Supporting Oral Narrative Development of Kindergarten English Language Learners Using Multimedia Stories

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Abstract

Narrative ability comes before literacy for bilingual students and helps narrow down the gap in text-level literacy between English language learners (ELLs) and native English speakers. Kindergarten ELLs are the best age group to receive intervention to improve their oral narrative skills. Multimedia stories have potential to assist kindergarten ELLs in developing oral narrative skills, but in previous studies, children viewed them without any support or interaction with adults, and few studies address how to use multimedia stories as a part of kindergarten programs to support oral narrative development of ELLs. Grounded in Kim, Hannafin, and Bryan’s (2007) pedagogical framework of technology integration and Plass and Jones’ (2005) model of multimedia-supported cognitive processing in second-language acquisition, this paper discusses how to utilize multimedia stories effectively in kindergarten programs to support oral narrative development of ELLs. Special focus is placed on how to teach story vocabulary words and implement dialogic reading with the support of multimedia stories to improve oral narrative skills of ELLs. Finally, future research directions are suggested.

Keywords: kindergarten English language learners, oral narrative skills, multimedia stories, vocabulary instruction, dialogic reading

English language learners (ELLs) are defined as “students whose first language is not English, and encompasses both students who are just beginning to learn English (often referred to as ‘limited English proficiency’ or ‘LEP’) and those who have already developed considerable proficiency” (Lacelle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994, p.55). They are “not yet developed to the point where they can profit fully from English-only instruction” (August & Shanahan, 2006, p.21). Based on a comprehensive review of previous research, the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth has identified English oral proficiency as a critical area for language-minority children (August & Shanahan, 2006). They find from the literature that language-minority children can acquire word-level components (e.g., decoding, spelling) of literacy as well as their monolingual peers, but rarely attain the same degree of text-level skills (e.g., reading comprehension).

Oral English proficiency promotes the development of reading comprehension skills, which consequently helps narrow the gap in text-level skills between second language learners and native English speakers (August & Shanahan, 2006). Narrative ability facilitates oral language skills (Stadler & Ward, 2005) and precedes literacy for bilingual students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Oller & Pearson, 2002). Given the importance of oral narrative skills, it is necessary to monitor and assess ELLs’ oral narrative skills in the early school years, that is, from kindergarten to first grade (Uccelli & Páez, 2007).

Researchers have used various interventions to try to improve young ELLs’ oral narrative skills (Dockrell, Stuart, & King, 2010; Uchikoshi, 2005). Reading printed storybooks to ELLs and providing oral summaries can enhance their vocabulary acquisition (Collins, 2010) and sentence repetition (Dockrell et al., 2010), but not their narrative skills (Dockrell et al., 2010). In the studies in which ELLs children watched English cartoon TV programs (Uchikoshi, 2005) or children who learn Dutch as a second language viewed multimedia stories (Verhallen, Bus, & de Jong, 2006), it is found that both cartoon TV programs with strong narrative components and the multimedia features of stories can help improve some aspects of oral narrative skills.
Multimedia storybooks (also referred to as CD-ROM storybooks/electronic storybooks) are electronic storybooks that “present children’s literature with text and illustrations similar to a traditional text and also include elements designed to enhance the reading experience for beginning readers” (Lefever-Davis & Pearman, 2005, p. 446). The elements may include automatic reading of story, audio effects, graphic animations, written sentences on the pages synchronized with the narration, word pronunciation and definition, and games (Eshet-Alkalai & Chajut, 2007; Lefever-Davis & Pearman, 2005; Pearman & Chang, 2010). Depending on the publishers, different types or series of multimedia storybooks vary in their features that support readers. However, multimedia storybooks basically have automatic read features, graphic animations and sound effect. Multimedia storybooks excel children’s TV shows in availability, variety, temporal flexibility, portability, and interactivity.

Reading multimedia storybooks has been found to help improve second language learning children’s vocabulary and some aspects of oral narrative skills (Eshet-Alkalai & Chajut, 2007; Verhallen et al., 2006). Eshet-Alkalai and Chajut (2007) reveal that reading multimedia stories enabled children who could barely read or speak English to master word pronunciation and meaning recognition in the story. Verhallen et al. (2006) find that multimedia features of stories were effective for children who learned Dutch as a second language to expand vocabulary and syntax and learn implied elements of stories that indicated goals or motives of main characters. In the similar form with multimedia stories, children’s cartoon TV programs with strong narrative components better fostered kindergarten ELLs’ oral narrative skills than those focusing on phonics and reading fluency (Uchikoshi, 2005). Yet, in those studies, only several, not all, aspects of their oral narrative skills got improved, and it is notable that children watched multimedia stories or TV shows alone without any support from or interaction with adults. The addition of adult support was assumed to generate better effects of using multimedia stories (Verhallen et al., 2006). However, there is little research on how multimedia stories could be used between teachers and ELLs in kindergarten settings.

Dialogic reading is a reading strategy that involves dialogues between an adult and a child during book reading and prepares a child to be a story teller (Whitehurst, 1992). During dialogic reading, an adult encourages a child’s oral responses and promotes the child’s acquisition of narrative knowledge by using elaborative “wh-” and open-ended questions, repeating child’s good answers, modifying child’s utterances, and expanding his/her incomplete responses. Use of dialogic reading techniques in narrative conversation between parents and children (either ELLs or monolingual English-speaking children) in their home language has been proven to improve the children’s oral narrative skills in their home language (Boyce, Innocenti, Roggman, Norman, & Ortiz, 2010; Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, 1999). While there is little research on the effects of dialogic reading in English on ELL children’s English oral narrative development, this approach is anecdotally reported to have positive effects on ELL children’s emergent literacy (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006).

Although researchers emphasize that vocabulary supports the development of English narrative skills (Dockrell et al., 2010; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011; Tabors et al., 2001; Uccelli & Paez, 2007; Uchikoshi, 2005), there has been little research on how teachers enhance young ELLs’ vocabulary learning supported by multimedia stories. Research has reported mixed results as to whether ELLs learn vocabulary automatically by watching multimedia stories alone. While some researchers have demonstrated promising results (Eshet-Alkalai & Chajut, 2007; Verhallen et al., 2006), others have found that watching TV programs without follow-up reinforcement cannot increase ELLs’ vocabulary size (Patterson, 2002) or enable them to learn vocabulary better than those who do not watch TV programs (Uchikoshi, 2006). Despite existing literature on how to teach vocabulary words during storybook reading or through videos (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011; Sénéchal, 1997; Silverman & Hines, 2009), there is scarcity of research on how to teach story vocabulary words using multimedia stories.

Watching children’s TV programs and playing with iPads have become part of many children’s activities at home. However, since school and classroom are the major places where ELLs receive English input (Xu, 2010), it would be beneficial for ELLs to receive multimedia-enhanced instruction in kindergarten classrooms with teacher’s language support. The reality is that there is lack of research on how to use multimedia stories to support vocabulary learning and oral narrative development of ELLs in kindergarten settings.

Thus, the goal of this paper is to propose an approach to implementing vocabulary instruction and dialogic reading with the support of multimedia stories to help ELLs improve their oral narrative skills. In the following sections, we discuss what oral narrative skills are, in what ways multimedia stories can assist kindergarten ELLs in developing oral narrative skills, and how to foster kindergarten ELLs’ vocabulary acquisition and oral narrative skills supported by multimedia stories.
Narrative Skills

Labov (1972) defines narrative as “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred” (pp. 359-360). Researchers have analyzed children’s narrative skills from different dimensions (Chang, 2004; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011; Pearson, 2002; Peterson, Jesso, & McCabe, 1999; Schneider, Dubé, & Hayward, 2005; Uchikoshi, 2005; Verhallen et al., 2006). Those dimensions share some similarities, and the key dimensions of narrative skills can be synthesized as: story structure, cohesion knowledge, contextual knowledge, evaluation, storybook language, and syntactic complexity (Level & Sénéchal, 2011; Schneider et al., 2005; Uchikoshi, 2005).

A well-structured narrative includes setting information, character descriptions, initiating events, responses of the characters, plans to solve conflicts, attempts to solve conflicts, consequences, and reactions to events (Labov, 1972; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Cohesion knowledge shows how well a narrator combines structure, content knowledge, and linguistic knowledge, and it can be assessed by the number and variety of connectives used (Peterson & McCabe, 1991). In respect to contextual knowledge, Lever and Sénéchal (2011) point out that “decontextualized language such as anaphora can serve as an index of contextual knowledge” (p.4). To be specific, it is appropriate to introduce a character by the name or the title, but after that, it is reasonable to mention the character by a pronoun or a label. Orientation to context is key to decontextualized language and is significant to narrative (Peterson & McCabe, 1994).

Evaluation is “the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative (Labov, 1972, p. 366), including the reason for telling the story, the meaning of the narrative, or comments about a character, place, thing or event (Labov, 1972; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). That is to say, children not only tell what happens in the story, but also embed their own evaluation (Labov, 1972; Peterson & McCabe, 1983). Based on previous research, Uchikoshi (2005) summarizes seven evaluative devices, including intensifiers, negatives or defeats of expectations, references to emotional states or cognitions, reference to physical states, intentions, causal markers, and words with high evaluative content.

Well-read-to children are able to use book language specific to written narrative that was integrated, involving, literary and decontextualized when telling a story (Purcell-Gates, 1988, 2001). When well-read-to children were asked to tell a story from a wordless book to a doll, the language they used for telling the story was different from the language they used for telling a personal experience in vocabulary, syntax and degree of decontextualization.

Syntactic complexity can be measured by the mean length of communication in words, number of different words, total number of words, and complexity index (Schneider et al., 2005). However, the total number of different words is a more discerning measure of English narrative achievement than the total number of words used (Uccelli & Páez, 2007).

Why Use Multimedia Stories for ELLs

The outstanding strength of multimedia story is that it sets “a mood and context for a story in a highly appealing manner” (Lefever-Davis & Pearman, 2005, p.453) and helps activate learners’ story schema and introduce story-related vocabulary (Lefever-Davis & Pearman, 2005). These features reduce the cognitive load learners spend on decoding and allow them to focus on meaning instead (Pearman, 2008), and thus are especially useful for beginning and struggling language learners (Lefever-Davis & Pearman, 2005; McKenna, 1998). In addition, beginning readers need interaction with a variety of texts (Lefever-Davis & Pearman 2005); electronic storybooks can be one such resource (McKenna, 1998). Examples of multimedia stories downloadable from App Store are Ugly Duckling, Alice in Wonderland, The Princess and the Pea, and Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

Researchers also point out the downside of using multimedia stories. Multimedia story may make children passive receivers of language if they are over reliant on the electronic features to decode words or read the story (Lewin, 1996). Also, its embedded games and interactive animations such as flying birds and hidden characters may distract learners from the storyline and comprehension (Pearman, 2008; Pearman & Chang, 2010; Trushell, Burrell & Maitland, 2001) and negatively affect their story recall (Trushell & Maitland, 2005; Trushell, Maitland & Burrell, 2003). Arguably, these weaknesses can be overcome by adult interaction with children and their supervision (Pearman & Chang, 2010).

Studies focusing on monolingual children suggest that compared to reading printed storybooks, monolingual children who read multimedia stories of the same content make more progress in vocabulary (Korat, 2009; Korat & Shamir, 2007; Korat & Shamir, 2008), word reading (Korat, 2009; Korat & Blau 2010), reading
skills (Pearman, 2008; Pearman & Chang 2010), comprehension (Ciampa, 2012; Doty, Popplewell, & Byers, 2001; Pearman, 2008; Pearman & Chang 2010), and overall emergent literacy skills (Shamir, Korat & Barbi 2008).

Second language learning children also benefit from multimedia stories in vocabulary acquisition and oral narrative development (Eshet-Alkalai & Chajut, 2007; Verhallen et al., 2006). One advantage of multimedia stories for ELLs is visual support. Visual support (e.g., photographs, video, objects, diagrams) helps ELLs process language and understand concepts (Gottlieb, 2006). Additionally, visual representations may be very important for maintaining young children’s attention to the narrative (Gibbons, Anderson, Smith, Field & Fischer, 1986). Sharp, Bransford, Goldman, Risko, Kinzer, and Vye (1995) found that dynamic visual support just for the beginning of a story helped kindergartners remember the actors and settings, which consequently facilitated their comprehension of the short stories they heard.

Another benefit of multimedia stories for ELLs is that verbal and nonverbal information conveyed simultaneously may help them relate what they already know in their first language to the English equivalents. Multimedia stories convey meaning through narration synchronized with animation. According to Paivio’s (1986) dual coding theory, the language system of human beings operates a verbal system and a nonverbal system simultaneously. Activation of either system will activate the other, and both work together to process information and generate information that stays in the long-term memory (Paivio, 1986). This is consistent with a study showing that prominent auditory and visual features help children extract important information (Calvert, Huston, Watkins, & Wright, 1982). ELLs are usually bilingual students. Bilingual dual coding theory (Paivio, 1986) suggests that the verbal system for the first language, as well as for the second language, can be interconnected through the nonverbal system.

Furthermore, multimedia stories make it possible to listen to a word, a sentence, or a story as many times as a learner wants. Children’ acquisition of expressive and receptive vocabulary can be enhanced by listening to a storybook read multiple times (Sénéchal, 1997), and repeated exposures to an episode of an educational TV program can improve children’s learning and engagement (Crawley, Anderson, Wilder, Williams, & Santomero, 1999).

How to Use Multimedia Stories in Kindergarten Classroom

Framework

To illustrate how to use multimedia stories to support oral narrative development of kindergarten ELLs, we use both Kim, Hannafin, and Bryan’s (2007) pedagogical framework for technology integration and Plass and Jones’ (2005) model of multimedia-supported cognitive processing in second-language acquisition. In the previous paper “What Hinders ESL Teachers in the US integrating Technologies in ESL Classrooms”, we have provided the rationale for employing Kim et al.’s (2007) framework to analyze the alignment among the contexts for technology integration. Kim et al.’s (2007) framework includes three levels of integration: standards and curriculum reform serve as the overarching level (macrocontext); teacher community and professional development are embedded in the macrocontext; the innermost level is a technology-supported class (microcontext), which includes student-tool interaction, teacher-tool interaction, and teacher-student interaction. We adapt their framework to the ESL context, and the adapted framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Framework for technology integration in ESL teaching. This framework is adapted from Kim, Hannafin, and Bryan’s (2007) pedagogical framework for technology integration.
If Kim et al.’s (2008) framework provides the big picture of technology integration in classrooms, Plass and Jones’ (2005) model (shown in Figure 2) offers guidance on how to use multimedia to support students’ second language acquisition based on the cognitive processing phases. In their model, multimedia refers to words (spoken or written information) and pictures (static or dynamic visual tools). As shown in Figure 2, apperception indicates the process of using selected verbal and pictorial information to draw learners’ attention and facilitate their comprehension of the incoming information. Comprehension means to organize words and images into verbal mental representations and visual mental representations. Following, the verbal and visual mental models of the new information need to be integrated, which is known as intake. Finally, learners need to be given opportunities such as dialogues to produce comprehensible output in order to develop communicative competency.

Figure 2. Plass and Jones’ (2005) model of second-language acquisition with multimedia.

In this paper, we first briefly analyze the macrocontext for using multimedia stories, and then based on Plass and Jones’ model, we focus on describing the procedures of implementing vocabulary instruction and dialogic reading with the support of multimedia stories in an ESL classroom. While discussion of teacher-student interaction is the focus, it will be interwoven with analysis of teacher-tool and student-tool interaction.

Standards

Standards guide teachers’ teaching practices, and thus they should be the first thing to check for technology integration in kindergarten classroom. It is notable that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) allow the use of various media to present information to kindergarteners, who are expected to confirm understanding of “a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media” (p. 23). With prompting and support, kindergartners are supposed to have the capabilities to read stories, ask and answer questions about key details in a story, and retell a story with key details (CCSS). While the CCSS target at the general student population, ELLs are expected to meet the same high standards with support. The state standards for kindergarteners in English/language arts align with the CCSS on kindergarteners’ storytelling capability.

However, in the TESOL standards, the PreK-K English language proficiency standards for ELLs in the area of language arts reveal lower expectations in oral narrative ability of ELLs, and only kindergarten ELLs with high English proficiency are expected to produce a narrative. Thus, the intervention that aims at improving oral narrative skills would work better for ELL children with middle to high English proficiency level.

Materials

Teachers can choose the multimedia stories and download them from the iPad’s App Store. Selection of multimedia stories can be based on three criteria: a. they have obvious narrative plots; b. they are not familiar to the participating ELLs; c. the language level is appropriate for this age group; d. they are not holiday specific; e. they are interesting. If the group is mixed in gender, the story topics can be neutral; otherwise the story topics can be either favorable to boys or girls. In respect to story vocabulary words, three to four words per story that are “sophisticated and used often in literary and academic texts” (Silverman & Hines, 2009, p.308) can be chosen based on the approach used by Beck, McKeown and Kucan (2002). Seven to nine elaborative questions for each story would be designed according to Peterson and McCabe’s (2004) criteria: the questions refer to plot, setting, and evaluation of characters. That is, they should best relate to the learning of narrative knowledge.
Technology-Supported ESL Class

Teachers can project the story on a large screen when teaching a group of two to four ELL children. By learning together, children may feel more comfortable, and can observe their peers’ language use and learn the art of conversation turn-taking (Bond & Wasik, 2009). To maximize the opportunities for individual ELLs to speak, the group size should be no more than four. If it is one-on-one instruction, the child can operate the multimedia story on the iPad by him/herself, but the teacher needs to supervise the student’s operation to minimize the use of embedded games or interactive animations irrelevant to the story plot. Since kindergarteners are just beginning to learn to read, showing the written sentences to them makes no sense and might actually increase their cognitive load. Without the written sentences on the screen, they can focus on listening to the narration and watching the video, which helps them to construct meaning.

According to Plass and Jones (2005), introduction to the learning material is helpful to learners’ comprehension of the input. Therefore, teacher can start the storytelling session by briefly introducing the plot of the story. Afterwards, teacher can go over vocabulary to facilitate ELLs’ comprehension of the story. Following that, ELLs will watch the story for three times—1st time without any interruption, the 2nd time with the task of answering questions about the story vocabulary words, and the 3rd time with the task of answering questions about the story plot.

**Apperception-vocabulary learning.** Teachers can first go over the target words that will appear in the multimedia story using visual support, such as cards or pictures, since visual support is important to ELLs’ vocabulary acquisition (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Silverman & Hines, 2009). When a group of ELLs learn together, they may have different levels of receptive vocabulary, and thus some children may have already known some of the words for instruction but other children do not. However, teachers can still teach every word to them either to expand their vocabulary or to reinforce their knowledge of the words.

**Comprehension.** After ELLs view the story once without any interruption, the teacher can run the story the 2nd time and pause at the slide when raising a question about a word. Since the images ELLs initially see from the visual support are different from those shown later in multimedia stories, learners can “learn not only the new label but to be able to transfer the newly acquired labels to different representations of the referent” (Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993, p.365). This procedure of teaching young ELL vocabulary via using videos has proved to narrow the gap in vocabulary knowledge between ELLs and non-ELLs (Silverman & Hines, 2009).

No consensus has been reached on how to teach young ELLs words effectively. Some researchers assume that intervener’s expressive vocabulary in narratives automatically affect ELLs’ vocabulary development (Boyce et al., 2010), some find that providing rich definitions of target words during storybook reading contribute significantly to ELLs’ word learning (Collins, 2010), and still others have found novel ways to introduce new vocabulary (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011; Sénéchal 1997; Silverman & Hines, 2009).

The approaches from two studies give us insights on how to teach story vocabulary words with multimedia stories. In Sénéchal’s (1997) study on teaching vocabulary to preschoolers, the intervener pointed to the illustration for each target word while reading the narrative, and then paused to ask a “wh” question with the intention to have preschoolers speak aloud the word they just heard. For instance, once after the intervener read the target word angling, he/she would ask “What is Arthur doing?” (Sénéchal, 1997, p.130) If preschoolers could not respond with the target word, the intervener would ask the question in a more straightforward way: “Can you tell me the word I used when I was reading the book?” (Sénéchal, 1997, p.130) If children still failed to use the target word, the intervener would explain the target word; otherwise he/she continued reading the storybook. The results showed that preschoolers’ recall and articulation of new vocabulary based on corresponding illustration during the multiple readings of storybooks fostered their acquisition of expressive vocabulary.

While this method of teaching new vocabulary was designed for three- and four-year-old preschoolers, it can apply to kindergarteners as well since they are just beginning to learn to read. However, in the approach stated above, interspersing questions in the story reading process can be distracting for children to comprehend the story and engage themselves. Silverman and Hines (2009) provided good procedures for using videos to teach vocabulary to learners from pre-kindergarten through second grade, but they did not specify how to go over target words initially, what questions should be raised after video session, and how learners gave examples of words in other contexts. Drawing the strengths of both approaches in the two studies, we designed the approach of teaching words using multimedia stories stated at the beginning of this section.

**Intake and comprehensible output.** During this stage, teachers are supposed to help students integrate the verbal and visual information using questions, statements, images, or brainstorming (Plass & Jones, 2005). Thus, after ELLs watch the story the 2nd time, teachers show them the story the 3rd time and pause at the specific slide where the question comes from and raise the question after the narration of the slide. When children watch the story
for the 3rd time, to draw their attention and facilitate their understanding of the story, teachers can moderately use the interactive animations that further the story line or reinforce the events.

Although previous research shows that for second language learning children, viewing multimedia stories alone can help them develop oral narrative ability (Uchikoshi, 2005; Verhallen et al., 2006), few studies compare the growth trajectories of oral narrative ability of ELLs in multimedia-enhanced instruction with scaffolding versus without scaffolding, and it is suggested that scaffolding to second language learning children in their processes of using multimedia stories may generate better effects (Verhallen et al., 2006).

Vygotsky (1962) identifies the zone of proximal development as the gap between a child’s actual developmental level and the potential developmental level achievable with adult guidance or collaboration with more advanced peers. Based on Vygotsky’s theory, Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) develop the concept of scaffolding and define it as support from teachers, peers, or other resources which enables students to complete tasks that they cannot perform by themselves. Literature shows that when teaching ELLs who are developing language, teachers should encourage ELLs to participate in conversations and use questions to prompt ELLs to clarify or elaborate initial utterances (August & Hakuta, 1997). Additionally, according to Restrepo and Towle-Harmon (2008), “Paring children with more proficient students, scaffolding their conversations, and expanding on what they say with correct structure or wording are appropriate techniques to build sentence length and complexity” (p.13).

Above all, demonstration or modeling is an important scaffolding technique for ELLs, who need to see or hear clear examples of what they are expected to imitate (Walqui, 2006). Second language learning children can reproduce the linguistic structures that frequently appear in native speaker teacher’s speech, and the rate of reproduction is positively related to the frequency of their occurrence in teacher’s speech (Hamayan & Tucker, 1980).

The techniques of dialogic reading can foster oral narrative development and well satisfy the language developmental needs of ELLs. In dialogic reading, the three main techniques to improve oral narrative ability of English-speaking children and ELL are asking “Wh-” context-eliciting and open-ended questions (Boyce et al., 2010; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011; Stadler & Ward, 2005), modifying children’s utterances (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011), and expanding children’s answers (Boyce et al., 2010; Dockrell et al., 2010; Lever & Senechal, 2011). Research shows that parents’ frequent use of “wh-” context-eliciting questions in narrative conversations leads to children’s frequent provision of contextual information about when and where in their own narratives (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). When children use an ambiguous reference that provides no contextual information, the teacher should help articulate the reference with a character name or a label (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). Frequent recasting of children’s ambiguous references can improve their contextual knowledge (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). When children use an ambiguous reference that provides no contextual information, the teacher should help articulate the reference with a character name or a label (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). For instance, when a child says, “She is swimming in the river,” the teacher would reword it as “Alice is swimming in the river.” By expanding what children have said to what could have been said provides important linguistic features for children to imitate. For instance, the interviewer can add connectives to children’s incohesive sentences to highlight the importance of connectives in a narrative (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011).

With respect to teachers’ language use in scaffolding ELLs to improve oral narrative ability, since acquisition of new concepts and language is largely based on students’ prior knowledge (Walqui, 2006; Wood et al., 1976), teachers should try to use language that has already been learned by ELLs and adjust the level of English vocabulary and sentence structure according to individual ELLs’ English proficiency level. Considering the number of different words used is a measure of English narrative achievement, teachers should use varied words within ELLs’ range of knowledge to increase the variety of vocabulary ELLs will use in their own utterances. Sometimes teachers may introduce synonyms of the words that ELLs already know.

Figure 3 shows the procedures of vocabulary instruction and dialogic reading with the multimedia story Self Giant as the example. Finally, ELLs should be provided opportunities to tell stories. Depending on ELLs’ oral English proficiency, teachers may have ELLs retell stories initially and then proceed to construct narratives for wordless picture books or about personal experiences, or have ELLs rotate these two tasks by retelling a story one time and producing a narrative another time. While a description of assessment is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to have well-developed instruments and procedures to conduct the assessment.

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<td>Step 1: Go over vocabulary and provide definitions</td>
<td>Frighten</td>
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<td>Bloom</td>
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<td>Selfish</td>
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Step 2: Watch the story once without pause

Step 3: Vocabulary #2
Watch the story the 2nd time, and pause at the slide when raising a question about a word. Children are expected to speak out the word.

Frighten
(Pause at the slide with wall and door)
How did the child feel when the giant shouted?

Bloom
(Pause at the slide with trees, a boy and bushes)
What happened to the flowers after the giant put the boy up on a branch of the tree?

Selfish
(Pause at the slide with the giant alone)
What kind of person do you think the giant is?

Step 4: Watch the story the 3rd time, try a few interactive activities, and pause at the specific slide where the question comes from and raise the question after the narration of the slide.

Why do you think the children liked to play in the garden?
How did the children feel when the giant shouted?
What did they do then?
Why did the giant decide to share his garden?
What did the giant learn from not sharing his garden?
What things do you not like to share?
What happens if you choose not to share?
Spontaneous questioning: who, what, when where, why and how questions.

Figure 3. Procedures of vocabulary instruction and dialogic reading with an example of multimedia stories

Self Giant

Conclusion and Future Research

A decade ago, Bax (2003) proposed that the ultimate goal of technology integration in teaching English as a second/foreign language is to realize “normalization” of computer-assisted language learning, in which “technology becomes invisible, embedded in everyday practice” (p.23). Multimedia stories on iPad, with easy access, obvious benefits for ELLs, and the potential to be used at home should have their place in language arts education in kindergarten. This paper proposes how to use multimedia stories to foster oral narrative development of ELLs in kindergarten programs. It addresses gaps in previous research since few studies have investigated how this kind of technology can be used to support ELLs’ oral narrative skills in kindergarten settings.

In respect to future research, first, it is necessary to explore what modifications are needed to the proposal approach. Other empirical studies need to validate the efficacy of the instructional approach proposed in this paper. For instance, researchers can verify whether ELL children who watch multimedia stories with the teacher support explicated in this paper have better oral narrative skills than those who watch multimedia stories without teacher support. More importantly, researchers need to investigate whether ELL children who watch multimedia stories with the teacher support proposed in this paper excel those who watch multimedia stories with the teacher support provided in conventional story reading activities.

Additionally, research shows that dialogic reading experience in ELLs’ home language supports their narrative development in their home language (Boyce et al., 2010) and also their English acquisition (Huennekens & Xu, 2010), and ELLs’ narrative skills in their native language predict their later English narrative quality (Uccelli & Páez, 2007). Although most kindergarten programs are English-only programs, how to provide both native language support and English support in developing ELLs’ oral narrative ability deserves further exploration. Empirical studies would be needed to compare the effects of English-only support, native language-only support, and bilingual support on ELLs’ oral narrative development.

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