Creating Joyful "Third Space" for Young Dual Language Learners via Family-involved Chess Playing Project

Qinmei Yu[1], Stella Patino[2] & Tracy Harris[3]

Abstract

This study proposes a heuristic, operational "Third Space" model of the family-involved chess playing project by fitting Third Space Theory into Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory to create a joyful learning environment for young dual language learners (DLLs). The "Third Space" created by the project is a visible physical in-between zone of young DLLs' home and school contexts as well as an invisible shared socializing intersection of their home and English linguistic and cultural systems. It functions as the productive hybrid cultural, mediational and navigational context for young DLLs to challenge the authority and dominance of English language and culture, engage in early bilingual and biliteracy scaffolding practices, and develop their language literacy and cultural identity across their first and second linguistic and cultural systems. The study further recommends specific procedures to implement a series of three-week long chess-playing activities with the participation of children, parents and teachers to make it feasible for DLL teachers to implement the project in their teaching practices.

Keywords: Third Space, Young Dual Language Learners, Family-involved Chess Playing Project, Language and Culture

1 Introduction

The last several decades have witnessed a dramatical increase across the United States in the population of young dual language learners (DLLs) who have a home language other than English and are acquiring two or more languages simultaneously or are learning a second language while continuing to master their first language (Espinosa, 2015; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2017). They are proved with abundant scientific evidence to have the capacity and be neurologically prepared to acquire multiple languages simultaneously or learn a second language in the process of developing the first language with sufficient high quality exposure to or input in each language (Espinosa, 2015; Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008). And a growing body of research indicates that children of early bilingualism benefit significantly from frequent exposure to and interaction in both their home and English languages and cultures, bringing them short-term and long-term advantages over their monolingual counterparts in their linguistic, cognitive, executive functioning and social-emotional abilities (Castro & Espinosa, 2014; Espinosa, 2013, Espinosa, 2015; HHS, 2017).

Therefore, there is every reason to give young DLLs enough attention to support the development of their first language and the acquisition of English to promote their school readiness and reap the linguistic, cognitive and social benefits of early bilingualism. However, we are still "in the early stages of compiling a robust research base that can offer guidance on how to design early childhood services" for "the cultural and linguistic minorities in the United States" (Espinosa, 2015, p.48). And no detailed and specific instructional and interaction strategies are provided for early care and education (ECE) teachers to support young DLLs' home language while promoting their English language development (Espinosa, 2015).

[1] 1Jiangsu University of Technology, China, 601-622-2471, qinmei.yu@students.jsums.edu

[2] 2Metropolitan YMCA of Mississippi, USA, 801-389-5241, stellapc2000@gmail.com

[3] 3Jackson State University, USA, 601-979-2341, Tracy.L.Harris@jsums.edu

As a result of the insufficient bilingual exposure and support, these minorities are challenged with linguistic and cultural vulnerability and embarrassment when switching between different language and culture systems and are thus unlikely to benefit from the advantages of balanced bilingualism (Espinosa, 2015). They are found to show certain academic achievement gap comparing to their monolingual English-speaking peers in the areas of language, literacy, and math at the start of kindergarten (Murphey, 2014). It indicates that "the learning experiences these children need to meet their potential" mismatch "the quality of experiences they are currently receiving" (HHS, 2017).

To give full play to the role of young DLLs' multilanguage acquisition process, it's necessary for ECE programs to plan instructional projects or practices with rational research base to provide them with frequent dual linguistic and cultural exposure and interaction and high-quality early learning experiences to support and promote "their cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical development and prepare them for success in school and beyond" (HHS, 2017). To achieve this goal, this study proposes a heuristic, operational "Third Space" model of the family-involved chess playing project to create a joyful learning environment for young DLLs. It begins with a brief review on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory and the Third Space Theory to build the theoretical framework for the study, based on which an operational model, possible benefits and detailed implementing procedures of the chess playing project will be elaborated.

2   Early Childhood Development Theories

2.1 Bioecological Theory

Under the influence of Lev Vygotsky who recognized the importance of a social context on child learning and development, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986,1989, 1993) developed Bioecological Theory which has been one of the most frequently used theories in the field of early childhood education and development for almost 30 years (Härkönen, 2007). The comprehensive model he formulated is a nested and interconnected structure emphasizing the bidirectional influences or reciprocal interactions between children's development and their surrounding environmental contexts. It explores or explains children's personal development in relation to multidimensional and interrelated layers of complex systems (Krishnan, 2010), including the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem, each affecting the child's development either directly or indirectly.

The interaction of structures either within a layer or between layers of the systems is key to the bioecological theory. The microsystem is the innermost layer encompassing interpersonal relationships and direct interactions with immediate contexts as family, playmates, day care, school, and neighborhood (Berk, 2000), within which bidirectional influences are strongest and have the most immediate and direct impact on the child. The mesosystem is the second immediate layer comprising interactions or connections between two or more different microsystems, such as home, school, playmate settings. It can further influence or facilitate the proximal processes, i.e. the development process of systematic interactions between the child and the microsystem or immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Bergen, 2008). The mutual home-school involvement in a child's education, for example, may influence the child's interaction at home and school and result in mesosystem functioning, helping the family and the school to provide more effective support for the child needs.

2.2 Third Space Theory

Third Space Theory is developed from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural tradition in the 1990s as "a postcolonial sociolinguistic theory of identity and community realized through language or education" (Wikipedia, 2019)."Third Space" is referred to as both a physical concept and a mental construct which links children's "first space" and "second space", i.e. their home and school experiences or discourses (Tracy & Morrow, 2017). It is viewed, conceptualized and applied from three perspectives within the educational context (Moje et al., 2004). The construct is a bridge or productive in-between space for individuals to challenge dominant cultures and systems (Bhabha,1994), navigate across different discourse communities and contexts (Soja,1996) and mediate competing knowledge and discourses (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Tejeda, and Rivera 1999). The creation of "Third Space" situates individuals in their first and second spaces to draw on multiple resources or funds of knowledge to develop their literacy, social competence and cultural identity.

The theory has been used within a variety of disciplines to explore the space in-between two or more discourses or systems in language learning and literacy development (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 2003; Moje et al., 2004). For example, Third Space was adopted by researchers (e.g. Cook, 2005; Pahl and Kelly; 2005; Pane, 2007) to develop continuity between "the first space" (home) and "the second space" (school) literacies.

Third Space was also referred by Kramsch (1993, 2004) to take a new look at multilanguage learning as a confrontation of culture and a process involving the creation of new identities. As suggested by Kramsch (1993, 2004), Roessingh (2011) advanced a framework for early language development and undertook a dual-language book project for young DLLs to create a shared context between their first and second languages and cultures for them to "negotiate language, culture, and identity" (Roessingh, 2011, p. 141) and "develop linguistically, culturally and intellectually" (Li & Girvan, 2004).

As a theoretical perspective, Third Space Theory appears to be of increasing importance in educational discipline practice and research and also shows similarity in the intersectional influences of the first and second spaces with those described in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological model (Tracy & Morrow, 2017). No linguistic and educational development research, however, has been noticed to fit Third Space Theory into the Bioecological Theory to develop feasible practices or operational model to guide educators to construct "Third Space" in their instruction and explore the concrete proximal processes involved. Considering their significance in the field of early childhood education and the specific context in which young DLLs are situated, this study will draw on these two theories to develop a family-involved chess playing project to create joyful "Third Space" for young DLLs.

3 Joyful "Third Space": The Family-Involved Chess Playing Project

Young DLLs from families of different countries of origin are experiencing diverse and unique linguistic, cultural discourses across entirely different immediate (parenting and schooling) as well as broader social contexts while beginning their development of early literacy in both their first language and English. They need an in-between space or borderland zone with linguistic, cultural and contextual consistency for them to face the challenges they meet when they switch across home and school contexts and different language and culture systems.

3.1 Operational "Third Space" Framework

The "Third Space" framework as shown in Figure 3.1 comprises two microsystems (i.e. home and preschool) of young DLLs' growth, which are connected by parents-involved chess playing activities to form a "Third Space" of development within the mesosystem between the two microsystems. "Third Space" in this framework is a dynamic in-between space or a borderland zone created by interactions between the two most important immediate contexts to facilitate young DLLs' literacy and identity development across their first and second linguistic and cultural systems.

"Third Space" here can be understood from both visible physical and invisible mental perspectives. The physical "Third Space" is a special in-between zone in which families and teachers work together to do chess playing activities together with young DLLs to bring them a comfortable and joyful home and English learning environment. The mental "Third Space", with the support of the physical space, is formed as the shared socializing space or intersection of DLLs' home and English linguistic and cultural contexts in which they transit back and forth to negotiate meaning, culture and identity and finally find their place in either the first language and culture and the second (Cummins, 1996) .
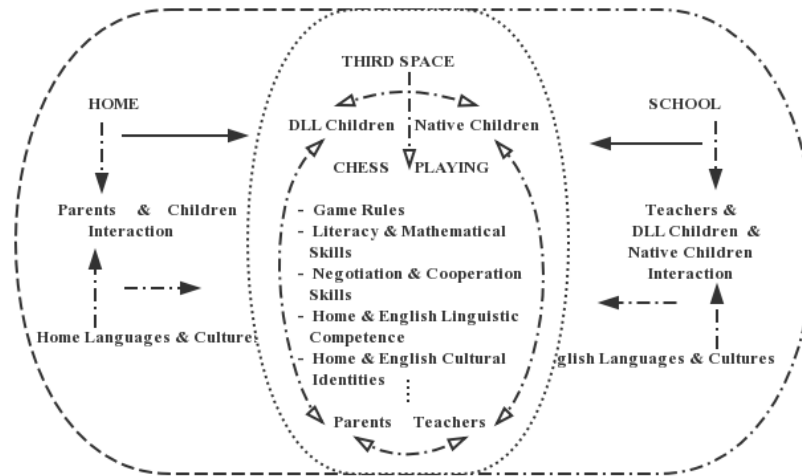
Figure 3.1 Operational Framework of the Joyful "Third Space"

3.2 The Chess Playing Project

According to Bronfenbrenner (1999), the proximal processes of child development happen through systemic and enduring reciprocal interaction between the child and their environment. For the occurrence of bidirectional interaction, the objects and symbols in the immediate contexts should "invite attention, exploration, manipulation, elaboration, and imagination" (p.6). Neuroscientific research evidence indicates that children's engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes will be improved when provided with joyful learning environments and experiences or activities like playing, exercising, and laughing (Scharaldi, 2017). To boost children's learning and development, especially those who are in their early development stage, it is necessary to immerse them in joyful learning environments and experiences. It is particularly the case for young DLLs who have a home language other than English and are acquiring two or more languages simultaneously or are learning a second language while continuing to master their first language (HHS, 2017).

Chess is such a game involving activities that can provide young DLLs with joyful playing experiences and arouse their interest to explore the symbols, cultures and rules involved at the same time. It is a game with far-reaching universal popularity and easily recognizable concept and basic rules that are sufficiently simple to be taught to children at a very young age (4 or 5 years old). Specifically, it is usually played with the same initial configuration, starting position and move rules for 32 chess pieces elaborating characters of the pawns, rooks, knights, bishops, queens, and kings. These pieces move on an 8x8 square chessboard representing 64 neighborhoods of alternating colors, one piece moving a square at a time and each type of piece having its own method of movement. It's feasible for young DLLs to be guided to play the game of chess and reap the pleasure of interaction with their native English-speaking counterparts even though they don't speak the same language.

The game, however, has inevitably undergone slight changes over the long discourse of development across countries around the world. It's no wonder that chess has consistently represented a snapshot of the language, culture, history, and lifestyles of different countries, each having a slightly different culture surrounding chess. When engaged in the chess game, young DLLs are not only attracted to play the game, explore the rules, exhibit their talents and reap pleasures in completing certain tasks and getting certain rewards, but also encouraged to reinterpret chess pieces and game moves with distinctive cultural characteristics and negotiate meanings in linguistic and cultural contexts distinctively different from that of their first language and culture. In addition, with the birth and growth of mass media, the game of chess as a reflection of its time, is made less serious as the competition but more playful and intellectual by using cultural icons like Miss Piggy, Homer Simpson, Darth Vader, and Piglet featured in such mass media as television, movie, and literary characters to showcase chess pieces which are known as Queens, Kings, Bishops, and Pawns (World Chess Hall of Fame, 2019).

The chess playing project in this study, therefore, is designed to involve a series of weeks-long activities (which will be illustrated in later chapter) as playing games for young DLLS to abide to basic agreed-upon move rules of a chess game, but with extended symbolism and reflection of chessboard and piece sets. The fanciful characters they will play during the chess moves will maximize their pleasure, inspire their imagination and stimulate their motivation to explore the means and meanings of these activities within their native and English social origins.

3.3   Joyful "Third Space" Created by Family-involved Chess Playing Project

As can be noted, the chess playing project is designed to encourage active involvement of the dual language learners' parents in a series of playful activities. DLL families are valuable treasures and sources of home languages, cultural background as well as personal beliefs, values, and talents (Espinosa, 2015). Family engagement in ECE programs is believed to promote bilingual and biliteracy development (Espinosa, 2015) and positive academic achievement as well (Halgunseth, Jia, & Barbarin, 2013). When the project is implemented with the involvement of young DLLs' parents, chess playing activities will work as the medium to connect their home and school to create a "Third Space" for them to engage in their interactions across different linguistic and cultural contexts, as well as to inspire their interaction within the immediate environments with their parents, teachers and peers respectively. The "Third Space" created by the project will function as the productive hybrid cultural, mediational and navigational context for young DLLs to challenge the authority and dominance of English language and culture, transit across their first and second linguistic and cultural systems, and scaffold early bilingual and biliteracy practices.

3.3.1 Joyful "Third Space" for Challenging Privileged English Language and Culture

Young DLLs in the United States are offered English-only instruction when attending ECE programs (Espinosa et al., 2013) in which multiple behavioral and mental processes are involved during the developmental attainment of literacy and cultural identity (Weisner, 2015). The cultural values and identities they attained in their first language would be in conflict with those they are exposed to in English (Weisner, 2009), which of course are privileged and in the dominant place in the preschool settings. By encouraging parents to engage in their children's chess playing and other activities in their school settings, the diversity of families' languages and cultures, as well as their personal beliefs, values, and talents are incorporated into their English learning environments, which foster a respectful relationship between DLL families and schools. When all individuals' cultures and languages are respected and valued, young DLLs will have a safe and supporting context to bring their fund of first language and culture into conversation with that of English. With the help of their parents in their home languages in the school settings, DLL children can have the opportunity to find better lines to communicate and negotiate meanings with their teachers and peers while playing the chess game activities.

3.3.2 Joyful "Third Space" for Navigating Across Multi-lingual and Cultural Contexts

Young DLLs "have the potential to become fully bilingual" (Espinosa, 2015, p. 45) , continuing their home language and literacy development while learning the sounds of speech and features of English language if provided with sufficient exposure and interactions in both languages with adults and peers (Espinosa, 2015). When engaging in the procedural chess playing experiences with their native English-speaking peers, teachers and parents, the young DLLs are immersed in joyful input and interactions both in home and English languages and cultures. Such a comfortable environment helps activate the background knowledge of their home language and culture to facilitate their acquisition of English language and culture. The playing activities and interaction process make room for DLLs to find continuity and switch freely between the home and English languages and cultures and negotiate meaning, culture and identity. This intersecting room, i.e. "Third Space", allows dual language children to preserve and enhance their home linguistic and cultural development while acquiring the English language and culture. This learning journey with intentional support from both the home and English languages, according to Roessingh (2011), is aligned with communicative language teaching and constructivism and "particularly salient to the instructional needs" of young DLLs. It supports balanced bilingual development, helps affirm their identity in both languages and cultures and consequently enables them to benefit from the short and long-term positive dual language learning experiences.

3.3.3 Joyful "Third Space" for Scaffolding Bilingual and Biliteracy Practices

Young DLLs, when engaging in the family-involved collective chess playing activities, can learn from actively listening to and observing more knowledgeable peers and adults (parents and teachers) (Rogoff, Correa-Chávez, & Silva, 2009).

In exploration of the game rules with the scaffolding of more capable others (including other children, teachers and their parents) in the joyful environment or welcoming "Third Space", young DLL individuals can finally internalize some basic mathematical concepts of the game like rows, columns, and diagonals, and develop mathematical skills such as problem solving (Trinchero& Sala, 2016), critical thinking mind set, and social and emotional skills such as taking turns, self-control of impulse, negotiation and cooperation with others, appreciation and respect for the other players, and accountability for one's decisions. In addition, involving in this kind of collective leaning and play activities allows educators and parents to better understand their children's world and further activates these children' interactions with people within their immediate contexts of school and home respectively. For example, after playing the chess game together in the school, parents and children will have more shared topics to talk about during their dinner time and may explore ways to practice the moves better together. These benefits are bound to contribute to their future academic success.

3.4 Summary

The above illustrated organizational framework of joyful "Third Space" for young DLLs, by encouraging visible parents' involvement in school chess playing activities, invisibly connects DLLs' home and school settings as well as their first and English linguistic and cultural systems. It respects diversities of children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and thus nurtures their positive sense of self-concept like confidence, family pride, and positive cultural identities in the new learning environment. Ultimately, it will contribute to creating joyful "Third Space", both physical and conceptual learning and interaction settings in-between young DLLs' home and English languages and cultures to promote their cognitive, social and emotional development.

4   Implementation Procedures

The chess-playing project proposed in this study involves a series of chess-playing activities with the participation of children, parents and teachers to create a joyful environment to support young DLLs' language, literacy and identity development. To make it more feasible for DLL teachers to implement the project, the following specific procedures are recommended.

4.1 Project Duration

The project is designed to be implemented at least three weeks long and in repetitive cycles. Children's parents will be invited to take part in 5-10-minute chess playing activities during drop-off or pick-up time on Monday through Friday.

4.2 Project Settings

The settings for these activities could be the classroom, playground or any available space in the school as long as it is big enough to hold the participating children, parents and teachers and to lay a chessboard with 64 equal squares. Theses square are arranged in eight rows and eight columns, alternating the color of the squares (black and white) and enough to have a preschool child standing comfortably next to other players. These settings will be decorated with posters of chess cultures in children's home countries, America, or other countries either in English or their home languages to establish a warm and familiar environment for the young ELLs and their parents.

4.3 Project Content
4.3.1 Chess Pieces

In different sessions, parents and children create together prompts of the sixteen pieces of the chess: Eight pawns, two rooks, two knights, two bishops, one queen, and one king in white or light color and the same set in black or dark color. These pieces can be replaced by children's favorite cultural icons and cartoon figures.

4.3.2 Chess Moves

Along with learning the parts of the chessboard, parents and children learn the moves of the different pieces: Pawns move one square each turn. Knights move forward and sideways in form of the letter L. They are the only piece that can jump over other pieces. Rooks only move straight many squares. Bishops move diagonal only in their correspondent color. Queen can move straight and diagonal, many squares. Finally, King moves one square at the time in any direction.

4.4   Project Procedures

The project begins by getting parents and children warmed up and building up children's excitement about the chess-playing games.

4.4.1 Week One: Getting Parents and Children Warmed up

All families are invited to attend a meeting to be informed of the project and (if agreeing to participate) to make necessary preparations. The meeting can be arranged on Monday to announce the launching of the project. On the meeting, handouts or flyers will be distributed to give a brief introduction to this project's objectives, possible benefits, playing activities and lists of materials needed. After the meeting surveys will be conducted on children and parents respectively for their initial knowledge of chess, preferable time of the day to spend 5-10 minutes in an activity (drop off or pick up time), and an invitation will be extended to parents to share a quality time with their children in school. And children will be encouraged to share with their classmates in small groups about their knowledge and experiences concerning chess playing and to further exchange relevant chess-playing information and culture in their own countries with their parents at home.

Children will be instructed on Tuesday to Thursday to draw pictures to express their experiences of playing with their parents and their understanding of the chess playing project, do dictation about the drawings from Day 2 and prepare in small groups of invitation cards for their parents to participate in the project. Parents will come to prepare necessary materials to build the chess pieces, game board and other items, and decorate the chess-playing settings together with their children.

An opening ceremony of the project will be held on Friday, in which children will present their parents the invitation cards, their drawings and their dictation work to show their enthusiasm or enjoyment in working on an activity together with their parents.

The integration of the DLL families and their children in these preparatory activities will contribute to inspiring children's anticipation for the project and setting a welcoming environment for their learning and growing.

4.4.2 Week Two: Getting Started and Tasting Enjoyment

With all the preparation work done, the teacher will start the project on Monday of Week Two by explaining to parents and children the initial setup and game rules of the project based on the previous exchange and surveys. Children will be divided into two groups (white or black) and allowed to choose the roles they would like to play with the help of the teacher and their parents.

The teacher will lead them in the following weekdays to practice the movements on the board game together with their parents according to the basic rules of the roles they choose impersonate. Parents and children can be encouraged to practice the movements in an innovative way based on the fun choices such as walking, crawling, dancing, jumping, and so forth in rows, columns and diagonals. The teacher can display posters with the different moves for parents and children to practice the moves using the prompts created with this purpose at any spare time.

4.4.3 Week Three: Getting Immersed and Reaping Benefits

Once families learned at their own pace and enjoyed the learning process of moving the pieces, the teacher will conduct surveys on parents and children again for assessment and improvement of the project. Children and parents are encouraged to exchange their opinions and experiences with the teacher and other families in the school and come up with suggestions to optimize the designing or implementation of the project. They then will be invited to participate in another round of the game by switching groups of the "white" and the "black" and the roles they play in the group. They might be encouraged to come up with diversified forms of activities in the practice of the moves or learn fun songs about the moves and positions of the chess pieces in the board from free online resources.

5 Conclusions

Young DLLs are in badly need of physical and emotional support to develop emergent and literacy skills and to find their place in the new English-speaking settings. Intentional home and English language support brought by close integration of families and schools confers great benefits to them by creating a physical and conceptual "Third Space" for their cognitive, social and emotional development. The chess-playing project is just one of the practice models to involve parents in DLLs' school learning activities to facilitate their short-term and long-term growth.

More similar programs or models partnering with parents and families can be developed to diversify these children's dual language learning experiences and to ensure the cognitive and emotional support they need in their leaning journey.

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