A Vygotskian Framework for Observing and Teaching Bilingual and English-Only Players

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The author argues that play always occurs within a social context and in relation to the various cultures that coexist within the classroom and the school setting. She uses Vygotsky's definition of play as dramatic or make-believe play for preschool children, and she applies Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian theories, including Daniil Elkonin's categories of play, to examine mature and immature play among preschool children. She describes case studies of dual-language learners (DLLs) and English-only (EO) preschoolers (who need more time and scaffolding to acquire mature, make-believe play) along with those of reluctant players. She also promotes Bodrova and Leong's observation and assessment measure, PRoPELS, for teachers and researchers seeking to help children reach a mature level of play in early childhood classrooms. She concludes with suggestions for supporting such mature play. **Key words**: dual-language learners; make-believe play; PRoPELS; scaffolding

MY PURPOSE IS TO discuss children in preschool classrooms who need opportunities for scaffolded make-believe play. The story features young, dual language learners (DLLs) and English-only (EO) preschoolers who are developing the language, social and emotional, independence, and self-esteem skills to interact with peers in play centers. This proves especially important because, in the last two decades, early childhood classrooms have become more diverse. According to the United States Department of Education (2020), young children who speak a language other than English have increased 28 percent nationwide. Multilingual young children need opportunities to engage in mature scaffolded play in early childhood classrooms.

There exists a paucity of research that has examined the play and social interactions of DLLs in predominately English-speaking preschool classrooms (Halle et al. 2014). Some have proposed that sociodramatic play with peers

offers a potentially important context for the social interactions of DLLs, their language development, and their self-regulation and that such play contributes significantly to their second-language learning (Schmerse 2021).

A sociocultural perspective guides my argument about mature play, a perspective that allows us to understand the relationship between young bilingual learners and their social contexts, which is mediated by their broad repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources. Vygotsky (1967, 1978) and Elkonin (2005) characterized sociodramatic play as an event that helped propel children's development as they created imaginary situations, adopted and acted out roles, and followed the rules determined by these roles. My study begins with a discussion about make-believe play and the Vygotskian approach, followed by a consideration of Elkonin's (2005) view on make-believe play in the preschool and kindergarten years. For my purposes, I will use Bodrova and Leong's (2007) term "mature play," although Vygotsky (1978) and his students (Elkonin 2005, 1999b) actually used the term "developed play." Next, I assess examples of preschoolers playing in the sociodramatic play center using PRoPELS to scaffold mature play (Leong and Bodrova 2012). I conclude with suggestions classroom teachers can use to support mature play in early childhood settings.

For the study presented in this article, I examined video examples of children's level of mature play in a dramatic play center using a rubric based on Elkonin's levels of developed play. I collected data when working in a preschool classroom, and I designed the video examples to allow the investigation of the research question: In what ways do four-year-old children in preschool classrooms engage in mature play?

Understanding Preschool Play with Dual-Language and English-Only Players

Play is universal and has no cultural boundaries. DLLs playing alongside EO preschoolers contributes to the early learning and language development of DLLs (Espinosa 2015). Play supports language growth for both DLL and EO preschoolers. There is no reason that children have to speak the same language to engage in role play. DLLs communicate through body language, facial expressions, and gestures. They engage in meaning making during play through verbal, visual, and actionable modes of communication. Researchers (Alanis, Arrequin, and Salinas-González 2021; Garcia and Wei 2014) have examined preschool

children's gestures during play and storytelling. These children point, nod, and act out words with their hands to inform other players of their actions during dramatic play.

Play provides a space for DLLs to explore and take risks with English as they play alongside EO peers. Gestures play an important role in accessing language in the process of speech production. DLLs learn to use various strategies to communicate and interact with EO peers (Arreguín-Anderson et al. 2018), which may include gestures or observing others play, before entering the play episode of the EO peers.

It is important for early childhood programs to provide hands-on, dramatic-play experiences that explore the structure of language in authentic ways. Teachers should understand the various ways DLLs play with EO peers because such understanding helps them scaffold and support children's daily play while enhancing the students' language, vocabulary, and development of mature play. In the next section, I outline Elkonin's (1999b, 2005) views about the development of play for preschoolers.

Views of Make-Believe Play

In the 1970s, Western researchers began to adopt the social-cognitive aspects of Vygotsky's work following the translation of *Mind and Society* (1978). Although much of American research has since applied a Vygotskian framework to the areas of psychology and education, few researchers have examined play from a Vygotskian framework to the extent that Bodrova and Leong did in *Tools of the Mind* (2007).

For Vygotsky a distinction exists between play and instructional interactions. Play and interactions with teachers and peers both contribute to development and create the zone of proximal development (ZPD) for children (Vygotsky 1967, 1978). According to Vygotskian theory, play constitutes a leading activity for preschoolers and children up to seven years, one in which adults assume a supporting role. Vygotskians focus on pretend play or make-believe play. Make-believe play helps preschool children develop higher mental functions by promoting planning and self-regulation, roles with rules, symbolic thinking, language, and literacy. For DLLs, play provides numerous cognitive, metacognitive, metalinguistic, and sociolinguistic advantages (Genesse et al. 2021).

A close colleague of Vygotsky, Daniil Elkonin, is known among educators for his Elkonin boxes used in reading recovery and his work on phonemic awareness, but he also elaborated Vygotskian theories and promoted the idea of a developed form of play. According to Elkonin (1999b, 2005), developed play does not emerge overnight, and it tends to reach its highest level of development in the preschool years if carefully scaffolded and taught.

From a cultural-historical perspective, Vercellino and Moreira (2023) discuss the progression of play and Elkonin's (1999b) categories of play. They describe Elkonin's analysis based on four categories of play: "(1) the main content of the activity, (2) the presence of roles and their properties, (3) the actions and their logic, and (4) the rules" (Vercellino and Moreira 2023, 3). Elkonin (1999b) examines the progression of play based on two large groups. The first group consists of levels 1 and 2, and it is considered immature play. Children explore objects and props in the dramatic play center, and they learn to use words or phrases to label objects. Each child determines his or her own role. These actions have no name and are "monotonous and repetitive actions" that go on "for a long time, and at the same time, demonstrate[e]" that those engaged in them have "no interest in what a neighboring child is playing with and how" (Elkonin 1999b, 32). For example, a child pretends to go shopping in a grocery store and says, "What should we buy?" But the roles of cashier, customer, and manager are not established. The child pushes a plastic shopping cart in the pretend grocery store and repetitively puts food items into the shopping cart without any interaction with other players. There is little conversation between the players. At level 1 and level 2, the play is short lived, and children often switch to other activities.

The second group of Elkonin's progression of play consists of levels 3 and 4, and it is considered a more advanced play (Vercellino and Moreira 2023). Children socially interact to plan roles and establish rules for carrying out the pretend roles. They perform these roles with other children and use words and actions to plan play scenarios that last for an extended time. For example, one child might be a customer pretending to buy groceries and placing them in a shopping cart as another pretends to stock the shelves with groceries and a third plays the cashier scanning and bagging the groceries.

The players invariably identified these roles aloud to other participants in the play. For example, Abby might say to Peter, "You're the cashier, and I'll be the girl shopping." This implies Abby must act in a specific way, one different from Peter. Abby must act like a supermarket customer. In these cases, children

often used the phrases "let's pretend!" and "make-believe!" (Bodrova and Leong 2006). The players negotiate the roles and may stay in the role for fifteen minutes or longer. Children may also start to narrate themes from familiar stories. At this level of Elkonin's progression of play, children are usually five years old, and they are able to pretend and to use complex language in their role. Often, they do not need a prop to stay in the roles.

Leong and Bodrova (2012) took the approaches of Vygotsky (1978) and Elkonin (2005) and analyzed play in five phases that include the plans, the roles, the props, an extended time frame, and language. "Play that exists in many of today's classrooms does not fit the definition of mature play" writes Bodrova (2008, 364). She suggests that adults intentionally use scaffolding to support this

Five Stages in a Child's Make-Believe Play					
	1. First Scripts	**2. Roles in Action**	**3. Roles with Rules and Beginning Scenarios**	**4. Mature Roles, Planned Scenarios, and Symbolic Props**	**5. Dramatization, Multiple Themes, Multiple Roles, and Director's Play**
Plan	Does not plan during play.	Does not plan during play.	Plans roles; actions are named prior to play.	Plans each scenario in advance.	Plans elaborate themes, scenarios, and complex roles. Spends more time planning than acting out the scenario.
Roles	Does not have roles.	Acts first and then decides on roles. No rules are revealed.	Has roles with rules that can be violated.	Has complex, multiple roles.	Can play more than one role at a time. Roles have social relationships.
Props	Plays with objects as objects.	Plays with objects as props. Actions with a prop result in a role.	Needs a prop for the role.	Chooses symbolic and pretend props.	Can pretend rather than actually have a prop. Does not need a prop to stay in the role. Objects can have roles.
Extended time frame	Explores objects, but not play scenarios.	Creates scenarios that last a few minutes.	Creates scenarios that last 10–15 minutes.	Creates scenarios that last 60 minutes or longer. With support, can create scenarios that last over several days.	Creates scenarios that last all day and over several days. Play can be interrupted and restarted.
Language	Uses little language.	Uses language to describe actions.	Uses language to describe roles and actions.	Uses language to describe roles and actions. Uses role speech.	Uses language to delineate the scenario, roles, and action. Book language is incorporated into role speech.
Scenario	Does not create a scenario. Can copy what the teacher does and says or will follow the teacher's directions if script is simple and repetitive.	Creates a scenario that is stereotypical, with limited behaviors. Can incorporate modeled roles and actions into play, with support.	Plays familiar scripts fully. Accepts new script ideas.	Plays a series of coordinated scenarios that change in response to previous ones or the desires of players. Describes unfolding scenario, roles, and actions.	Plays a series of coordinated scenarios that change in response to previous ones or the desires of players. Uses themes from stories and literature.

Figure 1. Five Stages in Make Believe Play. Reprinted with permission from Leong, Deborah J., and Elena Bodrova. 2012 "Assessing and Scaffolding Make-Believe Play," in *Young Children* 67:30.

make-believe play. And indeed, to help teachers develop higher levels of play, Leong and Bodrova (2012) developed PRoPELS as a tool to assess and scaffold the most critical elements of children's play.

PRoPELS—Assessing Mature Make-Believe Play

PRoPELS is an assessment that helps teachers support higher levels of play from Elkonin's (1999b, 2005) four categories of play to Leong and Bodrova's (2012) six categories of play. Teachers can use PRoPELS to watch children in the dramatic play area and identify a preschool child's level of play. As I mentioned, ProPELS is an acronym that addresses the following "dimensions": plan, roles, props, extended time, language, and scenario (figure 1). I can now offer a description of each dimension that relates to intentional mature play.

Planning
In this dimension, teachers encourage children to think about play before entering a dramatic play center. They ask the children what they want to play or what they want to be to encourage them to think about their role and to prevent arguments. During a restaurant play theme, for example, two children might both want to be the cashier. In this planning stage, children identify a role and talk about what they will do. Some children draw a picture of themselves in the role with an object or a prop to help them remember what they will do. For DLLs, teachers may show pictures of the play roles or say to children in their home language something like, "Señale la imagen del papel que desea representar" ("Point to the picture of the role you want to play").

Roles
In this dimension, we need to keep in mind that, according to Elkonin (1999a, 1999b), mature play reflects the social relationships that exist in the real world. A mother calls a doctor when her baby is sick, and the roles of mother, baby, and doctor are enacted. These roles have rules, as when the doctor asks the mother questions about the baby. As Leong and Bodrova (2012) point out, "Teachers need to explain the purpose of the behaviors, their sequence, and cause and effect relationships between behaviors" (32). Thus, playing a sick baby is a real-life situation and calls for teachers to model the roles and rules of the narrative.

Props and Objects

In the props and objects dimension, children need to be able to use real, symbolic, and imaginary props. Some props support the role, reminding children which role they are playing. Without the prop, children can—in the midst of play—forget who they are. Although children need props, these props can be minimal and symbolic. Children can begin to make props if they are not available, but the players do not need props to stay in their roles. Sometimes props are needed to act out the scenario. A child role playing a mother can, for example, use a stuffed animal for her baby and a block as a telephone to call the doctor. Such objects can be the actors in the play scenario.

Extended Time Frame

For this dimension, children may keep the play going for sixty minutes or longer without teacher intervention. They may also sustain play from one day to the next, but they will need teacher support to do so. The decision to continue happens during the mature stage of play.

Language

This dimension comes into play when role speech emerges and proves important in classrooms of DLLs and EO preschoolers. It can involve intonation and gestures, for example, when a pretend baby talks like a baby or a pretend cook uses a voice intonation appropriate for a cook. Adults need to use vocabulary, sentence structures, and intonations that fit the roles children play. Teachers sometimes need to join in the play alongside the children to support DLLs' language acquisition. Teachers can also assign an EO child to play with DLLs to model vocabulary and role speech.

Scenario

In this dimension, children play scripts related to the theme of the dramatic play. The scripts have several sequential actions that children coordinate with other players. For example, a child who plays the store manager walks over to the one playing cashier, opens the cash register, and waits for the cashier to pretend to count the money. DLLs can use gestures and props to create scenarios when paired with EO children. Children use background knowledge from personal experience to include in the scripts. The more mature the play, the more often the scenario involves a social problem that the players have to solve. For example, a mom brings her sick baby into the doctor's office but there are no appointments

for that day; or a customer orders a hamburger, but no hamburgers are being served, only chicken nuggets.

According to Elkonin (1999b, 2005), play starts with object play and adult modeling for two-and three-year olds and gradually evolves into fully developed play. As a leading activity for preschool children, play provides the most important context for the emergence and continued growth of important cognitive and social processes. As a result, play also prepares children for acquiring academic skills in elementary school. But play, once a daily activity in all early childhood classrooms, has been eliminated in most elementary public schools, and a trend presently exists to eliminate it in preschool settings (Nicolopoulou 2010). A push also exists to teach advanced skills to children at very young ages so they will be academically primed by the time they attend elementary school. Thus, preschool classrooms have limited opportunities for make-believe play and other play-based activities.

A study by Manuilenko (1975) compared the ability of preschoolers to follow directions in both play and nonplay settings. In Russia, children are considered preschoolers until age seven, so Manuilenko tested three- to five-year olds and seven-year olds and found that the older preschoolers benefitted more when the task was presented in a play format. Smirnova and Gudareva (2017) conducted a study of play and games to examine play activities of preschoolers. They observed the narrative role play of eighty-nine children and the levels of their development in Russian kindergartens. "The children observed were divided into three preschool age groups: a younger one (four to five years old); an older one (five to six); and a preparatory one (six to seven)" (259). They found the highest level of development, which they described as relation-based play, among the six-year-old to-seven-year-old preschool children. The results indicated that a small percentage of children reach a developed state of play after age six, confirming both Elkonin's (1999b) and Manuilenko's (1975) findings.

Low-level play may also result from a lack of time given to play. Children need time to engage in long periods of uninterrupted play (Murphy 2020). Dramatic play requires considerable time to plan and initiate in order to recruit players, negotiate roles, and agree on a story or theme (Christie and Wardle 1992). But many state-funded prekindergarten programs offer only half-days in the morning or afternoon and do not allow an hour for play. Our study focused on the development of play in a prekindergarten classroom with DLL and EO children using Leong and Bodrova's (2012) PRoPEL's assessment for classroom teachers.

Methodology

To answer my research question, I reviewed two classroom video tapes and tran-scripts from a preschool classroom to assess mature preschool play. I assessed individual children using PRoPEL and assigned a stage of make-believe play using Elkonin's categories (1999b, 2005) of developed and undeveloped play.

Subjects

I obtained parental permission to video tape children and collect data for future research. I observed the naturally occurring sociodramatic play of eight children and video taped them on two different days during the school year. The children's ages ranged from forty-eight months to sixty-one months. Five of the children were female; three were male. The children spoke Spanish at home, except for two who spoke English. The language of instruction in the classroom was English. The lead teacher and teaching assistant were both female, and both held bachelor's degrees in early childhood education. The teaching assistant was bilingual.

Setting

The classroom was equipped with standard preschool furniture and toys, such as dolls, trucks, dress-up clothes, and plastic pretend food, which are all condu-

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	English Proficiency	Spanish Proficiency
Aiden	Male	African American	E	Not tested
Anthony	Male	Hispanic	D	E
Ashley	Female	Hispanic	D	E
Brittany	Female	Hispanic	C	D
Emma	Female	African American	E	Not tested
Eva	Female	Hispanic	C	C
Joyce	Female	Hispanic	C	C
Mario	Male	Hispanic	D	E

Figure 2. *Participants: Ethnicity and Language Proficiency Levels*

cive to dramatic play. The classroom was a state-funded, universal preschool program in a low income, ethnically diverse district. The classrooms offered monthly themes (e.g. restaurant, farm, and bakery) for play activities. The teacher would ask each child to choose a role, and the children planned for the roles (e.g. customer, cashier, host, or other) they chose each day prior to entering the dramatic play center. They would need to say what role they were going to play and what they planned to do playing that role in the center. Each player wore a tag with role pictures, labeled in English and Spanish, to support self-regulation.

Procedure

As the researcher, I maintained a weekly presence in the classroom throughout the school year. To begin, I obtained language proficiency levels for DLLs and EO children. Next, I collected themed dramatic play video episodes using the PRoPELS measure to examine mature play (See figure 1).

Pre-IPT Oral English and Spanish Tests

Espinosa (2014) recommends assessing the language proficiency of DLLs in both English and Spanish to obtain proficiency levels. In my study, I assessed language proficiency using the Pre-Idea Proficiency Test (Pre-IPT) in English and Spanish. The test reports the test-retest reliability of .77 and criterion validity to be between .62 and .67 (Ballad and Tighe 2010).

To complete an assessment, an examiner uses a storyboard and felt pieces to encourage children to respond to questions and point to appropriate items on the storyboard. Levels A and B test children's understanding of simple vocabulary items (father, mother, boy, girl, shoes, dog). For Levels C and D, children respond to lengthier and more syntactically complex questions and indicate their ability to name three colors. The most difficult item, in Level E, asks a child to construct and retell facts from the story.

Children are assigned a level from A to E based on raw scores that range from zero to forty and age norms. Scores are converted to standard scores and percentiles. The standard scores are used in the designation of three-year-old children to five-year-old children as Non-English Speaking (NES) (Level A and B), Limited English Speaking (LES) (Levels C and D), or Fluent English Speaking (FES) (Level E).

The age norms for children ages four years to five years are Levels A, a Non-English speaker; Levels B and C indicate a Limited English-speaker (LES); and

Level D and E designate a Fluent English speaker (FES). (See results in figure 2). In my study, three children scored as limited English proficiency.

PRoPELS
We coded the two video cases according to Leong and Bodrova's PRoPELS (figure 1). Leong and Bodrova (2012) suggested teachers "first observe children's play without intervening and after assessing the level of children's independent play, decide on what kind of scaffolding would be most appropriate" (31).

Analysis of Video Tapes Using PRoPELS

A bilingual classroom teacher transcribed the play sessions. Some of the children spoke Spanish as they played and interacted with peers during make-believe play sessions. Next, a second researcher viewed and rated the video tapes. The video tapes and transcripts helped us identify and code mature play behaviors using the PRoPELS—specifically planning, roles, props, extended time, language, and scenario. Both researchers scored the quality of mature play for the two classrooms, using as the unit of analysis a continuous observation. Interrater reliability between the two yielded 85 percent agreement. In the first example, four girls play in a grocery store. In the second example, three boys and one girl take on the roles of restaurant workers.

Example 1: Playing in the Grocery Store
The sociodramatic play center was set up as a supermarket. Ashley, Eva, Brittany, and Joyce (pseudonyms), all of them Spanish and English speakers, played in the center for a little more than ten minutes before the teacher had the class clean up. Props included realistic food items, a cash register with a scanner, plastic shopping carts, dolls, purses, play money, and a teacher-made, shopping-list form. The shopping list lay on a separate table with pencils next to it. Additionally, signs and pictures relating to supermarkets were posted around the center.

     The four girls pretend to be customers. The video begins with Joyce pushing her baby in a shopping cart and taking food containers off the shelf. Brittany sits at the table writing her shopping list on the provided form. Brittany leaves the table. Using a block as a pretend microphone, Brittany begins to sing. Eva pretends to hold a baby and collects food containers. Ashley scans a

basket full of groceries. Eva reprimands Ashley, "Vamos! You're not going to shop forever!" Ashley looks at Eva and begins to scan her groceries. Ashley forgets to scan a tomato that Eva places on the pretend conveyor belt. Eva says, "Olvidaste esto! (You forgot this), and she points to the tomato. Eva takes the scanner from Ashley and scans her own tomato. Ashley reaches for the scanner, but Eva pulls it away. Joyce stays in her role of customer, shopping and placing items in the shopping cart. Eva takes on the role of cashier, scanning Ashley's grocery items. Brittany returns to the scene. Brittany tells Ashley, "We're the boss. We're the boss!" Brittany gets a shopping basket and takes on the role of customer. Brittany wants to use Joyce's shopping cart rather than a basket, and the two argue about the shopping cart. Joyce and Brittany give grocery items to Eva to scan. Their groceries fall when Eva shuts down the cash register. The three girls argue, but they settle the dispute when Brittany asks Eva to shop. Brittany says, "Let's shop." Eva responds, "I will shop with you, I'm the mom, okay?" Brittany responds, "No! I'm the mom!" Eva then responds, "I'm the sister. Okay?" Eva and Brittany take on the roles of mother and sister, shopping. Joyce and Ashley continue shopping. The episode ends when the teacher rings a bell for the children to clean up.

With respect to the plan dimension, the children planned before going to the pretend supermarket center but only for two roles, cashier and customer. Interactions in the role dimension related to associative play, and—after arguing—Britanny and Eva decided to take on the customer roles of mother and sister. The roles of manager and stock clerk were not enacted. The actions of all players were repetitive. They took grocery props off the shelf and put them in shopping baskets or picked up a grocery prop and used the scanner.

In the prop dimension, we observed children using realistic props for the entire session. They shared these props, although at one point Brittany and Joyce argued about the shopping cart. The one exception in such sharing came when Brittany used a block for a pretend microphone to sing.

As for the length dimension, Ashley, Eva, and Joyce remained in the dramatic play center for ten minutes. During this time, Brittany played alone in the background writing and singing, left the area, and then returned to the center after four minutes.

In relation to the language dimension, all players put grocery items in the shopping cart and scanned items without naming the role or verbally describing an action connected to shopping in a supermarket. With respect to the use of language during the episode, there were twenty-five utterances in English

and eight utterances in Spanish with no evidence of role speech. Ashley did not respond to Brittany or Eva, but when addressed, she used gestures and repetitive actions in her role as customer. Tags (Cohen and Uhry 2007; Corsaro 1986) such as "okay" or "oh" came at the end of a turn of talk to elicit a response or an acknowledgment to another player.

And for the scenario, the scripts were composed of limited actions. The players acted out their roles separately and not with each other. The scripts were composed of actions such as scanning the food items or putting the grocery items in the shopping cart. The children were familiar with these scripts and did not add any new scenes related to shopping in a supermarket.

Example 2: Playing in a Restaurant

The dramatic play theme involved a three-minute episode in a pretend restaurant, three boys—Aiden, Anthony, and Mario—and one girl, Emma, as the players. Aiden and Emma were English speakers, and Mario and Anthony were Spanish and English speakers. The props were realistic food items, plastic dishes, a toy mixer, a telephone, and a baby doll. Teacher props included menus with pictures of food items in English and Spanish and a paper chef hat. A shoe box with the lid closed represented a pretend computer. The furniture included a refrigerator, a sink, a stove, a cabinet to store food, a table and chairs, and a table with a telephone for the order taker. The furniture had English and Spanish signs (e.g., oven/horno, sink/pileta). The children had planned their roles before entering the restaurant: Emma to play a waitress; Aiden to play a customer; Anthony to play chef, and Mario to play the order taker. Anthony stands in the kitchen center pretending to prepare food (role of chef). Emma pretends to put something in the microwave and runs back and forth behind him (role of waitress). Mario pretends to takes orders (role of order taker). Emma pretends to put pizza on a plate for Aiden (role of customer). Anthony gives Aiden chicken and squirts it with ketchup and mustard (switches role of chef to role of waiter). Aiden pretends to cut his pizza and takes the tray of pizza from the oven and puts an extra slice on his plate (switches role from customer to chef). Emma says, "Aiden, I didn't want you to do that!" Anthony continues to put food on Aiden's plate. Mario is on the phone taking orders. Emma takes a banana from the shelf and puts it in the microwave. Emma says, "Here's a banana! Watch this! I'm putting in the banana!" (Emma puts the banana in the pretend microwave). Emma puts the banana on the table and takes the empty plate on the stove. Aiden shakes a hamburger patty and puts it on the table.

Anthony smiles at Aiden. Anthony takes a carrot out of the cabinet and puts it on the table. Aiden puts his tray of pizza on the table and picks up the carrot. Aiden's plate now has a carrot, a banana, an avocado, grapes, and a hamburger patty (switches role of chef back to customer). Mario says: "I want to eat. I want to eat." Mario leaves his pretend computer station and sits down next to Aiden with the pizza and carrot (Mario switches role from order taker to customer). Mario to Anthony: "I want to eat this" (Mario holds up the carrot). Aiden goes to the pretend computer station and takes phone orders (Aiden switches role from customer to order taker). Ten minutes into the play episode, Mario changes roles and goes back to the role of order taker.

This short scenario illustrated how the children played for the entire twenty minutes allotted for classroom dramatic play. Although the children planned their roles (planning dimension)**,** they engaged only in short episodes of repetitive play and could not stay in their role (roles dimension) longer than three or four minutes. The children's intermittent concentration and lack of persistence in maintaining the story and roles of restaurant workers became evident during the observation. They acted out their roles separately. Anthony planned the role of chef during play planning and wore the chef hat for the entire time allocated for restaurant play, but he changed roles from chef to waiter several times. There appeared to be no rules established with the roles played in the dramatic play restaurant.

Children used realistic props (e.g., plastic food items, plastic dishes, and utensils) during most of their play (props dimension). The teacher created a paper chef hat and menus. Children taking on the roles of customers and servers used the teacher-created menus at the end of the episode during one observation.

The children could not maintain a role for longer than three to four minutes before moving on to another role or a nonplay activity (length dimension). Mario and Aiden left the dramatic play area and wandered into another center.

The two bilingual speakers did not use their home language and often responded in English (language dimension)**.** Anthony frequently used gestures (e.g., smiles and head shakes in response to questions), one-word utterances, and many paralinguistic cues. The children were able to play together, but they did not share common goals related to the roles and rules of restaurant workers. Thus the dimension of associative play dominated the episode.

The children did not create a script of actions typically performed as restaurant workers (scenario dimension). The scripts had limited actions and were not well coordinated between players. The waitress asked the customer, "What do you want today?" She then would take the order to the cook to prepare.

Results and Discussion

Two classroom video examples indicated that the children were not engaged in mature play. For the most part, they used realistic props, did not engage in

Play Stages	Child's Name
Make Believe Play Stage 1 - First Scripts Plan- No planning during play ROle – No roles Prop – Plays with objects as object Length - Explores objects but no play Language – Little language Scenario – Does not create a scenario	
Make Believe Play Stage 2 – Roles in Action Plan – No planning during play ROle – Acts first then decides on role, no rules Prop – Plays with objects as props Action with prop results in a role – May argue Length – Scenario lasts a few minutes Language - Describes actions Scenario – Stereotypical with limited behaviors	
Make Believe Play Stage 3 – Roles with Rules and Beginning Scenarios Plan – Names roles and actions prior to playing ROle – Role has rules that can be violated Prop – Prop chosen for the role Length – 10 -15 minutes Language – Describes roles and actions Scenario - Play familiar scripts fully	
Make Believe Play Stage 4 – Mature Roles, Planned Scenarios & Symbolic Props Plan – Each Scenario is planned in advanced Role – Complex, multiple roles Prop – Symbolic and pretend props- May argue Length – 60 minutes or longer Language - Use role speech, describes unfolding scenario, roles, & actions Scenario – Series of coordinated scenarios that change in response to previous ones or desires of players	
Make Believe Play Stage 5 – Kindergarten – Dramatization, Multiple Themes, Roles, & Director's Play Plan – Elaborate themes, scenarios and complex roles. Spends time planning Roles – Can play more than one role Prop – Can pretend rather than actually have a prop. Does not need a prop Length – Last all day or over several days Language – Uses language to delineate the scenario, roles, and action. Book language is incorporated into role speech Scenarios – Plays a series of coordinated scenarios. Uses themes from stories and literature. Emotions and problems are worked out and solved in different ways	

Figure 3. PRoPELS - Child Observations of Mature Play Stages for Preschool Children

any play scenarios, and participated primarily in associative play. Some of the children managed to stay in their roles and maintain the rules of these roles. For a few players, their language and gestures did relate to role speech.

PRoPELS, as I have stated, is an assessment to help teachers support higher levels of play using Leong and Bodrova's (2012) levels from most immature to mature play. Our study investigated the use of PRoPELS to evaluate dramatic play episodes in preschool classrooms with DLLs and EO preschoolers. Many of the DLLs had acquired some English proficiency (see figure 2). The two examples underscore the worry that children's classroom dramatic play in the preschool year may no longer be at a level of complexity that supports learning (Smirnova 2013; Smirnova and Guadereva 2017; Vercellino and Moreira 2023). The level of involvement of the children we observed in the video tapes evidenced a reliance on realistic props, the use of repetitious story lines, a broken attention within the play episode, and a fragmented enactment of roles. By the time children reach kindergarten, they should be engaging in a developed level of make-believe play (Elkonin 1999b, 2005). Elkonin (2005) used the term developed to describe play that provides maximum benefits for development. He described developed play as the leading activity that should emerge at the end of kindergarten and undeveloped play as the kind of play common in younger children.

An important factor for our group seems to have been the lack of teacher scaffolding for the use both of realistic and imaginary props and pretend scenarios and the lack of talk to help children build language related to their roles into make-believe play. Bilingual and monolingual preschoolers need opportunities to act out scenarios related to the use of props and language in pretend roles. Children from families of diverse backgrounds have distinct play interests and skills. Teachers can interact in children's play to promote cross-cultural and cross-gender play and friendships. Teachers need to interact frequently before children enter dramatic play and during play time.

Time was another factor. The play in our examples lasted only twenty minutes. This prekindergarten program calls for a half-day program of ninety minutes, and children need at least thirty minutes to develop play scenarios (Christie and Wardle 1992).

The situation in our study is typical of today's early childhood preschool classrooms. Make-believe play in classrooms today proves difficult to achieve because we push preschoolers to be ready for kindergarten and depend too much on technology. Federal, state, and local directives that focus on math and literacy assessments narrow the play-based experiences in early childhood (Bas-

sock, Latham, and Rorem 2016; Nicolopoulou 2010) because many prekindergarten teachers emphasize academic-content standards over play-based curricula. This is particularly true of low-income, state-funded prekindergarten programs. Recent longitudinal research (Durkin et al. 2022) followed 2,990 low-income children in Tennessee in state-funded prekindergarten programs. Some were admitted by lottery, and others were rejected and served as the control group. Durkin and colleagues followed both groups to sixth grade. The children who went to prekindergarten scored higher on areas of school readiness at the end of their first year. But after third grade, they did worse than the control group. By the end of the sixth grade, they did even worse. The difference seems that the prekindergarten children were exposed to academic skills and were expected to sit on their hands while the preschool teacher gave ten-minute, whole-group lessons. These classrooms did not allow for quality time for play-based activities and dramatic play. The control group attended programs that embedded play in the curriculum.

Another challenge involves the amount of time preschool children spend on electronics before they begin attending. Interacting via the Internet with limited teacher-child and child-child interactions is not the same thing as playing alongside one another in the kind of dramatic play in which real-time negotiations and pretend role playing occur. Today's teachers are challenged to find ways for children to interact in real time and space with materials that can be props for symbolic, mature play (Waite-Stupiansky 2023).

Preschool teachers are the key to orchestrating successful peer interactions for all children within early childhood programs including typical, inclusive, multilingual, and at-risk classrooms. According to Vygotsky (1978), play provides a zone of proximal development for children to achieve beyond their present level of mastery. Vygotskian theory defines the zone of proximal development as consisting of two levels: independent performance and performance with assistance from adults or more mature peers. Adults can scaffold intentional, mature play that constitutes a leading activity for preschool and kindergarten children (Bodrova and Leong 2003). They can support children's play by providing the level of guidance needed for children to move forward and continue to build new competencies to achieve mature play. It is important we remember that children bring their cultural backgrounds to the play episodes and play situations. During play, children can receive feedback from their peers and adults that help them share this knowledge with each other as they play. Dual-language learners often do not have the necessary language

skills to communicate with other children (Clawson 2002). Teachers need to support the play of children who speak a language different from their peers by developing children's ability to communicate with each other. Research suggests that such children will sustain interactions with other peers when a teacher actively guides them (Dominguez and Trawick-Smith 2018; Zepeda, Castro, and Cronin 2011).

Preschool teachers should observe children during thematic make-believe play to become knowledgeable about when, how, and if they need scaffolding. Trawick- Smith (2020) held that "teachers can determine the amount and type of support they should give children in play by carefully observing what children are currently doing and identifying any need they might have for guidance" (81). Let me offer some ideas to help children develop features of mature play (Elkonin 1999a; Leong and Bodrova 2012).

Suggestions for Scaffolding Play

For Vygotsky, children's learning happens in social interactions with adults and peers. Additionally, Vygotsky placed a high value on play as a tool for communication and a tool for developing a child's physical, social, and cognitive behaviors. Teachers have an important role in scaffolding children in the play process. These ideas can be used for children with special needs, DLLs, and children who stand and watch other children play but are reluctant to interact.

Scaffold Roles and Rules of Mature Play
To promote mature play, teachers need to provide opportunities for children to act out dramatic play roles and to offer implicit rules for acting out these roles. If the theme is a supermarket, for example, a teacher might have children act out stories related to the supermarket. One then might consider such questions as: If you were going to the grocery store, what would you do first? Yes, as a customer, you would get a shopping cart and begin putting groceries in your cart. If you could not find a grocery item, who would you ask? The stock clerk? The manager? When you are finished shopping, what would you do? Yes, the cashier would scan your groceries, and you would pay for them. The teacher might then have children take on the roles related to shopping in the supermarket. Children can act out scenarios such as who can find the bread aisle, or if a jar of spaghetti fell, who will clean it up?

Teachers should use both English and a children's native languages to help them understand these actions. Bilingual children may need visual representations of their roles. They should provide pictures so DLL children can engage in play scenarios in both their home languages and in English. The pictures are a scaffold that DLLs can use to take on roles with their EO peers. DLLs can gesture or act out what they try to communicate with EO players if they do not have the verbal skill to do so.

DLLs teachers can include scenarios that incorporate children's unique cultures and backgrounds. How is the scenario different for children from different cultural backgrounds? When children play "eating dinner," is it different in different families? Such teachers might invite parents to take pictures of a child's family eating at a table and share the pictures during class. They might invite family members to visit their classrooms to share cultures, traditions, languages, and life experiences to support children's knowledge of the different ways families live (Cohen 2009).

Take a Role in the Play

Teachers can either direct children's actions during play or act as a play partner to teach DLLs to choose appropriate props and toys, help children plan their play, and coach those who may need other help.

Direct Children's Play

A teacher can act as a mediator for young children at play who so easily find themselves in conflicts they do not know how to resolve. A teacher as director models and explains problem-solving skills, helping children develop the ability to solve their own problems. In this sense, teachers have an opportunity to help children develop social competence and mature play skills. In the director role, teachers can recognize and teach positive character traits and ways to resolve conflict such as asking questions that enable DLLs to use their words to communicate solutions that both parties accept. Teachers may need to stay in a dramatic play center to help the children enact the scenario. They should ask the children who they are and help them clarify the behaviors that go along with their role. They should focus on the roles and props, perhaps suggesting the use of another prop that would sustain the role and work in the make-believe play scenario.

Teacher as Partner

Teachers can also play alongside a DLL's play by acting as a partner to the child.

The teacher can establish a simple script and model play skills. Pictures related to pretend roles can serve as mediators. Simple phrases in a child's native language can extend the experience. If children are playing in a pretend restaurant, the teacher might learn some Spanish phrases related to restaurant. For example: "¿Tienes hambre?" ("Are you hungry?") or "¿Quien va a poner la mesa?" ("Who is going to set the table?"). Once children begin to use their roles to fit the theme and to play on their own, teachers step back and observe.

Partners and Peer Scaffolding

Several research studies (Alanis and Arreguin 2019; Picker 2013; Scrafton and Whitington 2015) have examined paired learning for DLLs to promote language competence. Alanis and Arreguin (2019) shared vignettes of paired learning with DLLs to build social and linguistic competence. Picker's (2013) research in a Head Start center examined DLLs' play interactions with monolingual children to foster English learning for DLLs. The mixed-language groups provided optimal circumstances for supporting and producing complex English language. The monolingual children were willing to continue to play with their Spanish-speaking peers when language errors occurred. The interactions encouraged Spanish-speaking children to speak English. The DLLs were frequently unable to communicate verbally or express ideas and maintain their role in play episodes. Scrafton and Whitington's (2015) research found similar results in a study of four-year-old and five-year-old children. Shyness and language competence in English creates barriers for accessing play with English peers, but these hurdles can be mitigated by their peers. Pairing EO children with DLLs can support make-believe play.

Vygotsky (1978) describes the benefits of peer scaffolding for supporting development and learning. Bodrova and Leong (2023) wrote that "the notion of assistance within ZPD needs to be expanded beyond the adult or more experienced peer to include various social contexts, (such as working as a pair, mentoring a less-experienced peer, or engaging in a specifically designed group activity), various aids and instruments, and behaviors that children can use to self-assist (such as using private speech, writing and drawing)" (67). Teachers can pair a DLL with an EO student who is at a higher level or stage in make-believe play. For peer scaffolding to work, teachers can help the mentor assign the role and plan the scenario.

Use of Imaginary Props

Preschool children are provided with realistic toys in their homes and child

care centers. Trawick-Smith (2020) states, "Realistic props are those that resemble real-life materials and suggest an obvious use in play and open-ended or nonrealistic props are nondescript and do not resemble any one thing" (159). Elkonin (1999a) identified principals in which play influences child development that are foundational for learning in primary grades. One principal related to the use of symbolic props is advancing the development of mental representations. In our earlier example, children used real grocery store items (with the exception of one player who used a block as a toy microphone). Teachers could have modeled the use of a paper plate as a symbolic substitute for driving to the supermarket. A cardboard box might have replaced the shopping cart or paper for the play money. The use of imaginary props needs explicit modeling for children.

Teachers can remind children of the props in the make-believe play center and suggest ways to use them. Cohen and her colleagues (Cohen et al. 2014) conducted a study of which props and bilingual storybooks resulted in greater gains in English proficiency in preschool DLLs compared to English-only and nonplay conditions. Salinas-González (2018) described an emergent Spanish-English Head Start class that set up a *panaderia* (bakery) in a dramatic play center and introduced props in three phases. In the first phase, the teacher introduced basic bakery props. The third phase included symbolic props as the children role played bakery scenarios. Salinas-González suggested allowing children first to discover the new props, then to follow up with explanations or modelling of how to use them through role playing.

Model Explicit Language
To support the mature play of preschoolers, after children plan and name the roles they will play, teachers can scaffold language using what Elkonin (1999a) labeled "role speech." As Bodrova and Leong (2015) noted, "The role a child chooses should be consistent with the speech used for that role as well as the speech of the child to whom the speech is addressed" (382). Teachers can act out scenarios using role speech and props. For example, they can use role speech to model a bakery manager talking to a customer. Children might practice by repeating, "I am sorry but we are all out of blueberry muffins today. Would you like a cranberry instead?" Then they can show the customer the menu and take the new order. Additionally, teachers should use children's home language, when possible, to engage DLLs in self-talk.

Ways to Sustain a Play Scenario—Background Knowledge

To help children sustain play for an extended time frame, teachers can borrow ideas from children's literature, invite guest speakers from the community, or take a field trip. There are numerous works of fiction and nonfiction related to dramatic play themes that teachers can read aloud to preschool children. A community field trip can help children develop a higher stage of mature play by learning about the roles of various community workers. A successful field trip should include selecting a location, visiting the location, planning for the trip, preparing children, and extending the experience into the classroom (Cohen 1998). Taking pictures and conducting interviews help children remember the roles of community workers and support their use of role playing and language skills to enable more mature play in the dramatic play areas.

In a dramatic play center, teachers can copy pictures from books or use the pictures taken during the field trip to support scenario development. They can encourage role play in a scenario from a supermarket using props and language. Other adults, when present, can serve as customers or as cashiers. After modeling for the children, teachers can have children act out placing groceries in a shopping cart as one scenario followed by another scenario of having a cashier check out the groceries. They can encourage dialogue to reinforce the roles children play, saying for example, "Tell Marianna who you are and what you are doing." Encourage children to act out the scenario in their home language or in English.

Some DLLs will use gestures to communicate as they are acquiring language. Preschool DLLs gesturing during play supports emergent language and literacy in elementary grades (Axelrod 2014; Salina-Gonzalez, Arreguín, and Alanis 2017). Children can be encouraged to demonstrate play actions or use special gestures during role play.

If we want children to progress with later academic skills in math and letter recognition, we need to provide opportunities for play. Vygotskians believe that language as well as imagination and symbolism are an outcome of play, not a prerequisite for it. Educators can play with and scaffold negotiations and elaborate during play themes. To support our growing population of DLLs and monolingual children, teachers must scaffold play in imaginary situations, roles, and rules to propel preschool mature play.

Conclusion

Observation is a fundamental skill for early childhood educators, because it allows them to monitor closely each child's development and tailor their teaching approach to best support the learners. Teachers invest significant time and effort into learning how to observe without judgment, avoid labels, and become skilled investigators who can connect their observations to established theories of child development. Vygotsky (1978) and Elkonin (1999b) have provided invaluable frameworks for understanding how children learn and grow, and these frameworks serve as essential guides for educators in their everyday practice.

PRoPEls assessment (Leong and Bodrova 2012) is an excellent measure to help DLLs and EO children develop into mature players. To support classroom make-believe play teachers have a crucial role in scaffolding children's involvement in mature make-believe play. Neo-Vygotskians hold that adults should mediate play and that the major role of an adult is to present and explain different social roles to children (Karpov 2005). Otherwise, children will not be able to play, and their sociodramatic play will be immature and impoverished.

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