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──────────── **Abstract** ────────────

This qualitative case study examines how five Chinese first graders responded to bilingual English/Chinese picture books and how bilingual books used during an eight-week study session impacted their bilingual and biliteracy development. Reader response and socio-cultural theories were the theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. Four bilingual picture books were selected for the five participating Chinese children to read during an eight-week period. The researchers specifically sought answers to two questions: (1) How do Chinese children respond to the bilingual books? (2) What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development? The findings suggested these children responded positively by becoming engaged, making connections, activating cultural and background knowledge, and showing unnoticed talent. In addition, bilingual books, combined with appropriate instruction, can be a powerful resource to promote bilingual and biliteracy development.

Exploring Bilingual Books with Five Chinese First Graders: Children's Responses and Biliteracy Development

Research has shown that high quality multicultural literature not only enhances children's awareness of diversity in the world, but also ensures a sense of belongingness when children of diverse cultural and language backgrounds see themselves represented (Reddish, 2000; Salas, Lucido, & Canales, 2001; Walker, Edwards, & Blacksell, 1996). As one type of multicultural literature, bilingual books have great potential in promoting bilingualism and biliteracy development (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003; Jeffers, 2009). A growing number of studies have examined how bilingual children respond to texts in their developing language—English (e.g., Colledge, 2005; Gregory, 1990; McGonigal & Arizpe, 2007). However, research that builds understanding on how bilingual children respond to bilingual children's books is scarce and under-developed. In addition, there is very little empirical evidence regarding how these books can be used instructionally to promote bilingual and biliteracy development. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First of all, we investigate how Chinese children who are learning English as a foreign language respond to bilingual English/Chinese children's books. Secondly, we explore how these books can be used to develop bilingualism and biliteracy. Reader response theories (Rosenblatt, 1938) and sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978) are the theoretical perspectives that underpin this study. This is the second phase of a large project on bilingual English/Chinese children's picture books. The first phase of the project focused on the examination of the quality of the bilingual picture books and has been completed. Based on the results from the first phase of the study, researchers selected four high quality bilingual picture books for the participating Chinese children to read. Researchers specifically sought answers to these two questions: (1) *How do Chinese children respond to the bilingual books?* (2) *What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development?*

Literature Review

High quality multicultural literature plays a critical role in promoting all children's awareness of diversity in the rapidly changing world (Reddish, 2000; Salas, Lucido, & Canales, 2001; Walker, Edwards, & Blacksell, 1996). Perkins and Mebert (2005) found that preschoolers who attend schools that adopt multicultural curriculum have less biased racial attitudes than those who attend schools that do not. Moreover, authentic multicultural literature is especially valuable for children from diverse cultural and linguistic background as they see their unique culture

being represented in a positive light. It also helps these children to bridge the gaps between school and home (Edwards & Walker, 1995), as a result, empowering them to cope with multiple, oftentimes conflicting, identities. Cummins's (1996) research on bilingual students has confirmed that strengthening a sense of belonging for culturally diverse students is not only "fundamental to the academic success" (p.2), but also critical "to thrive in the interdependent global society in which they will live" (p. 236).

Bilingual books are a type of multicultural literature. The bilingual books discussed in this study refer to the books that have two full versions of the texts. Research has shown the benefits of exposing children to bilingual books. Saldana (2009) found that the bilingual book club is a creative way to encourage young Latino readers to read and build a school-home connection. Bilingual books not only promote biliteracy for English Language Learners (ELLs), they are also valuable in fostering literacy in the mainstream classrooms (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003; Jeffers, 2009). "[T]he presence of books in other languages in the classroom library sends a clear message about the value of languages, scripts, and cultures in that classrooms" (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003, abstract).

Further, Kalia (2007) indicated that there are positive impacts on the second language development (e.g., oral language, narrative, and literacy development) among bilingual preschoolers who are exposed to books in the second language. Ample evidence from research has shown that academic and linguistic skills can be positively transferred from one language to another (Au, 1993; Cummins, 1991; Ovando & Collier, 1998). Therefore, bilingual books provide a rich, meaningful context to encourage more positive transfer of literacy skills from a stronger language to a newer language.

While research has recognized the importance of acknowledging multiple identities of diverse students (Chen, 2010; Cummins, 1996) as well as the positive effects of using multicultural literature in promoting bilingual and biliteracy development (Ernst-Slavit & Mulhern, 2003; Jeffers, 2009), there are very few empirical studies on the use of bilingual books with bilingual students. However, there is a growing body of studies looking at how culturally and linguistically diverse children respond to texts in English. Teachers' roles as to how their, or lack of, support, in engaging students' interactions with children's literature, is also considered along this line of research.

As for selecting criteria for children's literature to use in the classroom, Laycock (1998) suggested that well chosen children's literature, based on content,

prior background, picture, language, and format (e.g., bilingual or parallel versions), are able to provide additional support for culturally diverse children if used in carefully structured ways (p. 80-81). Gregory (1990) looked at the act of negotiation, defined as collaboration, between a teacher and a five-year-old Bangladeshi child in a British school while sharing books. She found that during the negotiation process, both the teacher and stories play significant roles in acculturating the child from minority cultural background in understanding literacy. Children's literature, in this case, becomes a spring board as it "... provides both the backcloth and support to the necessary structures of language and culture as well as being a forum for negotiation to take place" (Gregory, 1990, p. 112). Colledge's (2005) one year study examined how the five to six years old English/Bengali-speaking children responded to narrative picture books in English. Analysis of the children's responses has shown that "the books formed a bridge between the known and the culturally unfamiliar, giving the children access to an understanding of scenes from types of homes other than their own" (Colledge, 2005, p. 24). It was pointed out that these bilingual children's responses, limited by their less than perfect English, were often ignored by their teacher who emphasized heavily on the verbal text.

The national study in Scotland conducted by McGonigal and Arizpe (2007) analyzed how ethnic minority children made sense of a range of Scottish texts and pictures. Their study has shown that the unique features of picture books, together with a supportive environment, provide a rich and secure context for "emergent bi-culturate children" to construct meanings from unfamiliar elements and negotiate their evolving identities. "The interaction of teachers and pupils around a text can lead to a better understanding, for everyone involved, about how texts work within a particular cultural context and also about what readers bring from their own cultural backgrounds to the meaning-making process" (McGonigal & Arizpe, 2007, p. 43).

In summary, two common themes emerge from the above mentioned studies: (1) carefully selected children's literature creates a secure space for diverse children to bring in what they know and explore what is new; and (2) a supportive environment, typically nurtured through a teacher who acknowledges children's multiple identities and encourages their exploration, is beneficial in acculturating in the new culture and language.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives provide a framework for the study. First, reader response theories (Richards, 1929; Rosenblatt, 1938) take into account the reader's interaction with the text and the author; thus, what the reader brings to the reading process, for instance, prior knowledge, beliefs, feelings, and attitude, matters as much as the text. It is important to consider the role of the reader when considering how diverse children respond to bilingual children's literature because in this case, readers' background and cultural knowledge can be strikingly different than what is portrayed in the text. The meaning-making process is also a negotiation between the reader and the text as s/he engages in questioning, confirming, and reconstructing.

Second, sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) asserts that learning takes place in a social process and interactions among learners are critical in helping them construct meanings. Learners' interpretation of text is often negotiated and reconstructed through discussions with others. A social context, with the support from a teacher and peers, allows children to consider different perspectives and receive proper guidance when needed. Through rich discussions with the teacher and peers, children are scaffolded to discover new meanings and make meaningful connections to the text.

Methodology

This is a qualitative case study that examines how Chinese children respond to bilingual English/Chinese picture books and how bilingual books used during the 8-week study sessions impact their bilingual and biliteracy development. Five children who attend first grade in Beijing, China participated in the study. Data were collected during an eight-week period in an informal, out of school setting. Data sources included pre- and post-assessments, researchers' observation and tape recordings of the children' comments and discussions when they responded to these bilingual picture books, interviews with the children and their parents, and the children's work samples.

Research Setting and Participants

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Author Three, who is a university professor in Beijing, helped Author One locate four children who were his son's classmates living in same neighborhood to participate in the study. In order to provide these children with an environment that was different

from the traditional Chinese classroom setting, Author One and Three have decided to use the living room areas in Author Three's condo in Beijing. The researchers redecorated the area to make it a learning room with a big white board in front, safety mats on the floor to sit when teaching as a whole group, and small tables and chairs for the children when conducting individual activities.

The five participants (age 6.5 to 7 year old, first grade) included four boys, Bill, Jack, Michael, Tom and one girl, Alice (pseudonyms used in this study to protect children's confidentiality). All these children are Chinese, speaking Chinese as their native language. At school they have English classes four times in a week and all of them attended the Cambridge Children's English class once a week.

Book Selection Criteria

Findings from Phase 1 of the project indicated that there were a wide variety of English/Chinese bilingual picture books in terms of genre, theme, presentation format, and translation quality. Phase 1 of the project also suggested a list of criteria, including the qualification of author, illustrator, and translator, consistent format of illustration and texts, equal presentation of both languages in all places in bilingual books, cultural authenticity and appropriateness, and positive theme of promoting bilingualism and multiculturalism, for educators and caregivers to select high quality English/Chinese bilingual children's books. Based on the phase 1 findings, the following criteria were considered when selecting bilingual children's books: the book should be culturally relevant, close to students' life and be able to stimulate students' conversation, creativity, and imagination. Author One and Two selected three out of ten high quality English/Chinese bilingual books used in this study. The fourth book, Yeh-Hsien, does not belong to the high quality category due to stereotypical images; however, Author One and Two selected it because the story was culturally familiar to these children. The four books were in the order in which they were used.

Week 1 and 2: Tsai, I. Y. (2008). *Frog in the well*. Philadelphia, PA: CE Bilingual Books LLC.

> Content Summary: The Frog in The Well (井底之蛙) is a Chinese idiom, which is based on an old Chinese folklore. The story is about a frog that lives in a well. The frog is very content about himself, believing that he is the best and smartest creature alive. He is very satisfied with living in the well – his whole world. Then one day, he meets a Sea Turtle and learns that the world is much bigger than the well. The story teaches children that they

need to keep their minds open, and never believe that they have learned all they need to know.

Week 3 and 4: Casey, D. (2007). *Yeh-Hsien: a Chinese Cinderella.* London: Mantra Lingua Ltd.

> Content Summary: Similar to the Disney Cinderella story, Yeh-Hsien was the girl who lost her father and lived with her step-mother and two step-sisters. Befriended by a magical fish, Yeh-Hsien was granted her wish of going to the village festival to dance with the King, but she lost a golden shoe. Being recognized by trying the shoe on, Yeh-Hsien finally married the King and lived a happy life ever after.

Week 5 and 6: Genechten, G. V. (2006). *Floppy.* London: Mantra Lingua Ltd.

> Content Summary: Rabbits' ears are all straight and long except Floppy, who had one straight ear and one floppy ear. He tried all kinds of ways to make his floppy ear straight but the other rabbits just laughed at him more. After a visit to the doctor, Floppy and other rabbits finally realized that there is more than one way to be the same.

Week 7 and 8: Curtis C. (2008). *I took the moon for a walk.* London: Mantra Lingua Ltd.

> Content Summary: This was a little boy's magic adventure. He was taking a walk across a rural landscape with the moon besides him. He imagined that the moon and him tiptoed together, raced for the swings, and flied to the sky. Then the moon followed him home and stayed all night to keep him accompany during the sleep.

Bilingual Study Sessions

For eight weeks, Author One and Three worked with the five children every Friday afternoon for one hour and 30 minutes and all the sessions were digitally recorded. Author One and Three had different roles during the sessions. Author One served as the teacher and Author Three served as a silent observer and the note-taker. Two sessions were devoted to study one book: the first session was dominated by Chinese with some English teaching and the second session was dominated by English. Four instructional activities were usually conducted in the first session. First, Author One presented the book to these children and conducted picture walk asking them to comment on the books in Chinese. The comments included making predictions about the book, talking about illustrations, and making personal connections and relating to children's background knowledge. Second, Author One asked the children to construct a story in Chinese based on their understanding

of the book after free commenting. Third, Author 1 read aloud the Chinese texts in the book and asked the children to comment on their versions of the story and the author's story. Finally, Author 1 taught the children the key vocabulary words in both Chinese and English. When teaching Chinese, Author 1 wrote the Chinese characters on board and required the children to read aloud to facilitate memorization. When teaching English, Author 1 focused on word pronunciation and spelling (letter-sound relationship). The recording of the session was transcribed immediately after.

In session two of the following week, the same book was used, but the major content was presented in English. Six instructional activities were usually conducted in this second session. First, Author One read aloud the story, first time in Chinese and then in English. Second, Author One reviewed the key words in English using flash cards. Third, Author One asked the children to use five to six sentences to orally summarize the story in Chinese, then with Author One's help, children were asked to translate the sentences to English. Fourth, Author One wrote the key sentences in English on board and echo read with the children for multiple times. Fifth, Author One dictated selected key words and the children were encouraged to spell out the word as best as they could. Lastly, the children were asked to write these sentences in their notebooks to practice read aloud at home.

Pre- and Post-Assessments in the first and last session

Several assessments were conducted in the first and last sessions. The purpose of the pre-assessments in the first session was to obtain a general idea about each child's English level. Three assessments were administrated in the first session: (1) Hu-Li 2010 pre-assessment questions (Appendix A) developed by Author One and Three based on children's English textbook used in China, (2) reading the pre-primer and primer level words from the Dolch/Fry combined wordlist (Appendix B) (Hu & Commeyras, 2008), and (3) invented spelling of ten words selected from the pre-primer and primer level wordlist.

The purpose of the post-assessments was to measure the language and literacy growth of these children. Three assessments were administered: (1) rereading the pre-primer and primer level words from the Dolch/Fry combined wordlist, (2) invented spelling of 20 words the children learned during the eight-week long study sessions, (3) the reading of four sentences these children (one from each book) have learned during the eight-week long study sessions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Selected sentences for running record*

Oral Storytelling in Chinese	English translation provided by Author 1
1. 一只青蛙在跳，它跳得很高。	1. A frog is jumping, way up high.
2. 王冠掉到水里，找不着了。	2. He dropped his crown and cannot find it.
3. 然后，它跳得很高，到水里去捡它的王冠。	3. Then he jumped into water to find his crown.
4. 青蛙找到它的王冠了，它很快乐。	4. He found it and he is very happy.
5. 青蛙爬到石头上去捉虫子。	5. He climbed to a stone to catch a fry.
6. 它弹着吉他唱着歌。	6. He played his guitar and sang a song.
7. 一只乌龟来了，它看见一口井	7. A turtle came and saw a well.
8. 它和青蛙讲话。	8. He talked to the frog.
9. 乌龟在水里游，还有好多鱼虾，螃蟹。	9. The turtle is swimming with lots of fish, shrimps, and crabs.
10. 青蛙跳上来了，王冠又掉了。	10. The frog jumped up and his crown fell again.
11. 青蛙特伤心，然后就到草丛了，低下头。	11. The frog is so sad. He jumped to the grass and bowed his head.

Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple data sources were used in order to enhance the credibility of the study. Data collection included eight weeks of study sessions, informal interviews/ chatting with children throughout, interview with parents at the end of the eight-week study session, and the pre- and post-assessments. Data analysis was directed by the two research questions: (1) *How do Chinese children respond to the bilingual books?* (2) *What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development?* In order to answer the first question, the authors read through Author Three's notes and the transcriptions of children's free comments toward each book, children's constructed stories, and the conversation Author One conducted with both the children and parents carefully to look for patterns and themes. The authors coded by themselves first and then shared their codes with each other to look for consensus.

The second research question was broken into two parts during data analysis: English language and literacy development, and Chinese language and literacy development. To report children's English language and literacy development, descriptive statistics were obtained from the pre- and post-assessments, children's invented spelling from the first and last sessions were compared, and running record and miscue analysis were conducted on their reading of the four sentences. In order to report children's Chinese language and literacy development, their oral telling of the stories over the eight sessions were analyzed. The total words used in each storytelling were calculated and story plots were also examined.

Results

How do Chinese children respond to these bilingual books?

Results suggested that these Chinese children had the following responses to the bilingual books: becoming engaged, making connections, activating cultural and background knowledge, and showing unnoticed talent.

Becoming engaged. Researchers have noticed children's eagerness and interest to be engaged in the book. When Author One presented the book to the children to do a picture walk and ask for their comments, all of them eagerly started to share their thoughts. Author Three wrote in his notebook, "Children got too excited to talk. Teacher has to stop to talk about class management issues to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak". These children also enjoyed the opportunity to make up a story themselves rather than just reading the story. When asked to compare their version of the story with the story in the book, one child said: "I like my story better because I like it my way." Another child also said: "I like Jack's story the most because in his story, the frog and the turtle become good friends...It ended nicely" (Field notes, April 9, 2010; Translation provided by the authors from Chinese to English).

The parents also mentioned positive changes in their children. One mother mentioned that her son was always willing to tell her what he did during the session on their way home. Her son was excited to tell her the story he made up and the story in the book. Afterwards, her son asked her which version of the story she liked the most. Another parent observed a few sessions and said that her son was like a different person in this class compared with his behavior in the regular English classes at school. She said,

He was never like this in an English class. I always told him that he needs to speak more often and answer the teacher's question, but he is just a quiet child. That is why his teacher thought that he is a shy boy. But actually he is really not. I am surprised to see that he has SO much to say and want to say it. He even volunteered to read the English sentences (Bill's Mom, personal communication, April 16, 2010; translation provided by the authors).

Making connections. During the study sessions, these children offered all kinds of comments and opinions on the books. Children were asked to make predictions when doing a picture walk, comment on the illustrations and texts (including the text in the book and different versions of the text made up by all children). Researchers noticed that the content of children's conversation centered on relating the books to themselves, to each other's texts, and to the world they know.

Text-to-Self Connection. When reading the book Floppy, these children had the following conversation.

> Michael: Floppy is different from others.
>
> Bill: We are all different.
>
> Alice: No one likes Floppy at first, then they all like him
>   because he made them laugh.
>
> Michael: But he is sad when others did not like him...
>
> Jack: I would be sad too if my friends do not like me.
>
> Bill: We all need to be nice to other people,
>
> Tom: Even people who are different from us.
>
> Alice: I like everyone in our class...
>
> Jack: but your best friend is me...
>
> Alice: But I still like other classmates
>
> (Field notes, April 30, 2010).

In this conversation, the children associated Floppy with themselves. They understood that they were all different from each other and they needed to be nice to others regardless of the differences.

Text-to-Text Connection. When working on the book Yeh-Hsien, the children compared Alice's version of the story with the texts in the book.

> Jack: The text said the old man, but Alice said Grandpa Wind. I
>   like Alice's story better.

> Michael: I like her story too. I like Grandpa Wind.
>
> Author 1: Why you all think Grandpa Wind is better than The Old Man?
>
> Jack: Because Grandpa Wind sounds much nicer.
>
> Bill: Because an old man should be called Grandpa.
>
> Tom: Grandpa Wind made the story sound more beautiful.
>
> Michael: (looking at and pointing to the illustration) Because he is Grandpa Wind, he is the wind, coming from the sky.
>
> Alice: I read other stories and they used Grandpa Wind. I like it.
>
> (Field notes, April 23, 2010).

In this conversation, the children commented on Alice's description of an old man coming from the sky. It is this old man who told Yeh-Hsien that her step-mother killed her best friend, the little red fish, and the bones of the fish contain powerful magic that could get Yeh-Hsien whatever she wished for. Different from the texts which stated "the old man", Alice used a more personified title "Grandpa Wind" in her telling of the story. Alice associated her use of the title with other books she read to make text-to-text connection. Other children, however, compared Alice's title with the author's texts and explained reasons of their preference. Even though not said directly, Jack and Tom's reasons seemed to imply that Grandpa Wind had made the story more personified and alive. Bill stated a reason of common sense which also bears the cultural phenomenon in it. In China, Grandpa, Grandma, Aunt and Uncle are general titles that children use to address elders, even strangers. Michael's reason came from the illustration. To him, an old man coming from the wind was Grandpa Wind.

   Text-to-World Connection. Children also made text-to-world connection when they talked about the book Floppy.

> Bill: Floppy was not his name.
>
> Jack: No, it was the nickname others gave him, so they can make fun of his floppy ear.
>
> Michael: It is not good to call others by their nickname.
>
> Alice: No, our teacher told us that we should not do so. It will hurt others' feeling.
>
> Michael: And it is very rude to do that
>
> (Field notes, May 7, 2010).

In this conversation, the children talked about the issue of giving nicknames to others based on Floppy. Considering the children's age and the content of the book, the children in this conversation have related the book knowledge to a worldwide issue that they are familiar with. We do have to admit, though, that among all the three types of connections these children had least conversations about relating the text to the world.

Activating cultural and background knowledge. All these children enjoyed the opportunities to have book discussions and they applied their cultural and background knowledge into discussions. The story of Yeh-Hsien is considered as the Chinese Cinderella story and is very similar to the Disney version Cinderella. However, none of the researchers and parents (all Chinese nationals) were aware that there is a Cinderella story in Chinese as well as the children. They were not aware that there was a Chinese version Cinderella story, but they were excited reading the book and did a lot of comparison with the most popular Disney version Cinderella.

The children talked about the pretty dresses illustrated in the book; however, they felt the illustrations of the people in the book looked ugly. Alice said: "Cinderella should be pretty, but she is ugly in this book. Her clothes are pretty – it is made of feathers." Jack commented: "the people in Cinderella all look different. But in this book she (Yeh-Hsien) looks the same as her two sisters. They are not pretty at all." Michael then added: "The prince is not handsome either!" Alice further showed her opinion saying: "No, they should draw a pretty Cinderella and Prince" (Field notes, April 16, 2010).

Children also had a conversation comparing the story plots of Yeh-Hsien to Cinderella.

> Bill: In this story, the King asked his servants to leave the gold shoe on the street. He did not come to Yeh-Hsien's home.
>
> Alice: Yes, because he wants to see if Yeh-Hsien would come to claim it.
>
> Tom: Cinderella lost a shoe that is made of crystal.
>
> Alice: Yes, but Yeh-Hsien's shoes are made of gold. I like crystal shoes.
>
> Jack: The shoe made of gold will get lost easily.
>
> Alice: Cinderella's two stepsisters also tried the shoes on, but Yeh-Hsien's stepsisters did not
>
> (Field notes, April 16, 2010).

It is very obvious that all these children were very familiar with the story of Cinderella. Even though this is not part of the Chinese culture, Cinderella is part of their background knowledge. The children used this background knowledge in reading the story about Yeh-Hsien and constantly compared this new version with the Cinderella they knew.

Another incident was reading without the support of cultural and background knowledge. The *frog in the well* is a well-known Chinese idiom, suggesting the tunnel vision of the frog; however, to everyone's surprise, none of these children were familiar with the idiom or story. Hence, children constructed a very different frog in the well stories. For examples, Jack's story was about how the little happy frog lost his crown, hence, he asked his friends, such as the sea turtle, butterflies, and birds to help him getting the crown. Bill's story was about the little frog making friends with birds, rabbits, and the sea turtle. Then he invited them to come to the well, so they could play together.

Showing unnoticed talent. The study sessions using bilingual books were very different from the regular English classes or extracurricular English classes. In these sessions, children got the opportunities to be authors – something they have never done in the past. According to Alice, it has always been her mother or teacher who read a story to her. She was never given the chance to construct a story on her own when reading books. Tom also said that he enjoyed hearing all the different versions of the story from his classmates. They were not the published story, but they were stories from people/friends he knew. Among all the children, Jack was the one who had a great sense of humor and liked to make all the stories humorous. He liked being the author because he wanted people to laugh when they read his stories.

The parents also reported that they have discovered some new talents of their children. At the beginning of the session when Author One chatted with the parents about their children's creative writing skills, they stated: "My child does not know what to write," "Not good with composition," "His teacher said that he is going to need individual tutoring sessions on writing" (Field notes, April 2, 2010). However, at the end of the sessions when Author One presented their children's own stories to the parents, they commented: "WOW, is this his story?" "I cannot believe that he has this much to tell," "Look at her use of phrases, it is full of creativity!" "I think I will do similar things at home for him in the future" (Field notes, May 28, 2010).

What impact do the bilingual book study sessions have on children's bilingual and biliteracy development?

English language and literacy development. The children's English language and literacy development was reflected in three aspects: an increase in the number of indentified words from Dolch-Fry combined wordlist, the development of invented spelling, and the use of graphophonic cues in reading.

Word identification. In the first session, these children were asked to read the pre-primer and primer level words on the Dolch-Fry combined wordlist and they scored an average of 28.6% and 9.2% respectively. In the last session, the same assessment was administered again and the children scored the average of 56.6% and 36.4% with an increase of 28% and 27.2% respectively on reading pre-primer and primer level words (Table 1).

Table 1. Pre- and Post- Reading of the Dolch-Fry Combined Wordlist

	Preprimer level words (35 words total)		Primer level words (39 words total)	
	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test
Alice	10/35 = 29%	15/35 = 43%	5/39 = 13%	8/39 = 21%
Bill	6/35 = 17%	18/35 = 51%	8/39 = 21%	15/39 = 38%
Jack	18/35 = 51%	30/35 = 86%	6/39 = 15%	20/39 = 51%
Michael	9/35 = 26%	20/35 = 57%	6/39 = 15%	17/39 = 44%
Tom	7/35 = 20%	16/35 = 46%	3/39 = 8%	11/39 = 28%
Average	28.6%	56.6%	9.2%	36.4%

Invented spelling. Invented spelling was a process that was unfamiliar to all these participants. As strong believers who attach ultimate importance to accuracy, teachers and parents in China do not promote the idea of using invented spelling. Several parents mentioned their confusion and doubts about invented spelling at the beginning and had comments, such as "if you let them invent the spelling, how can they learn the correct spelling?" "I don't think that will work because they will remember their wrong spelling rather than the correct spelling." "They should not invent the spelling of an English word. They should memorize the correct spelling" (Filed notes, April 2, 2010).

The children had never used invented spelling prior to the sessions. When Author One dictated 10 selected words from the Dolch/Fry combined wordlist, they only wrote down the words they knew how to write correctly and refused to try invented spelling of unknown words at first. After Author One repeatedly explained that there was no problem to spell a word wrong and she just wanted them

to try to write down what they heard, only one child (Jack) tried invented spelling of all the words. Table 2 presented the results of the five children's invented spelling in week one. Invented spelling was the one activity that the children did in each session. Author One had constantly encouraged them to spell out the word based on what they heard. Toward the end of the session, all the children were familiar with this practice and had demonstrated growth in the frequency of using invented spelling and the accuracy of sound-letter relationship in the first and last letter in words (Table 3).

Table 2. *Invented Spelling in Week 1*

	Alice	Bill	Jack	Michael	Tom
and	and	end	and	-	and
away	-	-	awei	-	-
can	-	-	ken	-	can
come	-	-	km	-	come
big	big	big	big	big	big
look	-	-	look	look	look
must	-	-	mst	-	mast
all	-	-	ou	-	-
play	pla	-	play	p	play
help	-	-	aip	p	help

Table 3. *Selected Sample of Invented Spelling in Week 8*

	Alice	Bill	Jack	Michael	Tom
frog	frog	frog	frog	fog	frog
well	wall	wol	well	vo	weill
come	cm	come	come	com	come
sea	si	sad	sea	ci	see
kind	kand	kd	kid	cd	kand
like	lik	laik	like	k	like
poor	p	pr	per	p	pur

	Alice	Bill	Jack	Michael	Tom
follow	fo	faolou	flow	fl	folo

In comparison with Table 2 in which only Jack and Tom used invented spelling on a few English words, Table 3 presents all the five children's attempt of invented spelling of the eight English words. In addition, their accurate spellings of the beginning and ending letter of the words evidently reveal the children's development of the English sound-letter relationship to some extent.

The parents (Author Three included) were all surprised and content to see the growth of their children's spelling development. Author Three commented: "This is really a good way to help Jack to achieve correct spelling gradually." Another parent said: "I think this is much better than asking them to spend all their time memorizing correct spelling of words. This gives them chances to explore and then they can get it themselves" (Alice's Mom, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

Graphophonic cues. At the last session, each child was asked to read aloud four sentences (Figure 1) while Author One took running record of their reading. The children made a total of 13 miscues, four repetitions, and three self-corrections. Analysis of the 13 miscues (Table 4) suggested that the children were using mostly the graphophonic cues in reading. The mispronounced words all had similar beginning or ending letters compared with the text words and this has further suggested these children's development in the letter-sound relationship.

Table 4. *Analysis Results of the 13 Miscues*

Text says	Child says	Graphically similar?			Syntactically similar?	Semantically similar?
		B	M	E		
sea	sai	yes				
told	tood	yes		yes		
very	viri	yes				
wide	window	yes				
they	the	yes				
fell	fall	yes		yes		
love	long	yes				
lived	live	yes			yes	yes

Text says	Child says	Graphically similar?			Syntactically similar?	Semantically similar?
		B	M	E		
tried	told	yes		yes		
kinds	kind	yes			yes	yes
ways	walls	yes				
followed	flowed	yes		yes		
forest	frost	yes		yes		

Chinese language and literacy development. During the eight-week long study sessions, the children were given opportunities to be authors, something they have never experienced in the past. These children's language and literacy growth was mainly reflected in the language they used during oral storytelling, such as longer stories, more complex, attractive and creative story plots, and lots of conversations. In addition, several children also used Pinyin, the sound representations for Chinese characters, in their writing of Chinese.

Longer stories. Comparing children's storytelling of each book from the first session to the last, the most noticeable characteristic was that they had longer stories in latter sessions. The authors averaged the number of characters each child used in the storytelling of each book and results suggested a definite growth in the use of total characters. The average numbers of total characters used in storytelling of the books were 132 characters for book 1, 293 characters for book 2, 425 characters for book 3, and 522 characters for book 4.

Complex, attractive and creative story plots. Another growth of these children's storytelling in Chinese was having complex and creative story plots. At the first few sessions, children used mostly just one sentence describing each illustration. Instead of telling a story, they were, in fact, describing what they saw in each illustration. There were weak story plots, such as unclear problem, missing the high point or solutions (Figure 2). The children's storytelling in later sessions, however, has demonstrated major improvements. They used more sentences describing each illustration and their stories had clear and complex story plots. For example, Figure 3 presented the story plot of one child's story telling of *Floppy*.

Figure 2. Bill's oral storytelling of Frog in the Well *in week 2 (translation provided by author 1).*

problem	One of Floppy's ears was not straight. It was floppy. So Floppy's friends in school laughed at him. Floppy wanted to fix his floppy ear to be just like other rabbits.
roadblocks	Floppy tried all kinds of ways to make his ear straight; however, none of these ways worked.
the high point	One of his ears was still floppy, and all his friends were still laughing at him. Floppy was so sad. He hid in the wood, felt so lonely and cried so hard.
solution	Floppy went to see a doctor and learned that ears come in all shapes. Floppy was no longer sad and his friends missed him when he was gone. So all Floppy's friends decided to fold one of their ears to be just like Floppy.

Figure 3. Story plot of Floppy.

Jack's Oral Storytelling in Chinese	Chinese texts in the Book
1. 傍晚的时候，我去散步。回头一看月亮正跟着我。	1. 昨夜我和月亮一起散步了。月亮就像一只大风筝似得跟在我的身后。
2. 我问月亮："月亮，月亮，你跟着我干吗呀？"月亮说: "我要和你一起散步。"我问月亮："你怎麼跟着我啊？我拉不住你。"可月亮还是跟着我。	2. 尽管没有任何线牵着月亮。当我和月亮一起散步的时候。
3. 我走在森林的小路上，拿着一个手电筒我一开手电，照到了猫头鹰。猫头鹰不怕我，可其它的小动物不知道是手电筒，为是猎枪呢，都四处逃窜，鸡飞狗跳的月亮也吓得躲了起来。	3. 我还带着我的蓝色手电筒以防万一，月亮却被吓得藏起了它的脸，
4. 我来到了牧场。三头牛哞哞的叫着。我到月亮跟我，这才放心。然后，这三牛看到天色晚了，月亮出来了，就回屋觉去了。	4. 但是月亮却透过淡淡的云朵偷偷地注视我。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，
5. 后来又到了教堂前，房顶的尖戳了月亮屁股一下,月亮就不小心把鞋弄掉了。	5. 我告诉月亮要升得高一点，这样月亮就不会被教堂的屋顶钩住了。
6. 我跑过去，把月亮的鞋捡了起来。有好狗都看着月亮。	6. 邻居家的狗 的叫声像火车的汽笛一样。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，
7. 我捡到鞋以后赶快叫月亮下来。	7. 我们小心翼翼地踮着脚走过小昆虫睡觉的草丛。当所有红腹知更鸟都去睡觉的时候，
8. 月亮下来了，我给它穿上鞋。	8. 月亮叫来了一滴滴像眼泪似的露珠落在青草上。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，

Jack's Oral Storytelling in Chinese	Chinese texts in the Book
9. 然后，月亮又飞起来了。	9. 我们比赛荡秋千，看看谁的脚更高，我还想象着月亮是如何叫我像它一样飞起来。
10. 我又叫月亮下来。月亮下来以后，我说："咱们荡秋千吧。" 月亮说："我没有秋千啊。" 我说："你在空中，我拉着你一起荡秋千。"	10. 我们手拉着手飞过布满星星的夜空。当我和月亮一起散步的时候，
11. 后来，我拉着拉着，没拉住，月亮带着我就飞上天了。	11. 我们跳着舞穿过了静静流淌的小河，穿过了小桥。月亮高悬在天空，美丽的剪影倒映在水中。
12. 我们飞到一个小桥上，月亮高兴地说："看，水里还有一个月亮。"	12. 柔和的月光笼罩着我的全身，当我和月亮一起散步的时候。
13. 我摸着水，一边摸，一边告诉月亮："这是你的倒影，不是另外一个月亮。"	13. 当我们回去的时候，月亮一直都静静地陪在我的左右。月亮和我回到了家中，整晚不曾离去。
14. 我要回家休息了。月亮紧跟着我，和我说："你能不能把床搬到外边，我们一起睡。" 我说："行啊。"	14. 月亮还说谢谢我与它分享这么甜蜜的夜晚，当我和月亮一起散步的时候。
15. 然后，我就和月亮一起睡了一整个晚上。	

Figure 4. *Jack's storytelling of* I took the Moon for a walk *in week 8 (translation provided by Author 1) in comparison to the texts in Chinese and English.*

English Translation provided by Author 1 based on Jack's storytelling	English texts in the Book
1. In the early evening, I went for a walk.	1. I took the Moon for a walk last night. It followed behind like a still summer kite.
2. I turned and saw the Moon was following me. I asked: "Moon, Moon, why you are following me?" The Moon said: "I want to go with you." I asked the Moon: "How can you follow? I can not hold you?" But the Moon insisted to follow me.	2. Though there wasn't a string or a tail in sight when I took the Moon for a walk.
3. I walked to a little road in the forest with a torch. As soon as I turned on the torch, I saw an owl. The owl was not afraid of the light, but all other animals did not know it was the torch. They thought that I had a gun, so they all escaped. The Moon was afraid too and tried to hide.	3. I carried my blue torch just in case the Moon got scared and hid its face.

English Translation provided by Author 1 based on Jack's storytelling	English texts in the Book
4. I walked to the farm. Three cows mooed and mooed. I saw the Moon was still following me, so I am relieved. Then the cows saw that it was getting late, the Moon was already out, so they went home to sleep.	4. But it peeked through clouds there were fragile as lace when I took the Moon for a walk.
5. I walked to the church. The tall spire stamped the Moon's button, so the Moon dropped his shoe.	5. I warned the Moon to rise a bit higher so it wouldn't get hooked on a church's tall spire.
6. I ran and picked up the shoe. There were many dogs watching the Moon.	6. While the neighbourhood dogs made a train-whistle choir when I took the Moon for a walk.
7. I asked the Moon to come down after I picked up his shoe.	7. We tiptoed through grass where the night crawlers creep when the rust-bellied robins have all gone to sleep.
8. The Moon came down and I put his shoe back on him.	8. And the Moon called the dew so the grass seemed to weep when I took the Moon for a walk.
9. Then the Moon flew up again.	9. We raced for the swings, where I kicked my feet high and imagined the Moon had just asked me to fly.
10. I asked the Moon to come down again. Once he was down, I said: "let's play the swing." The Moon said: "I don't have one." I said: "you are in the sky. You hold my hands and we swing together."	10. Hand holding hand through the starry night sky when I took the Moon for a walk.
11. I did not hold fast enough, so the Moon took me to fly.	11. We danced cross the bridge where the smooth waters flow. The Moon was above and the Moon was below.
12. We flew to a bridge. The Moon said happily: "Look, there is another Moon in the water."	12. And bright in between them I echoed in their glow when I took the Moon for a walk.
13. I touched the water and said: "This is your reflection, not another Moon."	13. Then as we turned back, the Moon kept me in sight. It followed me home and stayed there all night.
14. I wanted to go home to rest. The Moon followed me, and said: "Can you move your bed out so we can sleep together?" I said: "of course".	14. And thanked me by sharing its sweet sleepy light when I took the Moon for a walk.
15. Then I slept with the Moon together for the whole night.	

Some children also demonstrated creativity in their storytelling. For examples, in Alice's storytelling of Yeh-Hsien, she referred to the old man from the sky as Grandpa Wind. This personified title for the old man from the sky was both creative and attractive. In addition, one child's story of the last book — *I took the Moon for a walk* was creative in many ways in comparison to the texts. Figure 4 provided Jack's storytelling in Chinese (English translation provided by the authors), the Chinese texts, and English texts. It was evident to see that Jack's story was more creative compared with the original texts. For instances, for sentence number three, Jack talked about not only the Moon, but other animals in the illustration to create a plot; for sentence number five, Jack thought that the reason of the Moon dropping one of his shoes was because the tall spire stamped his button.

The use of conversations. Another distinguishing characteristic of children's Chinese language improvement was the use of conversations in storytelling. When *The Frog in the Well* was introduced in the first couple of weeks, these children constructed different stories, but none of the stories contained any conversation among the characters. Two children's stories of the second book *Yeh-Hsien* had one conversation: Yeh-Hsien's conversation with the little red fish and with the Grandpa Wind. When using the third book, *Floppy*, all children except one included conversations in their storytelling, and by the end of the session with the last book, *I took the Moon for a walk*, everyone used conversations between characters in their story telling.

The use of Pinyin in writing. Because exploring the development of their writing in Chinese was not the purpose of this study, children were only asked to orally tell the story which was transcribed by the authors. No assessments were done to evaluate their Chinese writing and no activities were conducted to improve their writing in Chinese. Some of the parents, however, reported that their children were so involved in the story, they started illustrating and writing about the stories they constructed at home. The parents also brought their children's illustrations and writing samples. From these illustrations, the authors found that these children used Pinyin, the system used for transliteration of Chinese using a romanized alphabet, for the unknown characters (Appendix C). One parent explained this by saying,

> In the past, she wouldn't write it out if she did not know how to write the character. She asked me how to write it or I just told her to look it up in the dictionary. Ever since you taught her the invented spelling in English, I found that she started to use Pinyin to replace unknown characters. I think she enjoys writing more than before.

Another parent commented,

> I used to correct him when he was not writing (the characters) exactly. But since you told us that invented spelling is helpful for children to develop correct spelling in English, I did not insisted on letting him use a dictionary (to find out how to write a character correctly). I notice that he started to really enjoy writing and write more often.

Results

This study combined the new instructional materials (i.e., bilingual books) with a set of innovative instructional approaches in the eight-week bilingual study sessions. The findings indicated that bilingual books are enjoyable learning resources to use. Both the content of the bilingual books and the instructional approaches engage readers in many different ways. In the study, all the children have responded positively to the bilingual books. They were excited about learning English using storybooks and participated in all the instructional activities enthusiastically. The children responded to these bilingual books in many ways that are similar to native readers. They made connections to self, text, and the world, and they used their cultural and background knowledge to facilitate comprehension. One thing that is worthy of mentioning is that to these young children, background knowledge matters more than cultural knowledge in terms of facilitating comprehensions. The children's classic story — *Cinderella* was more familiar to these children than the culturally relevant Chinese story *Frog in the well*. This finding warned us that no assumption should be made that children would have an easier time to understand books that are related to their own culture.

This study also suggests that bilingual books, combined with appropriate instruction, can be a powerful resource to promote children's bilingual and biliteracy development. In terms of foreign language development, growth was reflected in the number of words these children could identify, use invented spelling, and use graphophonic cues in reading. Comparing the number of words these children could identify at the first and last sessions, we saw a significant increase. We need to acknowledge that even though the study sessions have positively influenced their vocabulary learning, their English classes they took in and out of school also contributed greatly to their vocabulary learning.

The children's development of invented spelling and the use of graphophonic cues in reading revealed that they have gradually developed some letter-sound relationship. Their dominant approach to spelling and reading was to use the names of the letters as cues to the sound they want to represent, and this has been the characteristics of beginning readers (Bear, 1989; Viise, 1996). In addition, some of these

children's writing also reflected their knowledge of Pinyin in Chinese (first graders in China have already learned Pinyin, the alphabet that represents the pronunciation of Chinese). This is similar to the findings of another study on using wordless picture books to promote the biliteracy development of a five-year old Chinese child (Hu & Commeyras, 2008). This finding has suggested that the Chinese Pinyin system has become an important and useful tool that Chinese children at the beginning stage depend on when learning how to write English. In addition, the finding also shed more light on the similarities of invented spelling in both English and Chinese and how Chinese children presented evidence of positively transferring such knowledge from one language to another.

In terms of the native language development, the children have used richer oral language in storytelling, which was reflected by having longer stories, more conversations, and complex, attractive and creative story plots. The importance of storytelling in children's language development has long been recognized (Berkowitz, 2011; Riley, 2007; Singhai, 1998); however, not many studies addressed the importance of conversation construction among story characters in children's storytelling. We believe that children's construction of conversations among story characters in their storytelling marks an important difference between describing pictures from telling a story. These children's gradual increase of vocabulary and story complexity indicated that they think deeper and more critically about the characters and the plots, which as a result, enhanced their comprehension of the stories. It may be arguable that the inclusion of dialogue could be the nature of the stories; however, we believe that all these four books have rich content that stimulate conversations based on the criteria we used when selecting the books.

Furthermore, the use of Pinyin to substitute unknown characters in writing had two indications. First, it indicated that these children have applied the idea of invented spelling into Chinese writing. The children have learned to focus on the sound when they used invented spelling for unknown English words, and they have applied this same strategy to write Chinese using Pinyin which represents the sounds of Chinese characters. Hence, the children used the sound representation to replace unknown characters. Second, the fact that the children used Pinyin to substitute unknown characters rather than using lines or symbols suggests that these children are in the advanced stage of Chinese writing development (Chan & Louie, 1992). They understood the non-alphabetical nature of the Chinese language, were aware of the conventional representation of Chinese characters, and could clearly distinguish the sound and character demonstration of the language.

The bilingual texts in the book can serve as the authentic texts for children to learn vocabularies, phrases, or native expressions. Moreover, when ignoring the texts, bilingual books can be used the same way as wordless picture books – encouraging children to come up with their own stories to promote the concept of story and to learn the languages (Hu & Commeyras, 2008).

Importantly, this study has suggested that instructional approach matters. In the study sessions in this study, the researchers used approaches such as picture walk, constructing children's own versions of the story, interactive read aloud, and response to writing with the encouragement of using invented spelling. These instructional approaches have been very successful in creating a supportive environment and making a difference in these children's motivation and class participation. Picture walks have helped children activate their prior knowledge and make predictions about what they will be reading. Constructing their own versions of the story has given children a sense of ownership, suggesting that it is "my own" story! Interactive read aloud has actively engaged them in the story, made connections, and prepared for critical response after reading. The encouragement from the teacher to use invented spelling or Pinyin to represent a challenging Chinese character for a child has freed writing from conventional spelling/characters and focused on meaning. Findings from the study have also shown that it is beneficial for educators to shift from an entirely teacher-centered class to a balanced, teacher-centered and student-centered class for active engagement and motivation. It is crucial to educate parents by offering them workshops on literacy education that emphasizes the importance of meaning (content) rather than form (conventional spelling/character) only.

These new instructional approaches and materials, combined with other more traditional direct teaching methods and resources in China, have shed new lights on literacy education for educators, parents, and students in China. It also confirms that a supportive learning environment, typically nurtured through an understanding teacher, is important in children's exploration of new culture and language (e.g., Gregory, 1990; McGonigal & Arizpe, 2007). With the support from teachers and parents, students will be able to find who they really are by exploring their different identities through the power of reading, writing, and multicultural children's books.

Appendix A

Hu-Li 2010 Pre – Assessment Questions

I. Do you like to learn English?

II. Listen and choose. Circle the words you hear.

1. cook book look	2. lake cake wake
3. boat coat goat	4. hut nut cut
5. foot wood good	6. car garden warm

III.   Listen and fill in the blanks.

1. b__ke   2. b___g   3. b___x   4. f___sh   5. be___

IV.   Match the pictures and the words.

1. dish
2. spoon
3. eyes
4. ear
5. boat
6. rain
7. ball
8. hand
9. fish
10. pen

Appendix B
Dolch/Fry Combined Word List

Dolch/Fry Combined Word List

Preprimer	Primer	First grade	Second grade	Third grade
a (F1)	all (F1)	after (F2)	always (F3)	about (F1)
and (F1)	are (F1)	again (F2)	around (F2)	carry (F3)
away (F2)	at (F1)	an (F1)	because (F2)	cut (F3)
big (F2)	be (F1)	as (F1)	been (F1)	far (F3)
can (F1)	but (F1)	ask (F2)	before (F2)	got (F3)
come (F1)	came (F2)	by (F1)	both (F3)	grow (F3)
down (F1)	did (F1)	could (F1)	call (F1)	if (F1)
find (F1)	do (F1)	every (F3)	does (F2)	keep (F3)
for (F1)	eat (F3)	from (F1)	don't (F3)	kind (F2)
go (F1)	four (F3)	give (F2)	first (F1)	light (F3)
help (F2)	get (F1)	had (F1)	found (F2)	long (F1)
here (F2)	good (F2)	her (F1)	made (F1)	much (F2)
I (F1)	have (F1)	him (F1)	many (F1)	never (F3)
in (F1)	he (F1)	his (F1)	off (F2)	only (F2)
is (F1)	into (F1)	how (F1)	or (F1)	own (F3)
it (F1)	like (F1)	just (F2)	read (F2)	small (F2)
little (F2)	must (F2)	know (F2)	right (F2)	start (F3)
look (F1)	new (F2)	let (F3)	tell (F2)	together (F3)
make (F1)	no (F1)	live (F2)	their (F1)	try (F2)
me (F2)	now (F1)	may (F1)	these (F1)	
my (F1)	on (F1)	of (F1)	those (F3)	
not (F1)	our (F2)	old (F2)	us (F2)	
one (F1)	out (F1)	open (F3)	use (F1)	
play (F2)	saw (F3)	over (F1)	very (F2)	
run (F3)	say (F2)	put (F2)	which (F1)	
said (F1)	she (F1)	some (F1)	why (F2)	
see (F1)	so (F1)	stop (F3)	work (F2)	
the (F1)	soon (F3)	take (F2)	would (F1)	
three (F2)	that (F1)	them (F1)	write (F1)	
to (F1)	there (F1)	then (F1)	your (F1)	
two (F1)	they (F1)	think (F2)		
up (F1)	this (F1)	walk (F3)		
we (F1)	too (F2)	were (F1)		
where (F2)	was (F1)	when (F1)		
you (F1)	well (F2)			
	went (F2)			
	who (F1)			
	will (F1)			
	with (F1)			

Note. F in parentheses represents Fry and the number shows the level in the Fry word list.

Appendix C
Writing Samples in Chinese

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