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INCORPORATING SCAFFOLDED DIALOGIC READING PRACTICE IN TEACHER TRAINING: An Opportunity to Improve Instruction for Young Dual Language Learners in Transitional Kindergarten

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Under the California Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010, Transitional Kindergarten (TK) provides the eldest 4-year-olds¹ with credentialed teachers and instruction designed to narrow the gap in academic achievement for children who have experienced a lack of social, economic, and educational provision. TK aims to serve the children who previously would have been excluded from K-12 education. Thus far, professional development (PD) and teacher preparation for TK have been sparse, compounding the lack of Early Childhood Education (ECE) training typical for Multiple Subject credentialed teachers (Quick et al., 2014). The TK population in California is comprised of significant numbers of Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and mirrors the linguistic and cultural diversity of Kindergarten students in the state (Ibid). Through the implementation of these policies, the pressing imperative for educational systems to respond to their needs has the potential to avoid the negative consequences of neglecting the education of young children. (Espinosa, 2010; Goldenberg, 2008). Given the new policy panorama, the formal intersection of preschool with K-5 is newly recognized in the State's 2014-2015 budget (California Department of Education, 2014), and subsequently creates tangible opportunities for a cohesive training system that is fully attentive to the needs of DLLs.

The purpose of this brief is to (a) state the opportunity to ensure DLL support within California's TK policy; (b) provide a synthesis of a research project with teachers of young DLLs using the expanded version of an evidence-based oral and narrative language instructional practice known as Dialogic Reading, which is widely recognized as a highly effective method to increase language skills (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; What Works Clearinghouse, 2004); and (c) provide TK professional learning and policy recommendations that would allow for the inclusion of professional development on evidence-based practices purposefully integrated with DLL supports.

CALIFORNIA'S TK POLICY OPPORTUNITY: ADDRESSING DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNER NEEDS

The Kindergarten Readiness Act (2010) presents California's educators with an opportunity to positively affect the experience of young DLLs who make up 50% of the State's preschoolers (Cannon, Jackowitz, & Karoly, 2012; Fortuny, Hernandez, & Chaudry, 2010). The California Budget Act of 2014-2015 targeted \$10 million in funding to provide invaluable resources to the California Department of Education (CDE)'s Early Education & Support Division for Transitional Kindergarten Professional Development (PD) and \$15 million to facilitate the completion of 24 ECE units by TK teachers hired after July 2015 (CDE, 2015).² The California Transitional Kindergarten Stipend Initiative project provides a window of opportunity until June 30, 2017 to ensure funding for thorough, evidence-based support for teachers of California's new grade level (Santa Barbara County Education Office, 2014). Per the California 2014-15 State Budget Plan, "the Legislature states the intent that transitional kindergarten curriculum be aligned to the California Preschool Learning Foundations" (Association of California School Administrators, 2014, p. 6). These Foundations are an element of the well-designed resources, standards, practices, and educator competencies of *California's Early Learning and Development System (ELDS)*,³ which is notable also for its exemplary inclusion of *Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners* (CDE, 2013; CDE & First 5 California, 2011). It makes sense then for implementers to incorporate the ELDS within ECE coursework and PD to provide a strong platform for TK preparation.

¹Children who turn 5 years by September 1 are enrolled in *Traditional* kindergarten. *Transitional* Kindergarten is the first year of a 2-year voluntary kindergarten experience for those 4-year olds whose 5th birthday falls between September 2 and December 2. TK is clearly distinguished from kindergarten in its mandated use of a curriculum modified to be developmentally appropriate. (California Department of Education, 2015)

²CA Education Code Section 48000 (g) requires LEAs to ensure that teachers assigned to a TK classroom after July 1, 2015 have at least one credential from the CTC and shall by August 1, 2020 have met at least one of the following:

- 1- At least 24 units in early childhood education, or childhood development
- 2- As determined by the LEA, have professional experience in a classroom setting with preschool age children comparable to 24 ECE/Child Development units
- 3- A child development permit issued by the CTC

³See complete Early Learning System resources at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/cddpublications.asp>

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Evidence-based practices that respond to the needs of Dual Language Learners must be part of a comprehensive professional learning plan for teachers of young, DLLs. The evaluation of impacts on teacher learning as well as the design of short- and long-term, articulated professional development programs are also necessary to advance the field and profession. The following describes a research project focused on the implementation of a comprehensive PD program for Transitional Kindergarten teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Methodology

Researchers from a joint project between Loyola Marymount University's Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL) and the Los Angeles Unified School District's (LAUSD) TK program focused on the implementation of a TK Professional Development program inclusive of the Dialogic Reading (DR) framework (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998) with required DLL scaffolding (Matera, Armas, & Lavadenz, 2013). This Scaffolded Dialogic Reading (SDR) framework (described below) was developed and implemented as part of a comprehensive Professional Development program for LAUSD TK teachers (Matera, Armas, & Lavadenz, 2013). Twenty-eight TK teachers participated in monthly PD trainings, with concurrent classroom implementation over a 6-month period. Teachers received professional development

on SDR and then applied it in their classrooms with young DLLs. Fourteen of the teachers were randomly assigned to also receive in-classroom instructional coaching by four trained coaches.

Two research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What is the impact of the scaffolded version of dialogic reading (SDR) professional development on teaching practices for DLLs?
2. How does coaching affect the implementation of SDR?

The Scaffolded Dialogic Reading Framework

Dialogic Reading is a method to enhance language skills through dialogue between teachers and small groups of children mediated through repeated readings of storybooks that fulfill specific criteria⁴ (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). Instruction based on the DR framework was found to produce positive effects on at-risk preschool children's oral language development (What Works Clearinghouse, 2004). In order to strengthen and increase the capacity of TK teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse young children (Espinosa & Matera, 2010; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008), the DR framework was expanded to include research-based scaffolds as shown in Table 1.

⁴Book selection criteria includes a clear plot, large narrative print, a limited number of words per page, and illustrations that match text throughout. (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998).

TABLE 1: Supporting DLLs in Dialogic Reading: The Scaffolded Dialogic Reading Framework
(Matera, Armas, & Lavadenz, 2013 expanded from Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998)

DR LEVEL AND FOCUS	ORIGINAL DIALOGIC READING	REQUIRED DLL SUPPORTS
PRE-LEVEL	Non-existent in original Dialogic Reading framework	Pre-Level: Background Knowledge and Engagement Using differentiated questions, discover and document vocabulary from children's prior knowledge in English and home language Progressive examples: -What do you see here? (point to object in picture) -Can you describe what you see on this page? -What do you think/predict this story is about? Summarize the story without giving the end away (motivation to engage)
LEVEL 1: DEVELOP VOCABULARY Academic Language	Identify key academic words related to story Use new words throughout the day in other contexts	Identify key academic words related to the story based on children's prior knowledge assessment in pre-level session (see Pre-Level) Use movement, gestures, realia, songs, photographs in teaching the academic words Use home language to develop and review vocabulary Create experiential opportunities to preview story concepts and vocabulary Contextualize the words in the story and give examples of how the words are used in a different context
LEVEL 2: PROMPT DESCRIPTIONS Comprehension and Expressive & Receptive Language	Focus on the key parts of the story Expand children's comments and responses and ask connecting questions Create experiential opportunities to preview story concepts and vocabulary	Ask differentiated questions based on child's English proficiency level Use home language to review vocabulary and ask clarifying questions Use movement, realia, songs, gestures, and visuals to enhance comprehensibility Repeat child's response and ask him/her to repeat Check for understanding of storyline, assess vocabulary knowledge, and expand language based on child's response Provide materials for parents to discuss story at home in home language
LEVEL 3: ENCOURAGE RETELLING Personalizing the Story Experience	Teachers set the stage, listen and document Encourage demonstrating parts of the story Elicit retelling story in own words through different activities (e.g. using felt board, role-playing, inventing different endings) Extend conversations beyond story plot Elicit personal connections with real life	Assess receptive and expressive language skills in English and home language (based on the State's Preschool Learning Foundations) Assess productive and interpretive English language development and usage (based on State's ELD standards) Assess and encourage use of vocabulary and language structures included in the story Use movement, realia, songs, gestures and visuals to retell story Use home language to support retelling and comparison of story to students' own lives Provide materials for parents to retell story at home in home language

Data Sources and Analysis

Data were collected from several sources throughout the research project implementation: (a) classroom observations using the Observation Protocol for Academic Literacies (OPAL©) (Lavadenz & Armas, 2010); (b) a teacher survey of their understanding of SDR and implementation of DLL supports; and (c) coaching reflection logs. All measures included quantitative and qualitative data points, and provided evidence of the impact of program implementation. The study used a posttest only design (Gribbons & Herman, 1997).

The OPAL was used as the TK classroom observation measure, and is comprised of four domains: Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, Connections, Comprehensibility, and Interactions. The OPAL was used to measure degrees of implementation from sociocultural and language acquisition perspectives using a 6-point rating scale (Lavadenz & Armas, 2010). Certified OPAL observers recorded evidence of SDR based on teacher responsiveness to children's language, comprehension, and overall learning needs.

The researchers identified the OPAL domain of Comprehensibility as the most applicable for coaches to support teachers in their implementation of DR. This domain was, therefore, used as the basis for in-classroom coaching. Coaches attended the PD training alongside classroom teachers to learn about the DLL supports included in SDR. The scope of work for coaching was organized into three phases: (a) planning of a demonstration lesson and establishing rapport; (b) co-teaching, providing feedback in-situ; and (c) OPAL-SDR observation. Coaches maintained reflection logs across all three phases. Reflections from coaches on implementation and support were also analyzed.

Findings

TK Classroom Implementation. After only a four month implementation cycle, an analysis of the OPAL classroom observation results yielded positive effects in all domains, with strongest effects in the Connections domain (Matera, Armas, Lavadenz, 2013). These results indicate a moderate level of implementation of the required SDR elements in TK classrooms. Teacher survey results corroborated classroom observation rankings in that, overall, teachers reported a better ability to meet the needs of young DLLs. However, the vast majority of respondents and classroom observations indicate that: (a) more time was needed to fully integrate SDR into routine instruction; and (b) more support is required to increase teacher learning of practices (e.g., coaching through video, demonstration or peer observation). OPAL scores for the subset who received coaching showed significantly higher levels of implementation of SDR.

Coaching. Reflection logs indicated that all coaches were utilizing the SDR framework to plan, co-teach, and observe in each of the classrooms. Coaches reported a need for more time to preview and debrief on lessons, and for more information about the students in the classroom. Coaches' logs revealed that the OPAL helped them identify key elements in lesson planning and delivery and that the OPAL Comprehensibility Domain proved, in particular, to be a useful guide for planning. Coaching logs also indicated that teachers had questions about how to group children and how to enrich activities at Level 3 (retelling). Overall, coaches reported that teachers were receptive to classroom support and to collaborative work with their respective coach.

Conclusions. This research provided evidence as to how teachers of DLLs in TK classrooms can maximize their practices in the following ways:

1. Coaching, as reported by teachers, added to their knowledge, skill, and implementation of SDR with DLLs.
2. Teachers gained a greater understanding and capacity to support DLLs. This reinforces the hypothesis that it is advisable to ensure that PD integrates training in DLL strategies with training in broader evidence-based practices.

As a result of this study, two sets of recommendations for teacher education and policies follow.

TEACHER EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that professional development on research-based practices such as Dialogic Reading should not occur independent of a focus on DLL supports. TK teacher professional learning can successfully incorporate key DLL practices such as language assessment and family engagement within general classroom instruction. The inclusion of professional development on SDR would achieve an unprecedented level of alignment of ECE DLL best practices as defined in the 0-5 ELDS with the English Language Development Standards for K-12. Comprehensive and sustained training and coaching in SDR that is focused on DLL needs should be included in the 24 ECE unit requirement for future teachers, and can be accomplished in field placements.

The broader implications of the study suggest the value of:

1. Explicit attention to DLL scaffolding techniques for teaching content knowledge and language skills in TK.
2. Explicitly implementing developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate instructional practices in TK.
3. Targeted and progressively designed professional development for TK teachers.
4. The provision of in-classroom coaching in the form of co-teaching in TK.



Implementation and Focus of ECE 24-unit requirement for TK teachers. In response to the 2014-2015 State Budget Act's requirements for TK teachers, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing will institute an Advisory Panel to update current ECE Teacher Preparation Requirements. The California Budget Act of 2014-2015 requires that TK teachers complete 24 ECE undergraduate or graduate units by 2020 (with stipend funding only until 2017). An opportunity exists to meet the new ECE requirements in a way that aligns to *California's Early Childhood Educator Competencies* (CDE & First 5, 2011) and *California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners* (CDE, 2013). Such alignment could partly be achieved through implementation of professional learning modules such as the Scaffolded Dialogic Reading project presented here. This professional learning represents a proven practice that is aligned with the ELDS and focuses on working with DLLs, and therefore, could comply with the new requirements.

Advisory Panel Impact. The formation of the ECE Teacher Preparation Advisory Panel represents a unique opportunity to advise on the preparation of teachers for preschool and TK with a focus on serving culturally and linguistically diverse students. Therefore, it is critically important to include an individual with expertise in ECE and DLL on the ECE Advisory Panel soon to be established by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. This board can impact policy by recommending a formal adoption by the CTC of the ELDS resulting in (a) the update and formalization of the Preschool Learning Foundations as standards to which all relevant instruction would be held accountable; and (b) the enforcement of the ECE Educator Competencies (CDE & First 5 California, 2011).

Professional Development Impact. PD funded by the 2014-2015 California budget appropriation should include training in SDR with in-classroom support for teachers of TK with DLLs. Ideally, such PD should be supported by additional funding for evaluation to examine the impact of PD on teaching quality in classrooms with DLLs. In addition to the evaluation of teacher experience, this next level of research needs to include child outcome data. To test the validity of results, research needs to expand to include the PD in a range of classrooms with different language configurations for teachers and children in demographically diverse regions.

In summary, the policy arena for early care and education in California is undergoing much needed change but with questions over important teacher preparation requirements and implementation of the State's Early Learning and Development System. As discussed above, reforming implementation and content through the newly required ECE units for TK teachers could occur in a way that advances teaching careers and incorporates the proven practices included in the ELDS. Reform also by introducing an ECE and DLL expert voice on the CTC ECE Advisory Panel could help ensure professionalization of ECE teaching based on mandated ECE standards that include DLL supports.

To facilitate teacher provision of DLL supports, PD and ECE coursework could include Scaffolded Dialogic Reading learning modules. The SDR study shows the value of DLL scaffolding techniques, implementation of developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate instructional practices, targeted and progressively designed professional development, and in-classroom coaching for TK teachers. The inclusion, then, of SDR in PD and coursework combined with incorporation of the ELDS could help to ensure that ECE teachers apply a strong language framework within a comprehensive preschool-through-third-grade (P-3) approach. These measures could help teachers provide a continuous and well-aligned set of meaningful language experiences for all TK children, including DLLs. This is particularly important in states such as California, where student diversity is extremely high, necessitating policies that directly address the needs of young DLLs.

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