Increasing English Language Learners' Engagement in Instruction through Emotional Scaffolding

Mi-Hwa Park

Introduction

Some of the challenges that early childhood teachers face include how to deal with a growing diversity in student populations, how to reduce learning gaps, and how to increase the achievement of all children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The number of children who are English language learners (ELLs) is growing fast schools in the United States today and their limited English proficiency in an English-language school setting contributes to wide and persistent achievement gaps between these English learners and English-proficient students (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011). Emerging early in life and persisting throughout the school years, these gaps have serious consequences for ELLs and for society as a whole.

In an effort to improve the language skills, literacy, and academic achievement of ELLs, many studies have examined effective instructional strategies. These have included the use of body language and sign language (Konishi, 2007; Sime, 2006), video-self-modeling and digital technology (Ortiz, Burlingame, Onuegbulem, Yoshikawa, & Rojas, 2012; Wilson, Chavez, & Anders, 2012), music (Miranda, 2011; Paquette & Rieg, 2008), and family involvement (Farver, Yiyuan, Lonigan, & Eppe, 2013; Harper & Pelletier, 2010).

In addition to these effective strategies, another possible way to deal with the challenges facing early childhood teachers is the use of positive emotional experiences in the classroom. Positive emotional experiences that enhance learning can be

Mi-Hwa Park is an assistant professor in the Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education of the College of Education at Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky.

called "emotional scaffolding," a term that borrows from Vygotsky's concept of "scaffolding" and combines it with an awareness of the role of emotion in the learning process (Meyer & Turner, 2007).

In recent years, cognitive scientists examining the structure and function of the brain have found that emotion and cognition interact in the learning process in a highly interwoven relationship, together constituting the fabric of children's learning and development (Damasio, 1999; Willis, 2007). The literature shows that emotion plays a decisive role in mediating children's acquisition of academic knowledge and skills in the learning process.

When both emotion and cognition are integrated in teaching and learning contexts, they provide more optimal and effective outcomes in children's learning and development (Goldstein, 1999; Meyer & Turner, 2007; Op't Eynde & Turner, 2006). The literature reflects the fact that children's emotional scaffolding in instruction can be critical teaching tools.

In addition, children express their emotions not only through language, but also through nonverbal language including facial expressions, subtle nuances in vocal intonations, gestures, eye contact, and body language (Hyson, 2004, 2008). Using emotions as an alternative language to express their feelings about, interpretation of, and appraisal of a classroom situation, children impart a picture of their mental states.

Children's emotions show what they know or think about the content of lessons through behaviors of engagement and disengagement (Damasio, 1999; Hyson, 2008; Meyer & Turner, 2007). Thus, staying conscious of children's emotions in instruction can have a powerful effect on increasing their learning engagement.

A study that explores emotional scaffolding in the early childhood context is important because of the tremendous po-

tential for improvement in ELLs' learning engagement. Indeed, learning engagement is a strong indicator of academic success (Hyson, 2008). In the context of teaching ELLs, however, little information is available on discussions about emotional scaffolding in instruction. The existence of such literature would bolster teachers' understanding of the emotional aspects of teaching and learning and would provide them the pedagogical knowledge and skills needed to support emotions in instruction.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how a prekindergarten teacher makes pedagogical decisions that could be considered emotional scaffolding. This study is important because of the potential for improvement in ELLs' learning engagement that could result from teachers knowing more about the way that emotions work in learning and, in turn, would help early childhood classrooms offer more meaningful learning experiences.

Theorizing Emotion as Contributing to Academic Success

Many studies on children's emotions in early childhood education have focused on children's emotional socialization for the development of emotional competence (e.g., Ahn, 2005; Bailey, Denham, & Curby, 2013; Day & Smith, 2013; Hyson, 2004). The literature puts an emphasis on children's emotional competence because this competence functions not only as a critical ingredient for cognitive and social development, but also as a strong foundation for successful future academic performance and adjustment to schooling.

In recent years, influenced by new work in cognitive science, the literature about emotion in early childhood has broadened from investigations located within the boundaries of the emotional realm to investigations of the connection

of the emotional with the cognitive domain. This literature criticizes an exclusive focus on academic skills and abilities in assessment of school readiness, a focus that has arisen under the influence of a new climate of academically oriented tests in the early childhood context (Blair, 2002; Hyson, 2008; Leerkes, Paradise, O'Brien, Calkins, & Lange, 2007). Because emotion functions as a "protective buffer," which fosters upward spirals toward future academic success, studies have argued that students' emotions should not be neglected in preparing them to become competent academically.

Although the literature connects emotional and cognitive functions, it retains an implied emphasis on the future integration of the student into the school context. For example, using maternal reports as a methodology, educational psychologists Leerkes et al. (2007) examined the relationship between emotional understanding, emotion control, cognitive understanding, and cognitive control in early childhood development. This work reported that young children with a high degree of emotional understanding and emotion control showed more indicators of social competence and academic success than did the subjects with high degrees of cognitive control.

Moving on from the realization that emotion and cognition are intertwined, the research asks questions about how types of emotions affect the learning process. Research on types of emotions and their functioning in the classroom has generally been conducted in late elementary and secondary school settings (Meyer & Turner, 2002, 2007; Op't Eynde & Turner, 2006; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002). The literature has found that students' emotions can play a positive or negative role in the learning process.

Students' positive emotional states (e.g., "happy," "interested," "confident," and "excited") motivate their attentiveness, create incentives to stay on task, and cause them to view their learning in a positive light and to begin to self-regulate their learning. On the other hand, students' negative emotional states (e.g., "bored," "sad," "frustrated," and "angry") lead to self-protective disengagement, avoidance, and off-task behaviors when experienced during the learning process. These findings are important because they help us understand how positive classroom environments are developed and sustained and how emotions can increase or decrease learning engagement.

For example, Turner and Meyer (2002) investigated the use of instructional scaffolding in sixth-grade mathematics lessons in two classrooms, asking how this scaffolding could help develop students' self-regulatory processes. Students in these classrooms reported that their classroom climate was one of high expectations for cognitive growth and academic achievement. The results, which relied on student self-reports, revealed that although both instructors effectively provided cognitive scaffolding, their affective styles differed.

One classroom's students self-reported more negative affect and self-handicapping, and this classroom's teacher was less likely to respond positively to students. The other classroom's students self-reported a high level of self-regulation, resulting from their teacher's supportive affective style. The study concluded that, given similar cognitive teaching methods, the most effective instruction occurs where teachers provide students with positive emotional support based upon shared understanding between teachers and students. For example, when teachers displayed positive emotions, including humor, enthusiasm, and interest, in their instructions, students reported that they felt more motivation to learn.

The Concept of Emotional Scaffolding

Emotional scaffolding consists of particular actions carried out by the teacher and lends itself to empirical investigation, thus providing an appropriate framework for this study. Studies on emotional scaffolding are continuing to emerge, and in fact there are only a few studies that have described this concept (e.g., Meyer & Turner, 2007; Rosiek, 2003). Specifically, the concept of emotional scaffolding is informed by constructivism's belief in the importance of social interaction and by the theory in educational psychology about the importance of emotion in learning. It holds that teachers can help students move forward in their understanding of academic concepts by stepping in at key moments and supporting emotions which will help students persist.

Emotional scaffolding is manifested in teachers' targeted pedagogical support of emotion to influence students' positive learning experiences (Meyer & Turner, 2007; Rosiek, 2003). Meyer and Turner (2007) define emotional scaffolding as "temporary but reliable teacher-initiated interactions that support students' positive emotional experiences to achieve a variety of classroom goals" (p. 244). They differentiate emotional scaffolding from other forms of student-teacher interactions, say-

ing that teachers engaging in emotional scaffolding have clear academic goals. They provided a list of these goals, which teachers use emotional scaffolding to reach: "Sustaining students' understanding of challenging concepts, students' demonstration of their competencies and autonomy, students' involvement and persistence, and students' emotional or personal experiences" (p. 245).

Meyer and Turner emphasized the ultimate purpose guiding all of these aims: "increasing student achievement and autonomy" (p. 244). Providing children with emotional support only as needed, teachers using emotional scaffolding ultimately aim to increase students' independence and autonomy in their learning.

This study modifies the framework used in Meyer and Turner (2007) to consider student-teacher interactions as reciprocal and encompassing all aspects of classroom emotions created from non-verbal communication. Emotional scaffolding is defined here as teachers' intentional verbal and nonverbal communications that establish and maintain emotions that are necessary to sustain children's learning engagement—the observable behaviors that children maintain to stay focused on an instruction (Hyson, 2008).

A common theme in the literature is the idea that positive student-teacher relationships are critical for emotional scaffolding. Meyer and Turner (2007), for example, wrote: "Establishing and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships is essential to developing the trust needed for scaffolding positive classroom environments that support student competence and autonomy through relationships" (p. 248). They also argued that the relationships of trust that enable emotional scaffolding can be enhanced by continual practice of this kind of scaffolding, creating an accumulation effect.

Rather than provide positive examples of this phenomenon, the literature focuses on the evidence that negative student-teacher relationships can create the opposite effect. For example, Stuhlman and Pianta (2001) reported their study of first grade and kindergarten teachers' relationships with their students. They found that students who they observed manifesting negative behaviors were the same students who were the subject of teachers' negative comments in their interviews. Hamre and Pianta (2001) also pointed out that students with whom kindergarten teachers reported having negative student-teacher relationships were more likely to have

negative social and academic outcomes through the fourth grade.

Meyer and Turner pointed out that these studies imply that the absence of positive relationships with teachers in early childhood can result in the opposite of academic scaffolding. Although Hyson (2008) did not explicitly discuss emotional support, she did point out that an early childhood teacher's strong relationship with a child's family can enhance the teacher's relationship with the child, and facilitate academic learning. This approach to strengthening relationships also contributes to a teacher's ability to provide emotional scaffolding.

Once positive relationships with students are established, how can teachers make specific decisions about content presentation while being sensitive to emotional scaffolding? Rosiek's (2003) study explained how teachers help students make emotional connections to the subject matter being taught. Rosiek (2003) pointed out that teachers' understanding of student emotional response to curriculum content is critical for scaffolding students' emotions.

In his study, Rosiek provided emotional scaffolding in several ways, including "focus[ing] on processes of inquiry, [drawing] upon insider knowledge of cultures that teachers shared with students, and [drawing] on popular culture references" (p. 401). He added that in order for the teacher to carry out emotional scaffolding, she or he must have a solid grasp of the subject matter. This level of understanding is necessary to facilitate the teacher's ability to tailor presentation based on knowledge about student emotion.

In a similar vein, Goldstein (1999), in a theoretical consideration of the concept of the relational zone, also claimed that affective relationships between students and teachers are critical ingredients for intellectual growth. Linking Vygotsky's conceptualization of social construction of knowledge to Noddings' concept of the ethic of care, Goldstein addressed the process of establishing what she calls the relational zone. This zone is a shared emotional space which is co-created by the teacher and student, and which meaningfully supports children's potential for cognitive growth.

In Goldstein's view, even though teachers co-construct knowledge with children, teachers have a unique positionality in the relational zone, which requires them to consider multiple factors when making pedagogical decisions. These factors include societal demands, pedagogical beliefs, and children's current knowledge and skills including their current emotional states, interests, preferences, and needs. (This positionality puts more responsibility on teachers than on students by producing an asymmetrical relationship between them in the relational zone).

Teachers encounter their children in the zone and provide effective scaffolding to assist children in their learning, without taking over the process but rather, emotionally engaging in collaborative relationships and demonstrating respect for the children's rights. When teachers demonstrate this respect, children will respond positively, furthering the cycle of emotional engagement. These reciprocal affective interactions in instruction contribute both to teachers' professional growth and students' cognitive development, strengthening the quality of the learning environment.

Method

This study, viewing emotion from a social constructivist perspective, employs a qualitative case study. The qualitative method, which lends itself to research that seeks to describe complex interactions embedded in context, was the right method for this study because of the complicated nature of emotional interaction in the classroom (Merriam, 1998). Also, a case-study approach worked because of the researcher's desire to focus on the way that an individual would approach emotional scaffolding in the classroom; the case-study method allowed the limiting of variables and the illuminating of factors contributing to one individual's decision making (Merriam, 1998).

Participants

This study, conducted at Sunshine Elementary School (all names have been changed to pseudonyms), was situated in the northern part of a mid-sized city in Texas. One preschool teacher participated in this study. The teacher, Rebecca Smith, was purposefully selected because of the researcher's experiences with and observations of her teaching demonstrated a good fit for this study. She sensitively reacted to her students' emotions to create her classroom climate, which showed a high level of student engagement (Meyer & Turner, 2007). The level of positive verbal and non-verbal emotional interactions between the students and the teacher was higher in her classroom than in most others observed.

Ms. Smith, an Anglo American, was in her mid-forties and in her 18th year of teaching. She held a B.S. in Elementary Education and had graduated from a local university with a concentration in early childhood education. She was certified in the state of Texas to teach three-year-olds through sixth graders. She was teaching in an ESL (English as a second language) prekindergarten classroom, and held ESL certification from the state of Texas.

The backgrounds of Ms. Smith's 15 students (8 girls and 7 boys) exhibited wide diversity. Her students had been born in South Korea, India, China, the Netherlands, Mexico, and the United States. In terms of ethnic background, she had African American, Caucasian, Latino, and Asian American students. Two of her students were special-needs (ADHD) and shared an aide, who sat in on Ms. Smith's class to support them. Two of her students came from an economically disadvantaged environment. Thirteen out of the 15 came from an ELL background.

Data Collection

Data were collected mainly through participant observations and interviews (all of which were videotaped and audiotaped). I observed, throughout a single semester, Ms. Smith for three hours a day, two days a week. Considering the classroom schedule (the pre-K class was from 8:15 am to 2:30 pm), participant preference, and school events, I negotiated an observation schedule for the classroom designed to capture the teacher's daily teaching practices without missing any part of the classroom schedule. Data were collected through morning procedures, instruction in all subject areas, center/small group activities, nap/rest time, transitions between lessons, recess, lunch, and special activities such as art, music, computer instruction, library, and gym, closing circle, and dismissal.

Participant Observations

Qualitative research involves observing naturally occurring behaviors. Ms. Smith was observed from an unobtrusive part of the classroom, and notes, taken on a laptop computer, concerned the instructional context and the verbal and non-verbal interactions (Merriam, 1998). These field notes included observations of classroom activities as well as reflective notes on the observations. Types of details captured included the teacher's language use, tone of voice, gestures, physical contact, eye contact, and facial expressions used in instructions and in response to

students' emotions. Also noted were the topics, duration, materials presented, the degree of freedom granted to the students to express their ideas and feelings, as well as the students' verbal and nonverbal responses to instructional activities.

All classroom observations were also captured on videotape. The video camera, set up on a tripod, supplemented typed notes. When describing the teachers' nonverbal actions, I relied on my own perceptions, later squaring these with the participant's perceptions. All videotapes were transcribed and given to the participant for accuracy. Interactions were selected for analysis based on their appropriateness in demonstrating the teacher's instructional strategies for emotional scaffolding to enhance children's engagement.

I also kept "reflexive analytic notes," written both during class time and afterwards. These notes included feelings and thoughts, as well as questions to ask the participant, and also served as preliminary analysis of the data (Glesne, 1998). I had weekly member checks for accuracy with the participant, sharing all of my observational data and interpretations, so she would co-construct the data through validation, refutation, elaboration, or clarification (Merriam, 1998). Finally, I conducted peer review with a graduate student in early childhood education and a graduate student in educational psychology (Merriam, 1998).

Interviews

Primary data also included interviews. Interviews were employed in order to understand the participant's "invisible" experiences, perceptions, interpretations, and feelings. Interviews in this study were semi-structured—a "mix of more- and less-structured questions" (Merriam, 1998, p. 73). This type of interview starts with questions about certain topics and allows participants to lead the conversation and co-construct an understanding of the topics.

There were two types of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Before observations began in the classroom, the participant was interviewed once for approximately 60 minutes with a list of set questions. The questions covered four subject areas: the participant's beliefs about emotions; the participant's beliefs about the child, teaching, and learning; the participant's beliefs about learning engagement; and the challenges and opportunities involved in incorporating emotions in the classroom.

Examples from the first area included: How would you define emotion in teaching and learning? What types of emotion do you believe most affect children's learning? Examples from the second area included: How do you define learning in your particular classroom? Whose emotion, yours or the students', do you believe more powerfully affects your practices?

Sample questions from the area of participants' beliefs about learning engagement included: What pedagogical advantages of integration of emotion do you consider when you integrate emotion in your practices? How do students respond to you when you integrate their emotion in your practices?

And finally, for challenges and opportunities involved in incorporating emotion in the classroom, sample questions included: What opportunities or challenges do you experience when integrating emotion in your practices in your particular school context? How do you manage or respond to such challenges and opportunities?

The second set of interviews was less structured. They focused on understanding actions observed in the classroom. For example, "When you told the students . . . you wanted them to . . . Am I correct in my understanding?" "Would you elaborate on what you meant when in our previous interview you said . . ."

This second set of interviews was conducted over a period of six months, almost always on the same day as observations. The participant's total interview hours were 30 hours. Interview lengths ranged from 20 to 60 minutes, averaging approximately 40 minutes. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Also, all the transcribed interviews were given to the participant for a weekly member check, to establish trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 1998). The participant's data set was analyzed separately. Analysis was grounded in the constant comparative method (Straus & Corbin, 1998) and followed a three-step process (Merriam, 1998).

First, I read and re-read each set of field observation notes until I identified a unit of data. A unit of data was "any meaningful (or potentially meaningful) segment of data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 179). I defined a unit of data as being one distinct strategy for supporting emotions necessary to increase engagement.

Each week I reviewed the field notes, writing in the margins emerging insights, feelings, tentative concepts, and questions. In the weeks that followed, the process was repeated but included interpretations from previous weeks' observations and interviews. Then all marginal notes were reviewed again to attempt to develop preliminary concepts, categories, and contexts.

The second step of my analysis developed the marginal notes from the previous week of data collection to help shape the coming week's data collection, pointing out new analytical directions and helping me develop and refine interview questions. Each week's analysis produced a separate list of comments, questions, and concepts. Lists from each week were merged into one, reflecting the conceptual direction of the research up to that point. The next week's set of data, and all of the data gathered on an ongoing basis, was chronologically analyzed according to the same process (Merriam, 1998).

Interpretation of the whole data set occurred weekly and data were coded manually for patterns, categories, and themes, comparing and contrasting sets on the basis of these categories, and considering the context of each data set (interviews and observations; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher also engaged in a negative case analysis by looking for instances in the data that worked against or contradicted earlier interpretations (Yin, 2003).

The third step was the reviewing of the entire body of analysis produced throughout the study to refine and confirm or refute preliminary analyses. I highlighted different themes, assigning each theme its own color and each subtheme a coding number. In alignment with the research question, a Word table was created to visually display overarching themes by combining similar categories, which emerged from the analyzed data (Yin, 2003). Finally, after writing up the findings that emerged from this analysis, I showed them to the participant for one last member check.

Findings and Discussion

This study explored how a prekindergarten teacher makes pedagogical decisions that could be considered emotional scaffolding. A theme that emerged from the data analysis in a recursive cycle was the teacher's knowledge of her students. Ms. Smith made her decisions about implementing her instructional strategies for emotional scaffolding by drawing on her

knowledge of how ELLs learn and her knowledge of her students as individuals.

Knowledge about How ELLs Learn as a Foundation for Demonstration Teaching

Ms. Smith made pedagogical decisions for emotional scaffolding based on her knowledge about how ELLs learn. In an interview, she described her view of ELLs. Instead of viewing them as deficient, or of using English skills as a standard to assess their capabilities, Ms. Smith perceived her ELLs as capable, independent, and creative learners, who deserved to be treated as dignified and competent in the classroom.

Even in a situation in which she was accountable to the school district for improving their English skills, she managed to perceive their ELL status as a positive addition to their learning capabilities. Moreover, she believed that the teacher's perception of children's capabilities contributed to developing their self-image as learners. If they viewed themselves as capable learners in concert with her perspective, she believed that their feelings would scaffold their learning. She said that she conveyed to them this view, communicating with them to deliver her authentic feelings and help them see themselves as competent and capable learners.

Regarding strategies for ELLs, the literature discussed the fact that using knowledge about the makeup of a particular class, specifically a group of students who could have marginalized feelings in the school culture, is critical for creating emotional scaffolding (Rosiek, 2003). Rosiek (2003) showed that a secondary teacher made special efforts to incorporate her Latino ELLs' traditions in a math lesson in order to decrease their alienated feelings and foster their interests and confidence in the lesson.

In this early childhood context, on the other hand, Ms. Smith constantly integrated demonstration into her daily pedagogical decisions, and used it as a strategy to enhance ELLs' confidence and interest in learning, even as she taught in English. The teachers described in the literature mainly focused on verbal instruction and content while crafting emotional scaffolding. Ms. Smith, on the other hand, did not alter the content of her lessons during observations, but focused on orchestrating her verbal and non-verbal communication to make her instruction meaningful to the students.

This strategy was derived from her understanding of ELLs' learning styles. She believed that ELLs were more comfort-able representing their ideas and feelings through demonstration using nonverbal expressions (Sime, 2006). Although she believed that ELLs were knowledgeable learners, she could see the gap between the ELLs' potential capabilities and their current English skills and remained cognizant that such a gap might lead to negative emotional experiences in the learning process. In this vein, she believed that security was even more important for these children than for non-ELLs, and she believed that this strategy could create comfort and security for them. "I believe that children must have a feeling of security to become effective learners … it's my job to make sure that they're feeling comfortable and safe … to learn new things."

The origin of Ms. Smith's approach to ELL learning lay in her academic and classroom experiences. When the students showed reactions beyond the range of her experiences, she put in extra effort to understand the ELLs and to reach out to them. She said that demonstration was the strategy she had developed through the dynamic interactions from her academic experiences, her existing knowledge about ELLs, and her self-reflective practices of analyzing the children's responses and her own teaching in a continuum. She claimed that all these constructs worked together and helped her shape her pedagogical knowledge in her emotional teaching practices for the students.

In the implementation of demonstration teaching, Ms. Smith consciously took actions to promote their participation and engagement, and heighten their chances of experiencing success in the lesson. The demonstration teaching was commonly manifested through her nonverbal actions including body movements, gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and speed of speaking. Frequent use of non-verbal communication stood in for spoken language to help students visualize abstract words and concepts. She was aware that demonstration teaching was pedagogically effective in teaching ELL students.

Regarding the process of demonstration teaching through nonverbal communication, Ms. Smith underscored her belief that this teaching not only increased academic effectiveness, but also enhanced the relationship of trust between student and teacher. She said that the students were smart, observant, and intuitive, and quite capable of recognizing her real feelings conveyed through her gestures, voice tones, and body language.

ELL children in particular, she said, observed and produced a more sophisticated interpretation of the meaning of the teacher's nonverbal expressions than her verbal expressions (Damasio, 1999). Therefore, she said that she needed to engage the children with her authentic emotional responses—to respond with words, but more importantly with nonverbal communication.

Her belief in these students' observation skills seemed to guide her into what is known as emotion work (Callahan & McCollum, 2002). Emotion work is a voluntary reflection of the workers' internal feelings. Ms. Smith said, "They're very observant and very intuitive and they can tell. They[children] pay attention to everything. They are very quick to understand if what you're saying verbally is matching what you're feeling non-verbally."

In the following example, Ms. Smith demonstrated her capability to consciously use demonstration as a "pedagogical tool" in order to scaffold children's competence, sustaining their cognitive involvement in activities. She attempted to construct students' mindset as co-constructors or active learners by refraining from giving her ideas. Instead she invited ELLs to demonstrate their ideas verbally and nonverbally.

> One morning, Ms. Smith and the students were engaged in the calendar activity as part of the daily schedule. While the students sat on the carpet in a circle, Ms. Smith stood near the calendar counting its squares with a pointer. She asked the children to predict how many days were left before Valentine's Day. Hae soo, an ELL, tried responding using his fingers, and could be heard murmuring several different numbers.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: (Gesturing) Hae Soo come up and tell us what you were saying.
>
> *Child*: (Comes up and stands near the calendar) Just seven more days.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: Seven more days until Valentine's Day. (Looking closely to other students) He's going to tell me and then you can say if you agree or disagree, okay? How do you know that Hae Soo? What did you do to figure that out?
>
> *Child*: Today is Thursday, and seven days.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: (nodding and leaning toward him) How do you know seven more days? How did you think that in your head? Did you count squares?
>
> *Child*: Yeah.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: Did you? You were sitting on the carpet and you counted? Can you show me what you did? Can you show me what you were doing?

Child: (counts out the numbers on the calendar) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.

Ms. Smith: That's exactly right and you know what? That's what people do. They find out how many more days until a special day. They count until they get there. (Looking at a child who raises her hand) Jiyeon, what did you want to say about the calendar?

(Several children added their ideas to Hae soo's way of counting numbers. Corin gave a thumbs-up.)

Ms. Smith: Oh, Corin. I remember that I was going to ask you if you agree or disagree with what was said about seven more days? (Looking at all students) If you agree, can you show me with the thumbs-up. Thumbs-up means you agree that you think it's going to be seven more days until Valentine's Day.

Children: (Showing their thumbs up) I agree.

Ms. Smith: (Smiling and looking at all of them) You agree with Hae Soo. Okay. I see all friends thinking it might be seven more days. Okay, let's all count together. Big breath. (The students and teachers count the calendar together loudly.)

Here, Ms. Smith used Hae Soo's confidence in his understanding of the calendar to increase his learning engagement by letting him demonstrate his counting technique. She encouraged Hae Soo to lead the demonstration and then involved the other children by asking them to offer their input regarding Hae Soo's work, first on a more verbal level, through asking for their own counting techniques, and then on a more non-verbal level, through asking for their thumbs-up or thumbs-down for Hae Soo's way.

In this way, Ms. Smith tried to construct their mindset as co-constructors or active learners in the lessons. She withheld her own ideas and instead invited them to make a judgment about other students' ideas by agreeing or disagreeing. In this way she structured scaffolding to help them handle meaningful challenges and attain the objectives of the lesson free of frustration, even increasing their engagement and existing competency as learners.

By asking the ELLs to prove their knowledge their own way, Ms. Smith attempted to stimulate their active engagement and provide them with a meaningful sense of accomplishment. She said that this strategy had the side benefit of letting her assess the children's understanding level. "It's also a way for me to assess and for them to have a sense of competency

and accomplishment when they're able to explain what it is that they're thinking."

Ms. Smith felt a challenge regarding the strategy of student demonstrations, during which she needed to hold the attention of both the demonstrator and the whole group. While a child was proving his or her understanding, she tried to manage the rest of the students' participation by inviting them to make a judgment about the student's ideas. To include all children, she used the thumbs-up/thumbs-down strategy at the very end of the discussion, after the children had a chance to express their opinions verbally.

> One of the challenges, I think, is that it does take longer and that other children might get off task but sometimes when they use open-ended questions, I'll ask another child, "Do you agree with what that person said?" And then they'll have to say yes or no and then why. So you could facilitate a discussion.

Ms. Smith described another challenge related to student demonstrations, based upon what she saw as the children's developmental traits. She said that the students' behaviors and emotions in learning were contagious, and added that the ELLs seemed particularly prone to following their peers' actions, because to understand what was going on in the classroom they were relying more on body cues than verbal cues.

The use of these contagious emotions could be pedagogically effective, as when excitement could create more active participation. However, they could also be challenging, as when children follow each other's lead to the point where the learning objective becomes compromised. Ms. Smith described challenges she faced when encouraging the children to come up and prove their knowledge to the class.

> There have been times when you allow one or two children to come up. The next thing, you've got five or six children standing around you and they're all pointing at the same thing and trying to tell you. In that case… I let them know that with these many children up here, we can't see each other, we can't learn from each other. I then help them try to prioritize.

In another example, Ms. Smith utilized demonstration strategy not only when children were presenting work to the class, but also when they were doing individual work during center time and having difficulties. She was acutely aware of how her bodily positioning could affect the children's feelings. She positioned herself in a way that she believed minimized her influence as a judgmental authority

figure, and maximized children's sense of power over their work.

> During center time, a child was working on a project at the writing center. She picked up a piece of pink construction paper that had a traced heart shape on it. The child wrote "I love you mom" inside the heart shape and was struggling to cut it out because she was trying to cut without securing the piece of paper with her other hand. From a close distance, Ms. Smith, hands behind her back, observed the child for a short while and then leaning toward the child had the following exchange.

Ms. Smith: (squatting next to the child and keeping her eyes level with) Did you write that? Gina, are you trying to cut out a heart? Would you like me to help you, or you want to do it by yourself?

Gina: (quietly) Need help.

Ms. Smith: Okay. Let me help you. (She squats behind and encircles Gina with her arms. Gina holds the scissors, while Ms. Smith puts her hands outside Gina's hands.) Hold the paper. Cut it around.

Gina: (Smiling at Ms. Smith) I make it! (Ms. Smith smiles and gently pats her back.) You did it! You look like excited. (Gina laughs with joy).

Ms. Smith used an instructional strategy of non-intrusive demonstration based upon her empathetic understanding of the child's feelings. She tried to observe Gina before making a decision to constructively translate her observation into an intervention. This continued into a type of demonstration (assistance) that sustained the child's engagement with the activity while minimizing Ms. Smith's intrusion into the situation.

By asking Gina whether she wanted her help, rather than immediately jumping into the situation, Ms. Smith avoided embarrassing or upsetting Gina. This provided the emotional scaffolding necessary for Gina to take the next step. Providing non-intrusive physical assistance, Ms. Smith enlarged the child's competence; later, she verbally described the child's accomplishment as the child's own, further confirming this new competence.

Explaining this strategy, Ms. Smith said that she intentionally stood beside children, instead of behind them or across from them, when she was offering demonstration (assistance) during center activities. She said, "I don't want to overpower them by being in front... If I'm in front of them [across from them at a table], they might be focusing on me instead of what it is that they're attempting to do."

Ms. Smith believed that asking children whether they wanted assistance before intervening in their work gave them a sense of power (competence, ownership, self-esteem) over their learning, while also letting them know that she was available to help. She positioned herself as a resource, not the ultimate authority figure who would decide whether or not something was right—a strategy which seems to have derived from her self-identity as an observer. As such, she has tended to position herself as co-constructor or partner.

She believed that showing respect towards children's learning developed their confidence. When asked about the interaction with Gina, she explained her rationale for helping the child through non-intrusive demonstration: "I want to encourage them to be independent and self-sufficient because I know when a person feels that way, they feel good about themselves and about learning new things and trying new experiences."

Ms. Smith felt that observing was also important after an interaction. In an interview, she described a form of observation that could be considered another way of physically assisting a child through silent physical presence. "I assist them and step back and watch a little bit longer to see if they're successful with what we worked out before I walk away."

In short, Ms. Smith believed that ELLs felt a greater sense of security and confidence in learning through demonstration because they relied more often on non-verbal cues. Viewing this particular group of students as capable and competent learners, she used demonstration as a strategy to give the students a sense of security, elicit their positive emotions toward learning, influence their image of themselves, and affect their behaviors.

This strategy was derived from her understanding of the ELLs as well as her self-reflective experiences with them. Drawing on her knowledge about the ELLs' observation skills, she believed that nonverbal communication should be a conscious act to increase their trust in her and help her build close relationships with the students.

Unlike the secondary teacher described by Rosiek (2003), Ms. Smith focused more on altering her presentation style (demonstration) to convey the curriculum content, rather than on changing the presentation content to include the children's culture. Also, Ms. Smith used nonverbal communication in alignment with verbal instruction, unlike the secondary teacher who employed verbal instruction as a main communication tool. Ms. Smith arrived at her strategy considering the ELLs' learning capabilities and styles.

Knowledge about Individual Children as a Foundation for Calibrating Questions

Ms. Smith also made pedagogical decisions about instructional strategies to scaffold children's constructive emotions in the learning process through her knowledge about individual differences in her students. Ms. Smith said that her students revealed a wide range of individual differences in backgrounds, English skills, and learning levels. She learned about her students through a variety of knowledge-gathering strategies, including interactions with families. She added, however, that she mainly gained the information through interaction, coupled with constant observations in both formal and informal ways. She said,

> I do some informal assessment during our center activity, kind of walking around and making observations…I also sit down and do formal observations. Here it's more of a question and answer. Children have to show me different levels of understanding of letters and sounds and counting.

Ms. Smith described her belief that her use of keen observation to get to know individual students was influenced by her students' backgrounds. Because the majority of her students were coping with the language barrier at the beginning of the year, to understand individual students she observed their nonverbal communication skills.

> At the beginning of the year when I have so many children that are not able to express themselves verbally, I have to be very careful and pay attention to their body language and their facial expressions and watch their interactions with other children as well, so I try to make sure that I have a good understanding of their personality and pay attention to how they're interacting with other children and how they're responding to me.

As the year went on, she used the information gained from observation in order to establish an understanding of each child, focusing on subtle clues to the child's internal state, especially when interacting with reticent students.

> It's being so in tune with each child and knowing exactly what it is that they love to do and what they don't like to do and just having an understanding, a deep understanding of what's important to that child.

In conjunction with the children's differences, Ms. Smith calibrated questions according to individual differences in students' learning levels. To keep the students actively involved, she tried to provide dynamic learning interactions by using calibrated questions in three ways: first, by repeating her questions using varied vocabulary; second, by asking for non-verbal responses; and third, by aiming questions at particular students.

Ms. Smith's first use of this strategy involved repetitive questioning of the entire class, with variation. (For example, when she would ask for students' assessment of a pattern on the calendar, she would say "What do you think?" "Do you want to take a turn?" "Do you want to try?") She used a repeated pattern to develop language development for ELLs, while saving more complicated formulations for students who she knew would be able to respond. Ms. Smith said that she strove for consistency, repeating her lessons to give her students a sense of security and to sustain their engagement with instruction

> When you repeat things it gives children a sense of consistency and that consistency helps them feel safe because they know what to expect… I try to keep things consistent so that they can always anticipate what's going to happen and that really actually helps with their language development when they anticipate and they have a chance to think about things ahead of time.

Even though Ms. Smith was aware of the benefit of the use of repeated questions, she also recognized the pedagogical disadvantage—some students might find the repeated questioning boring. This contradiction encouraged her to use varied language as an instructional strategy to meet individual differences in learning.

> If it is too redundant and too repetitive then… they won't be as excited in learning. I try to make sure that it's intellectually stimulating for the children but it's also interesting and fun… I know some children have a greater vocabulary than others so I try to phrase things in more than one way to address all of their needs.

Ms. Smith also said that she calibrated her response with a structure to keep all children from becoming too frustrated with lack of understanding or bored by repetition, using the language of scaffolding to describe her objectives. She said, "I do consider the questions and I do try to consider their feelings…but it's a very fine line because I want to challenge them but I don't want them to feel frustrated." Ms.

Smith also made sure that ELLs would gain something from her use of more advanced questioning for the students who were more verbal. She said, "I think when I use varied language, I also try to explain oh, that means… so that other children can also have an understanding of it or to explain it in a way that other children can understand as well."

Another way in which Ms. Smith used calibrated questions in order to respond to individual differences was in her solicitation of non-verbal responses. Sometimes when she asked the whole class a question, she noticed that certain students could not respond verbally, so she would read their non-verbal cues and ask for non-verbal responses.

> I know that some children can't respond verbally, but they can show me with a thumbs up or a thumbs down …so I can watch them and make different choices and different ways of responding.

The last way that Ms. Smith used calibrated questions involved addressing children as sole individuals. Corin, who was one of the only two English-speaking children in the class, displayed verbal and creative skills beyond those of his classmates. Ms. Smith tried to use the strategy of calibrated questions to maintain his engagement and his pre-existing confidence as a learner, while helping the rest of the class profit from his English proficiency.

During a whole-group lesson, Ms. Smith sometimes asked Corin questions to get specific and focused responses. This tactic steered the lesson and sustained the flow of instruction for the benefit of other students and the teacher (Meyer & Turner, 2007).

> For example, during a math activity, Ms. Smith used colored wood blocks made into shapes. Ms. Smith sat on the carpet with the box of blocks in front of her. The children sat in a semicircle in front of the box.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: (Showing a black oval) I want to review the name of this shape. Raise your hand if you can tell me the name of this. Let's look up here. Let's look up here. Oh, Sam is raising his hand. Sam, Sam, what do you see?
>
> *Child*: I see black oval.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: (Excited) Very good, Sam!
>
> *Ms. Smith*: (Showing yellow square) Varda, Varda, what do you see?
>
> *Child*: Square.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: Okay, What color is that?

> *Child*: Yellow. Yellow square.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: Good job. I can see a yellow square.
>
> *Child:* (Immediately) I can see a yellow square.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: (Smiling and nodding) Jina, Jina, what color and shape do you see?
>
> *Child*: I can see a red circle.
>
> (Showing shapes, she calls out each child's name according to the order of their seating spots.)
>
> *Ms. Smith*: Corin, Corin, what do you see?
>
> *Child*: I can see a green triangle.
>
> *Ms. Smith*: Good job! Corin, I have a question for you. If I try to do this way (rotating the shape toward the left side), do you think it is still a triangle?
>
> *Child*: Yeah (turning his head to follow the turning triangle).
>
> *Ms. Smith*: If I try to do this way (rotating the shape toward the right side), is it still a triangle?
>
> *Child*: Yeah! (confidently).
>
> *Ms. Smith*: You know what, that (rotating the shape) is called rotating. It doesn't matter which way I rotate, it will always be a triangle; no matter which direction you use it.
>
> *Child*: I'll show you something! (Corin comes up and demonstrates rotating the triangle back and forth).
>
> *Ms. Smith*: Yes! That's right. You think of a different way of rotating. It will still be a triangle no matter which side you rotate (smiling).

Ms. Smith tailored her questions to fit individual learning levels and provide all students with feelings of success. For the rest of the class, she asked the same questions multiple times to help them connect the lesson to their previous knowledge. For Corin, she challenged him to describe vocabulary and stimulated him, while building his interest, to a higher level of conceptual understanding. Ms. Smith said she worried that if she didn't make this effort he might disengage.

> Corin has a huge vocabulary, so if I just said, 'Turn,' that would probably be really boring for Corin, but when I say rotate that might be a word he hasn't heard before and so I think he would refocus and reengage the lesson.

As palpable evidence for the children's academic success, Ms. Smith reported that the children demonstrated successful test

scores that year and improved their initial scores. She said that her students successfully met the district expectations by scoring above the district average.

> The district hires a tester that goes to each of the classrooms to do the testing. The children are asked to point to the picture of the vocabulary word that the assessor says. The district average is 7.9 and this class was 8.8.

In short, Ms. Smith believed that individual students' varying learning levels influenced their emotional behaviors toward learning engagement. In order to meet their learning needs Ms. Smith tried to provide individualized attention in the whole-group setting by calibrating questions. This strategy was based on knowledge of her students' individual characteristics, obtained through observation, interaction, and discussions with families. She emphasized that in order to use strategies based on knowledge about individuals, she had to be conscious of possible challenges, in order to emotionally scaffold both these children and the whole group simultaneously.

Conclusion and Implications

This article describes Ms. Smith's pedagogical decision making about instructional strategies for emotional scaffolding. Ms. Smith created her teaching strategies for emotional scaffolding in informed and deliberate ways, drawing on her knowledge about ELLs. This finding is consistent with the literature in that teachers created instructional strategies for emotional scaffolding using their understanding of students (Meyer & Turner, 2007; Rosiek, 2003).

My research, however, showed a more complicated picture of how Ms. Smith constructed her understanding of ELL children and how she translated her understanding into the construction and implementation of her instructional strategies for emotional scaffolding.

Ms. Smith was consistent in her strategies by promoting her own concept of a most pedagogically important emotion. She thought feeling secure to be the optimal emotional state for learning. As a pre-K ESL teacher Ms. Smith understood her ELLs need to feel a sense of security. She believed that with a foundational feeling of security, students would enter kindergarten and the elementary grades with a mindset that would allow them to take risks in their learning. She envisioned that her students would take the emotional climate of their classrooms with them as they

moved through their academic careers, and that it would function as a protective barrier between these students and the potential for disengagement. Interestingly, this concern is one that teachers in upper grades who consider emotional scaffolding did not express (Meyer & Turner, 2007; Rosiek, 2003).

What is the relevance of this finding for building a concept of what it means to emotionally scaffold in the early childhood classroom? I would argue that it is a teacher's belief in a most desirable emotion for learning—a belief that is formed by knowledge about students, as well as by constant observations—that tends to determine the strategies that she may pursue. It has important implications for understanding how the teacher in this particular early childhood context shaped her instruction.

Drawing on her knowledge of ELLs and individual students, Ms. Smith also used demonstration to instruct ELLs and calibrating questions to help individual students circumvent language barriers and avoid frustration. As a communication tool, Ms. Smith used nonverbal as well as verbal instruction to increase her ELLs' engagement with instruction. Such a tool stands in contrast to the secondary teachers in the literature who mainly used verbal instruction (Rosiek, 2003).

Ms. Smith believed that nonverbal communication increased trustworthiness and helped children visualize the meaning of their words. She also believed that her ELLs were observant and visual learners. Hence nonverbal communication, she thought, would contribute to increasing the learning engagement of ELLs. Rather than integrating her ELLs' cultures into their curriculum content (Rosiek, 2003), my participant focused on communication style with ELLs. Use of non-verbal communication and demonstration characterized emotional scaffolding for this prekindergarten ESL teacher. This finding illustrates how emotional scaffolding in the early childhood classroom differs from that found in secondary classrooms according to the literature.

Ms. Smith also illuminated the place of emotional scaffolding within the range of teacherly activities that I would describe not as emotional labor (involuntary emotional display to meet the demands of the workplace) a term coined by Hochschild (1983) but as emotion work (Callahan & McCollum, 2002). In emotional scaffolding, the meaning of emotional labor approximates that of "emotion work." Ms. Smith

showed that she responded to student emotions with voluntary decision-making. She believed that especially ELLs were observant and intuitive.

This awareness of the children's observation skills made Ms. Smith conscious of the danger of insincerity. She consciously avoided the potential harmful effects resulting from a disjunction between her verbal and non-verbal communications. In other words, if in her attempt to increase engagement with instruction, she merely "talked the talk," her ELLs would not get the message. She believed that this disjunction could lead them to disengage.

Emotional scaffolding can transform classrooms into positive learning experiences where English language learners thrive academically and emotionally. Emotion is all the more important in the preschool environment because teachers of this age group are responsible for preparing students for school, academically and emotionally, which involves constructing positive attitudes toward learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Hyson, 2008). In addition, the children's emotions easily shape their behaviors, due to the fact that they are in the process of learning how to regulate their emotions (Blair, 2002).

This study presents several implications. First of all, it expands our perception of the nature of emotional scaffolding processes. Our current understanding of emotional scaffolding focuses on a teacher's intentional verbal interactions with students (Meyer & Turner, 2007). What this study showed was that emotional scaffolding could be nonverbal. Ms. Smith viewed her students as co-creators in her emotional scaffolding, emphasizing the importance of the teacher's capacity to respond to student-initiated interactions.

This recognition of children's interactions shaping the emotional scaffolding process strikes me as being in line with the social constructivists' perspective on students as active learners. Ms. Smith focused not only on her initiation of the use of demonstration as a communication tool, but also on her reactions to the ELLs' body language, encouraging them to use nonverbal communication to prove their understanding when they seemed to have difficulty expressing themselves verbally (Meyer & Turner, 2007). Ms. Smith used nonverbal as well as verbal instruction to try to increase their ELLs' engagement in learning. Her use of nonverbal communication in trying to connect with her ELLs might call for an expansion of the definition of emotional scaffolding strategies.

Second, the study has an implication regarding the sufficiency of pre-service training in the early childhood education. When Ms. Smith provided scaffolds for ELLs' emotions, she modulated her individual assistance by considering their learning levels. She believed that the wide range of types of student in today's early childhood classroom meant that the teacher should be prepared to respond to many types of emotional expression while trying to engage her students. Both the literature and this study's participant thought that emotional-scaffolding approaches equip teachers to maintain awareness of this range of emotional expression and to tailor their responses accordingly.

Providing instruction in emotional scaffolding practices, therefore, could help student teachers face some of the most important challenges in early childhood education, including the challenge of providing engaging experiences for children with a wide variety of backgrounds (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Ms. Smith had a good deal of experience in the classroom, yet admitted to still being in the process of fine-tuning her emotional teaching practices. How, then, are new teachers to grapple with the question of implementing emotional scaffolding?

Finally, awareness of the role of emotion in the learning process is the cornerstone of emotional scaffolding because it helps teachers to make deliberate and informed decisions. Early childhood teachers in the literature have said that they felt so much academic pressure that they could ill afford to take time to deal with emotional matters (Miller, 2005).

Ms. Smith, in contrast, viewed emotion as a key to sustaining the children's learning engagement. She stepped into the learning gap, viewing emotion as a counterweight to the current emphasis on academic achievement and as an essential and integral part of the curriculum. In this way, Ms. Smith positioned herself as having "mediated agency," meeting these external expectations through use of her own emotionally attuned approach.

When teachers support ELLs' emotions in instruction, they not only increase ELLs' academic achievement in the era of academic accountability, but also help classrooms become a fertile ground for more meaningful and developmentally appropriate practice. These possibilities, which can be derived from implementation of emotional scaffolding in the early childhood context, emphasize the importance of the teacher's decision making, which is a

critical factor in shaping academic success (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

One of the limitations of this study lies in its generalizability in terms of sample characteristics and sample size. The fact that Ms. Smith was White and a native English speaker as well as being experienced in her field, contributes to the limitation of generalizability. The fact that there are many non-White and non-native English speaker teachers in public schools underscores this limitation. Also, this is a case study carried out in a public school's pre-K ESL classroom. A case study, though, is necessarily small and thus not generalizable; instead it provides rich and thick contexts that allow readers a deeper knowledge of the context being studied. This approach enables readers to make their own judgments and decisions about the observations recorded.

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