foster a sense of camaraderie among her students, allowing for a more productive learning environment. “It built such a sense of community for our class...There's not so much meanness. Even the kids that don't get along so well, still get along better than if they hadn't been in dance, drama.”

Implications for Practice and Policy

When teachers lack preparation in helping children integrate what they have learned across content areas, the result is learning that remains compartmentalized, with little relevance to life outside of school. This works to the detriment of all students, but is especially harmful to EBs who must continually struggle to find connections between new and familiar experiences (Medina & Campano, 2006). Not only can arts integration be utilized to dismantle content area silos, but carefully crafted arts activities can also serve to engage and support diverse learners.

Arts-based teaching strategies provide a ready means for teachers to draw on the experiences and perceptions that all children bring with them into the classroom. Rueda and Stillman (2012) call upon teachers to teach culturally, not to simply instruct about culture. In discussing culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1995) stresses that it should not be merely a “feel good” pedagogy, but rather a rigorous method of teaching that 1) focuses on important skills and 2) has high expectations of all students. Proponents of arts education intuitively understand this directive; art is oftentimes disparaged as superfluous – merely a fun activity that allows students to feel good. Yet, as many studies (Catterall, 2009; Deasy, 2002) have shown, arts activities can also boost academic performance and foster important skills.

Teacher education that focuses only on knowledge and theory is insufficient. Prospective teachers need practice-focused experience in a professional setting if they are to be adequately prepared to serve diverse students (Loewenberg, Ball, & Forzani, 2009). When pre-service teacher development programs provide effective preparation in arts integration, it serves two purposes. First, as Loewenberg, Ball, and Forzani (2009) argue, it provides an avenue for incorporating practice into the teacher preparation curriculum. Second, arts integration promotes the kind of collaborative thinking that deconstructs curriculum silos. In the words of Mark C. Taylor, “responsible teaching and scholarship must become cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural” (2009).

Conclusion

There is a consensus among stakeholders in education—researchers, policy-makers, administrators, teachers, and parents—that we need proven, effective strategies to help meet the language needs of the growing number of emergent bilinguals. Researchers know that oral language practice is critical, yet it has all but disappeared from elementary classrooms (August & Shanahan, 2006). Paradoxically, the very strategy that schools adopted in an attempt to raise test scores—having early elementary children focus on reading, while spending little time on building oral language skills—may have undermined the literacy achievement of all students. Most significantly, it has undercut the progress of emergent bilinguals, who must depend on learning oral English at school.

It is our hope that integration of arts and literacy activities will increasingly be seen as a viable way to promote the oral English skills of young EBs, providing educators with an effective strategy for fostering rich verbal interactions and narrowing the achievement gap between emergent bilinguals and their monolingual classmates. By understanding the benefits of such practices, i.e., the specific mechanisms through which arts activities impact cognitive- linguistic development, educators can put the “arts” back into “language arts” in a way that highlights social interaction and taps into multimodal processing. Policy-makers may facilitate such

advances by recognizing the effectiveness of specific arts integration strategies and supporting their use via curriculum standards.

Note

1. TAP lesson plans, videos of lessons, and extension activities can be accessed by anyone, free-of-charge at the following URLs: <http://sites.uci.edu/class/theatre-grades/> and <http://sites.uci.edu/class/dance-lessons-grades/>
2. Videos of university students implementing and discussing Reading in Motion activities they implemented in public schools through ArtsBridge America service learning activities: <http://www.artsbridgeamerica.net/home/reading-in-motion/reading-in-motion-lesson-videos/>

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