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Alain Bengochea, Sabrina F. Sembianite, and Mileidis Gort

Attracting and Responding to an Audience: Preschoolers’ Multimodal Composing in Show-and-Tell Activity

Utilizing multimodal discourse perspectives, this study explored the multimodal resources that preschool children employed to convey their meaning making with peers and teachers in show-and-tell activity.

Today is show-and-tell day in Ms. Leticia’s English/Spanish dual-language preschool classroom. The children’s excitement grows as they gather and sit on the carpet, waiting for their chance to share the objects they have brought with them from home. Ms. Leticia calls on Guadalupe, a four-and-a-half-year-old boy who is fully dressed in a Spider-Man costume, mask included. Guadalupe jumps up and moves to stand in front of his peers, ready to begin his presentation.

“Hombre Araña, ¿cómo estás? [Spider Man, how are you?],” asks Ms. Leticia. Without speaking, Guadalupe begins to enact the role of a real-life Spider-Man, seeming surprised by his imagined transformation. He swiftly shifts his head to gaze to the right, then to the left, and then downward at his hands, raising them up as he stares at them, as if watching incredulously to what is happening to himself as he transforms.

Ms. Leticia persists: “Hombre Araña, respóndeme. Tienes que decir bien o mal. [Spider-Man, answer me. You have to say good or bad.]” Guadalupe unclenches his hands, and with his palms facing inward, slowly brings them down. Guadalupe’s dramatic acting makes it seem like he is experiencing trauma or pain. He then directs an intense gaze toward his peers in front of him.

“Hombre Araña, ¿quieres que llame al doctor? Llamemos un doctor [Spider-Man, do you want me to call the doctor? Let’s call a doctor],” says Ms. Leticia. “Está enfermo el Hombre Araña. [Spider-Man is sick.]”

During this episode, Guadalupe did eventually respond orally to Ms. Leticia, once he was satisfied with embodying his Spider-Man character using all of his extra-verbal resources. Ms. Leticia seemed taken aback, perhaps because in previous show-and-tell sessions, whether in English or Spanish, Guadalupe had been eager to talk about his objects. She went as far as to suggest calling a doctor because Guadalupe was not verbally responding to her.

In fact, Guadalupe’s multimodal enactment of Spider-Man’s transformation revealed a nuanced understanding of the character, and his choice to participate in show-and-tell using a range of resources outside of speech presents an important opportunity
for considering the role of children’s embodiment and multimodality in early childhood education (ECE) activities and teachers’ roles in supporting or engaging with these communicative means.

Validating multimodal discourse is a means of ensuring fluid communication, especially for preschool-age children who are emergent bilinguals. Our experience observing Ms. Leticia’s predominantly bilingual class over a period of six weeks, the results of which are the focus of this article, suggests that we might do well to reconsider expectations around particular ways of interacting in ECE, the centrality of speech in show-and-tell and other preschool activities, and the potential significance of extra-verbal modes of communication for children. Although the children in our study are Spanish-English emergent bilinguals, our primary objective is to understand how they synchronously employed all their multimodal resources rather than to focus on their oral language use alone.

Validating multimodal discourse is a means of ensuring fluid communication, especially for preschool-age children who are emergent bilinguals.

It is our hope that this article will shed further light on how emergent bilingual children’s multilingual learning and multimodal composition come into dialogue with each other in preschool. Whereas previous research on multimodal composing has focused on the (co)creation of digital products (e.g., by using multimedia and iPads; see Rowe & Miller, 2016), we broaden our scope to encompass all modes of communication that may underlie children’s literacy, including the messages they (co)construct using oral language and additional embodied forms of communication (e.g., gesturing, manipulating objects) in early learning activities.

In the sections below, we first review the pertinent literature centered on student-led learning in show-and-tell and multimodal composing in support of oracy, then discuss our theoretical framing of multimodal discourse as a form of literacy. Next we provide the background and context of our study and our data-gathering and analysis process. We then present our findings, focusing on the multimodal ways in which children responded to and performed for their show-and-tell audience. We conclude our article by reflecting on the practical implications of our findings.

Interactive, Student-led Learning through Show-and-Tell

In early childhood settings, teachers are charged with a dual role of providing direct instruction to help individual children meet academic outcomes as well as encouraging student-centered opportunities to explore and socially engage in productive dialogue and collaborations with peers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes et al., 2011; O’Connor & McCartney, 2007). One particular study by Booren, Downer, and Vitiello (2012) underscores the challenges teachers face in providing both direct instruction and student autonomy, to the possible detriment of both academic and social skills, during learning activities.

After observing children’s interactions with teachers, peers, and tasks across preschool activities in forty-four classrooms, Booren and colleagues found that teachers directed whole-group activities most of the time, whereas in more student-centered activities such as free play and meal time they were less apt to seize on potential learning moments. Results of the study suggest that teachers miss instructional opportunities when they are less engaged in student-centered activities and also miss opportunities to promote greater autonomy in teacher-directed, whole-group activities. Show-and-tell activities give teachers the opportunity to integrate and enhance child-directed opportunities within whole-group discussions that promote collaborative interactions with peers that advance their academic and social skills (Murphy, 2003).

Multimodal Composing in Support of Oracy

Oracy—children’s ability to express themselves fluently and grammatically—is critical for literacy development (Evans & Jones, 2007). For this reason, ECE teachers are encouraged to design opportunities for children to participate in extended oral
interactions that include both listening and speaking (Escamilla et al., 2014; Jacoby & Lesaux, 2014). Early childhood activities that increase children’s oral participation, such as show-and-tell, provide scaffolding for language as children use modal resources (e.g., manipulating objects, gesturing ideas) that have symbolic value, may be culturally relevant in the classroom, and may help to make emergent English and bilingual speakers’ ideas more comprehensible to others.

Show-and-tell activity can elicit high levels of symbolic thought from children as they engage in complex interactions with objects in goal-directed tasks (Kontos, Burchinal, Howes, Wisseh, & Galinsky, 2002; Kontos & Keyes, 1999). Children learn to describe features, explain functions, and recount events about their object while engaging their peers and teacher (Sembiance & Gort, 2015). As in other early literacy activities, it is particularly important to encourage students to lead conversations to enhance the relevance of issues discussed (Dovigo, 2016; Wiseman, 2011). The personal and interactive nature of this whole-group activity helps students to develop critical academic and social skills related to later achievement, such as asking and answering questions, supplying ideas and opinions, asking for explanations, evaluating peers’ ideas, and making (counter-)arguments (Dovigo, 2016; Webb & Palincsar, 1996). As children who multimodally communicate using visual aspects of their objects, actions, and verbal expression are also adhering to the purposes of show-and-tell, teachers should support them by acknowledging verbal and non-verbal contributions and validating children’s meaning-making strategies (Filipi, 2009).

Although there is limited research on the intersection between multilingual learning and multimodal composition for emergent multilingual children, especially in show-and-tell, several studies describe their affordances. Multimodal, early oracy, and literacy activities have been increasingly highlighted in research involving play (Bengochea, Sembiance, & Gort, 2018; Britsch, 2005; Dyson & Genishi, 2013; Ledin & Samuelsson, 2016; Long, Volk, & Gregory, 2007) and composing (e.g., writing, drawing, and narrating) with iPads (Rowe & Miller, 2016). For children who are growing up with more than one language, multimodal composition can validate their learning and invite their creative knowledge construction (Alvarez, 2018; Dyson & Genishi, 2013) while providing them with additional means of communicating their experiences (Alvarez, 2018). When composing multimodally, children have opportunities to strategically draw on multiple resources—actional, verbal, and visual—to make meaning, which benefits their learning (Duran, 2016). Research shows that emergent multilingual children demonstrate increased interest and engagement when given the freedom to combine modalities, such as by incorporating oral and visual modes of storytelling with written artifacts (Falchi, Axelrod, & Genishi, 2014).

Emergent bilingual children’s multimodal use was also found to differ when they interacted with peers versus teachers (Bengochea et al., 2018). Multimodally engaging with peers in play, the focal child made greater use of gestures and sound verbalizations and engaged with play objects following a fiction-based narrative, whereas his modal resources with his teachers followed reality-based ways of engaging verbally (e.g., describing conventional ways of using objects) and with his actions (e.g., manipulating items in typical ways). Similarly, the child engaged his verbal mode more flexibly with his peers in order to align with and mirror their language choices, fluidly using Spanish and/or English depending on their language preferences, whereas with his teachers he typically adhered to one language only. Although sociodramatic play represents one multimodal activity, Bengochea et al.’s (2018) study highlights how the affordances in both the environment and opportunities to differentially engage with varying play partners may shape students’ participation.

**Multimodal Discourse as a Form of Literacy**

The construct of multimodal discourse, or the ability for young children to draw from a variety of linguistic and environmental resources as well as use them strategically to express themselves, is helpful to educators in understanding children’s unique learning experiences, including those of students who
speak other languages (de la Piedra, 2006; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Wohlwend, 2011). Moving toward a multimodal perspective helps educators consider how learning produces and is produced by an expanded repertoire of resources (e.g., actional, visual, and verbal modes; see Wohlwend, 2011). Because monolingual and multilingual children communicate verbally at times as well as extra-verbally (e.g., gesturing, manipulating objects), recognizing the use of multiple modes of communication in learning activities may more wholly reveal their varying levels of expertise regarding content knowledge and ways of communicating. Thus, a multimodal-inclusive activity such as show-and-tell may better enable a child to fluidly communicate across multiple modes to add nuance to verbal statements while recounting experiences through the use of objects, actions, print, and images.

The idea that children advance conceptual understandings and communicative skills by integrating multiple modes, or resources, for meaning-making has been a cornerstone of research on multimodal composing within various literacy-related activities (Dallacqua, 2018; Duran, 2016). In this sense, multimodal composing recognizes children’s authoring as moving beyond oral and written production to a broader form of literacy encompassing all their verbal or extra-verbal creations and contributions. By validating and fostering the use of multiple modes, young learners who are developing oracy and other literacy-related skills may sustain their engagement and propel their learning by drawing on all their communicative means rather than solely conveying ideas through one mode, such as spoken or written language. Children develop different resources, including languages and symbol systems, that provide the basis for their entry into school practices (Dyson & Genishi, 2013).

**Background and Context**

Using the framing outlined above, we undertook a study to address the following research question: How do preschool-age emergent bilingual children engage their actional, visual, and verbal modes (inclusive of translanguaging practices) to compose their show-and-tell presentations?

Sunnyvale Early Childhood Education Center (pseudonym), a Spanish/English dual language bilingual education program, is located in a multilingual and multicultural community in South Florida and had been open for five years, serving children from birth to age six from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The surrounding community and county, described as “a de facto bilingual city” (McGuirk, 2004), is home to many recently-immigrated and established residents, a majority (74%) of whom speak a language other than English at home and 65% of whom speak Spanish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Residents in the community regularly engage in multilingual and multiliterate practices and print on a daily basis, interacting with or being exposed to different languages and cultures in a variety of community spaces (e.g., supermarkets, libraries, retail stores, coffee shops, local businesses).

Sunnyvale attempts to support the socioeconomic diversity of the surrounding community by offering 25% of its enrollment and tuition reduction to children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, 25% to children whose families could pay full tuition, and 50% of its enrollment capacity to families receiving county, state, and federally supported subsidies such as Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK), Head Start, and Early Head Start programs. The center also offers mixed-age preschool classes, with an average class size of sixteen children (in the 2012–2013 academic year) that comprises children between the ages of three and six. Lessons and activities alternated from English to Spanish on a weekly basis. Although teachers’ language designation and use was regulated by the school’s language policy (as either a Spanish- or English-speaking model), children were free to communicate flexibly, fluidly, or concurrently in Spanish or English during classroom activities, drawing from the range of their linguistic resources in their multilingual repertoires.

We became very familiar with Ms. Leticia and her preschool students during the two years that we spent observing and learning about Sunnyvale. Over the course of two-and-a-half years collecting data in the three preschool classrooms at Sunnyvale, we became involved in supporting the program goals.
around bilingualism and biliteracy by providing two end-of-year professional development sessions to all teachers at Sunnyvale. Although the preschool teachers recognized our research goals, two of us took on the role of observer as participant (Gold, 1958), keeping our direct involvement in the classroom at a minimum and instead capturing naturally occurring interactions through video recordings and field notes across multiple ECE activities.

We were interested in researching show-and-tell because it was one of the few ECE activities in which individual children, regardless of their language proficiency, were called on and had an opportunity to engage in a sustained interaction using their actions, objects, and talk to present personally meaningful artifacts. This multimodal-inclusive activity prompts children to explore the different purposes of their presentations, which can serve as a foundation for developing children’s academic discourses (Sembiante & Gort, 2015). This was also a routine weekly activity for children in these preschool classrooms both in the summer and during the regular academic year, ranging between twenty and thirty minutes in length.

During show-and-tell at Sunnyvale, children were directed to sit in a circle or together as a group on a carpeted, open-floor area where other large-group literacy activities usually took place (e.g., morning routine, read aloud). Ms. Leticia would call on children one at a time to orally present their items in front of peers (or next to her, if in a circle), asking each presenter facilitating questions. After each presentation, Ms. Leticia would ask the rest of the class for questions or comments about the presentation. Each presenter’s turn was between one and five minutes in length (including questions and discussion), depending on how much information children wanted to share.

### The Learning Community

Ms. Leticia, a Latina from Venezuela, was twenty-eight years old, held a four-year degree, and met certification requirements related to early childhood education. She had been in the United States for six years and had been working at the center for one year and two months at the time of the study. A fluent bilingual, she was a native speaker of Spanish and also spoke English.

We observed the show-and-tell presentations of nineteen children who were between three and five years old when we first began our observations. These children were also emergent bilinguals, with home languages that included Spanish (n=14); English (n=2); Portuguese and English (n=1); and Arabic, French, and English (n=2). Table 1 presents student demographic information, including age, home language(s), culture/ethnicity, and place of birth.

### Table 1. Demographic information for children in Ms. Leticia’s classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Home Language(s)</th>
<th>Culture/ Ethnicity</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Cuban/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Nicaraguan/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Cuban/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Cuban/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalupe</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Guatemalan/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Anglo-American/ White</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Arabic/French/English</td>
<td>Moroccan/ White</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Arabic/French/English</td>
<td>Moroccan/ White</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Cuban/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caterina</td>
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<td>Javier</td>
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<td>Cuban/ Hispanic</td>
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<td>Nicolas</td>
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<td>Dominican Republic/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Puerto Rican/ Hispanic</td>
<td>USA</td>
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</table>
Our Data Gathering and Analysis Process

We collected data on the show-and-tell activity in Ms. Leticia’s classroom during the center’s six-week summer program. In addition to our video-recorded observations, we wrote field notes to capture our thoughts and perceptions of children and teachers’ interactions in show-and-tell. Because we were interested in examining the multimodal ways in which children engaged with each other, we used Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2001) multimodal framework to help us identify and label the different modes of expression that children used. As we reviewed the video, we identified and coded the different modes children used during their presentations.

Subsequently, we analyzed children’s practices through the lens of multimodality to understand how they selected and creatively and fluidly combined multiple modes of communication (Wohlwend, 2008). Here, we looked at how children assembled their actional and visual modes along with their oracy-related practices and language choices, noting the interplay between these resources and how they matched with children’s communicative purposes. Table 2 provides more detail of the analytical multimodal framework that we employed. Two of us independently coded nineteen show-and-tell presentations, then compared and discussed our coding as critical friends (Schuck & Russell, 2005) by questioning and clarifying coding differences. We delineated the properties of recurring codes related to two overarching communicative purposes emerging in children’s show-and-tell—responding to versus performing for an audience—and identified excerpts that illustrate how modes were employed for these dual purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Framework for analyzing children’s multimodal composing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modality</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
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<td>Visual</td>
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<td>Actional</td>
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Our Findings

We found that children were strategic in the ways they used the range of their multiple modes to support and enhance their presentations, and in particular, to interact with peers. Even though children’s language preferences and choices varied (e.g., some preferred to engage monolingually in either Spanish or English, others fluidly in both languages), they all were creative and flexible in combining modes to make their presentations more compelling. Because Ms. Leticia showed flexibility in inviting peer interaction at any point in the presentation, children wielded their actional, verbal, and visual modes to both respond to audience members’ concerns and requests and draw their audience members’ attention.

Responding to Audience Members’ Concerns and Requests

In Ms. Leticia’s responsive show-and-tell space, where she sanctioned back-and-forth exchanges between presenters and their audience, we noticed that peers in the audience would regularly call out requests, concerns, or thoughts during the presentations. In these moments, presenters often did not exclusively use their verbal mode to acknowledge what the peers were saying, also relying heavily...
on actional and visual modes such as pointing out imagery inscribed in their objects. For instance, when one classmate asked a presenter, “Is it a piggy bank?,” rather than speaking, the presenter reacted by flipping over her ceramic cat figurine and removing its plug, showing that it was indeed a piggy bank. In another example, a peer asked a presenter, “Can I see the colors on the paper?” and the presenter held up and turned the paper she was holding so that the colors were visible to the audience. Presenters also reacted multimodally to the verbal directions of audience members, such as when a peer said, “He fell off the truck,” to alert a presenter that a figurine had fallen out of a toy truck. In response, the presenter reached over to pick up the figurine.

Below is an example of how one student, Melissa, used her verbal, visual, and actional modes innovatively to answer peers’ comments about the content of her book, *Narnia*.

[Melissa is seated on her knees next to the teacher. She is holding up the book so that it is open and facing the audience, and she is looking down at it from above.]

**Ms. Leticia [peering at the book Melissa is holding and briefly pointing at a picture in it]:** What is that? Is that a rat?

**Lucas:** No, it’s a mouse.

**Melissa [turning her head to look at the teacher, then redirects her gaze to the book]:** Yes.

**Isabella:** Yeah, it’s a rat. Yeah.

**Javi:** No, it’s a mouse.

**Ms. Leticia [looking at the image in the book]:** It’s a mouse?

**Lucas:** I remember the mouse’s name but—

**Paola [looking at Ms. Leticia]:** It’s a rat because rats have friends.

[Ms. Leticia and Melissa both look at Paola, who is sitting in front of them.]

**Ms. Leticia [laughing]:** Rats have friends, Paola?

**Melissa:** It is a rat because at the end, viste? [you see?] [Melissa flips through the pages of the book until she reaches the one she’s searching for and points at an image on it.]

**Ms. Leticia [looking at the image]:** Oh, ok.

In this example, Melissa entertained and countered her peers’ ideas using her multimodal resources, which ultimately helped her showcase evidence that resolved the discussion. Across her multiple exchanges with peers, Melissa employed both actional and visual modes by flipping through her book, which she had continuously displayed to the audience, and provided evidence by pointing to a picture to confirm a character’s identity as a rat. She pinpointed the character’s identity through multimodality, employing multiple languages (the Spanish word *viste*), actions (flipping through and pointing at the pages), and visuals (highlighting the illustration of the rat). Ms. Leticia also showed flexibility through follow-up questioning that allowed for peers’ extensive participation as well as Melissa’s multimodal use to emerge.

### Performing to Draw Audience Members’ Attention

Show-and-tell presenters also performed for and monitored the reactions of their audience by strategically coalescing their actional and visual modes with verbal modes. During these performances, children used their modes purposefully to elicit a response from the audience—or at a minimum, their undivided attention. When engaging in performance-like behaviors, presenters employed several modes to monitor their audience, carry out the performance or attention-drawing behavior, and observe the audience’s reaction in a cyclical process. These types of interactions differed in quality and nature from the usual types of interactions that constituted most presentations (e.g., awaiting peers’ contributions and contingently responding to them, as shown in Melissa’s presentation).

One example we observed was of Sabrina, who, while getting ready to present a set of bells, rather than verbally drawing attention to herself, forcefully dropped her bag full of bells in front of the audience to make a loud crashing sound. Peers in the audience exclaimed, “Ow!” in response, with
their full attention now directed to Sabrina as she set up for her presentation.

In the following example, presenter Adam engages with his light- and sound-making lantern to perform for his peers:

Adam [shifting his gaze as he speaks between the lantern, teacher, and audience]: This has a light, and it can say, “The darkness,” and it’s scary. And the mornings, they say [inaudible]. And the baby cries from the darkness. [Adam has now placed the lantern on the floor and is holding it and fiddling with it using both hands. The teacher looks back at him with a surprised look on her face, opening her mouth to indicate her surprise.]

Ms. Leticia [looking at Adam]: The baby. Only the babies. You are not afraid of the darkness.

[Adam leans over his lantern, which is still placed on the floor, and presses a button that elicits a spooky owl-hoot sound. As the sound plays, he looks back at the teacher to gauge her reaction. The teacher looks back at him with eyebrows raised and mouth open to indicate her surprise. She and Adam laugh as he directs his gaze back at the lantern and resituates it on the floor.]

Ms. Leticia [looking at the lamp]: That’s a funny lamp. That’s so cool.

[Adam again leans over his lantern and presses the button. This time, it plays the sound of a creaking door and crickets. He directs his gaze back at the audience. The teacher and all of the peers in the audience erupt in laughter.]

Javi: It made a fart! [referring to the creaking door noise sound.] [The class falls silent as Adam looks down at his lantern and pushes the button again. The lantern plays the sound of a wolf’s howl. Adam directs his gaze back at the audience.]

Ms. Leticia: Wow. What a toy.

Abraham: That was—that was a werewolf.

Javi: An elephant.

Ms. Leticia: And Adam, why do you like it so much?

Adam: Because, um, when I was three years old, I buy it from my— [A student in the audience, Bianca, knocks over a globe in the corner of the seating area, which lands with a loud bang. Everyone stops and looks over at her to see what happened.]

Ms. Leticia: Don’t worry, Bianca. Leave it there.

Bianca: Oopsie! Sorry! Sorry!

Ms. Leticia: It’s ok.

Lucas: It’s ok.

Ms. Leticia [to Lucas]: Crisscross applesauce. [The audience is restless, with students moving around. Some are still looking at Bianca, while others have directed their gazes away from Adam.]

Javi: Can I go to the bathroom?

[Adam leans over to press the lantern’s button again and looks back up at the audience. All the students quiet down and redirect their attention to Adam as they listen to the lantern play the sound of the creaking door. Some students laugh.] Adam’s inclusion of the lantern’s sound played an important role in his presentation in combination with his use of visual and verbal modes. He used it to capture his audience’s attention, both to entertain and to redirect attention after it had been lost. By employing his actional and visual modes strategically, he was able to engage the audience and elicit their reactions and comments about the toy (e.g., “That’s so cool,” “Wow. What a toy”) and the sounds (e.g., “It made a fart,” “That was a werewolf”). He used his verbal modes to discuss aspects of the lantern’s features and related circumstances and engaged his visual mode to monitor the audience’s attention and interest. He used his actional mode to elicit sound by pressing the lantern’s button, timing his actions to occur between the audience’s positive reactions. By directing his attention back to the audience after playing the lantern’s sound,
he was able to recognize and gauge their reaction. He was then purposeful in playing the sound again, maintaining audience interest and eliciting reactions and comments from peers. Adam also used this technique again, once Bianca knocked over the globe, to successfully re-engage the audience’s attention. This example represents a pattern that was found for other presenters, too, who were also mindful of their multimodal affordances and their toy’s capabilities to entertain and draw the attention of their audience.

Discussion and Conclusion
Children in Ms. Leticia’s classroom relied on their various communicative resources, or modes, to compose and even co-author their presentations. As the year progressed, we noticed that many of the interactions became more complex, especially as students learned the routines and purposes of show-and-tell. It was thus revealed that children in this classroom had learned how to both engage and respond to students using their available modal resources. They did so creatively, weaving a multiplicity of modes to respond, react, and interact authentically in their sharing process. Rather than finding a pattern in the modalities that were most present or co-occurring, we noted that children combined modes in ways that were unique to and maximized their goals of responding to and drawing the audience’s attention. Regardless of children’s English exposure or proficiency, they demonstrated a growing awareness of how to use their modes and conveyed complex ideas beyond their oral language use.

As a collaborative, whole-group activity, show-and-tell supports children’s multimodal composing and provides opportunities for oracy activities, such as verbally presenting objects, that are a precursor of literacy. Show-and-tell can provide a welcoming space for children’s use of multiple modes of expression, allowing for children’s holistic meaning-making, which is too often overlooked; actions (e.g., gesturing, facial expressions, movement) and/or use of visual resources (e.g., images, photographs, realia) may reveal skillful ways of presenting and constructing knowledge.

Like Ms. Leticia, teachers of young children should explore and value the multimodal ways to express ideas, honoring rather than dismissing their non-verbal communicative practices. As illustrated in our featured examples, we observed how these young preschoolers were multimodally responsive to their teacher’s and peers’ questioning, such as by justifying a character’s identity through the use of a book. We also saw how children entertained an audience and maintained engagement by accessing multiple modes, such as by sharing insider knowledge on how and when to use their object. These complex interactions were made possible by the multimodal nature of children’s presentations and by the efforts of Ms. Leticia, who supported dynamic interaction styles and activity formats and who patiently waited for presenters’ expertise to emerge.

As Crais, Watson, and Baranek (2009) have shown, it is crucial for teachers to enhance their understandings of children’s communicative skills and the cognitive abilities that may underlie them. Evaluating how young children communicate beyond their words can help us to better understand children’s academic and social development just as nonverbal modes of expression can help children better present what they intend on communicating to others (Kita, 2000; Mellgren & Gustafsson, 2011).

Ms. Leticia increasingly encouraged child-directed interactions during show-and-tell. Although she may have had a script in mind, such as the routines typical of show-and-tell presentations and questions she had planned to ask, she was flexible, letting the structure shift in accordance with children’s self-directed and collaborative goals. For teachers, determining when to step in and out of children’s show-and-tell is a perpetual work in progress, but the process can become clearer and easier to navigate, as we observed in Ms. Leticia’s classroom. When we recognize the strategic thinking behind children’s multimodal composing, we can enhance their learning by asking questions that are contingent on their verbal and non-verbal messages or prompting them to further explore other multimodal practices that may advance their conceptual and communicative skills. For instance, teachers may ask children to identify their objects’ visual features, verbalize sounds associated with their objects, or request that they move around the
room to showcase their objects and eliciting their peers’ verbal, actional, and visual communication.

Although we explored children’s composing in an oracy-centered activity, a multimodal approach to meaning-making can also be applied to literacy activities. For instance, in and beyond early childhood settings, students may multimodally present personal digital stories to their peers and teacher by relying on all their available modal resources as they manipulate or point to visual features, such as images and print they composed, on an iPad (Rowe & Miller, 2016) or on an interactive whiteboard (Smith, Higgins, Wall, & Miller, 2005). Consistent with Duran’s (2016) research, show-and-tell provides children with authentic contexts to communicate that may scaffold and extend their oral language production.

References


Alain Bengochea, Sabrina F. Sembiante, and Mileidis Gort

| ATTRACTING AND RESPONDING TO AN AUDIENCE |


Children love to put on skits for friends and family! They also enjoy sharing their favorite songs, dances, poems, and stories. In this activity, children incorporate these loves into a talent show, complete with costumes, props, and programs for the audience.

http://bit.ly/1s3svrM

Students develop scripts, perform, and use their voices to depict characters from texts, giving them the opportunity to develop fluency and further enhance comprehension of what they are reading.

http://bit.ly/2tD0SyK

Listening to a story is fun, especially Mother Goose stories like “The Farmer in the Dell” and “Little Miss Muffet.” Add even more fun by acting out the story after reading it. Work together to create a script and make costumes and props. Then invite others to watch and hear your story!

http://bit.ly/1P6gShb

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Alain Bengochea is an assistant professor in the College of Education at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He can be contacted at: alain.bengochea@unlv.edu. Sabrina Sembianite is an assistant professor in the College of Education at Florida Atlantic University. She can be contacted at: ssembiante@fau.edu. Mileidis Gort is a professor in the School of Education at University of Colorado, Boulder. She can be contacted at: mileidis.gort@colorado.edu.