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# Drama in Dialogic Read Alouds: Promoting Access and Opportunity for Emergent Bilinguals

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## Section III: Engaging Pedagogy: Integrating Arts into Schools

# Drama in Dialogic Read Alouds: Promoting Access and Opportunity for Emergent Bilingual Students

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### Abstract

In this report, we explore the potential for drama pedagogy in the classroom to support the engagement and growth of emergent bilingual students in language and literacy. We are focused on the use of drama to promote dialogic interactions during teacher read alouds. This study was conducted as a collaborative, action research investigation involving classroom teachers and university-based researchers. Our goals focused on three areas. First, we were interested in the impact of the drama intervention on comprehension. Second, we were interested in the responses of students to drama in read alouds with attention to differences in responses related to gender, grade level, skill level, and English Language Learner (school labeled) status. Third, we were interested in the students' explanations for why (or why not) drama enhanced their engagement with the stories read. The findings suggest the power of incorporating drama to promote participation and dialogic interactions in support of language learning

**Keywords:** drama based pedagogy, emergent bilinguals, English Language Learners,
reading comprehension

*"Because it's drama! Romance, mysteries, all the juicy stuff." (Jalan, 5th Grade)*

There are many voices present during a read aloud experience in a classroom. There is the teacher re-voicing the author. There is the teacher's own voice talking over and around the words of the author in ways that are intended to engage and direct the attention of the students and support comprehension. Finally, there are the voices of the students commenting throughout the experience in response to the author, teacher, and other students. Arising out of this ensemble of voices are socially constructed interpretations of the text. The engagement in a read aloud experience allows participants to gain insights into and control over discourse patterns that are essential to students' future interactions with others around texts both inside and outside of schools. Sadly, the voices of Black students (Delpit, 1988) and Emergent Bilingual students (Garcia, 2009; Olsen, 2014) in the United States are too often silent in this important work with read alouds—particularly in the presence of an author and a teacher privileging a Standard English language medium. In what can be a fast-moving, complex discursive environment, Black and Emergent Bilingual students' contributions to meaning making are often absent, and the

opportunities for them to grow in their English language abilities through dialogic interaction are unavailable to them. It is not only the absence of participation and growth that is of concern, but also the "lesson learned" that silence is the safe (or only) path for living in spaces where Standard English dominates. In this study, we describe our experiences as teachers and teacher educators engaging elementary students in read alouds of chapter books using drama based instructional (DBI) strategies to enhance access, dialogic meaning making, and language growth. The vast majority of the participating students in this study were non-White (85%) with over half (64%) identifying as Hispanic and over 30% formally identified as English Language Learners (what we call emergent bilinguals). DBI strategies provide a non-standardized approach to literacy instruction that invites and encourages students to engage in and interact with a text, which typically is overlooked in schools serving students from historically marginalized communities, as a result of narrowed curriculum (Gutiérrez, 2001; Medina & Campano, 2006).

## Background: Read Alouds and Interactive Read Alouds

Read alouds have been recommended as part of elementary classroom reading instruction for decades (e.g., Teale, 2003), at one point proclaimed as "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading." (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 23). Although the daily enactments of classroom read alouds may not always meet the standards for excellence documented in the research literature (Hoffman, Roser & Battle, 1993), there continues to be widespread advocacy for read alouds to promote interests, vocabulary, appreciation, fluency, and comprehension (e.g., Fox, 2008; Miller, 2013; Tompkins, 2014).

In recent years, there have been calls for "interactive read alouds" to emphasize the active and participatory role of children in the read aloud experience (e.g., Barrentine, 1992; Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2009; Lennox, 2013; Pantaleo, 2007; Wiseman, 2011). Fountas and Pinnell (2006) describe interactive read alouds as deliberate and explicit instructional activities that involve the teacher modeling vocabulary development, reading with fluency and demonstrating comprehension strategies to students, while allowing opportunities for students to join in the discussion and interaction. A typical interactive read aloud consists of selection and preparation of a text, an opening, reading aloud, embedded teaching, text talk, discussion, a record of reading, and written or artistic response and self-evaluation.

In their observational study of interactive read alouds, Fisher, Flood, Lapp and Frey (2009) identified seven characteristics of effective interactive read alouds: (1) books chosen were appropriate to students' interests and matched to their developmental, emotional, and social levels; (2) selections had been previewed and practiced by the teacher; (3) a clear purpose for the read-aloud was established; (4) teachers modeled fluent oral reading when they read the text; (5) teachers were animated and used expression; (6) teachers stopped periodically and thoughtfully questioned the students to focus them on specifics of the text; and (7) connections were made to independent reading and writing (pp. 10-11). While variations of interactive read alouds emphasize different features, most emphasize the critical role the teacher plays in fostering

conversations around meaning making. For the most part, this work around interactive read alouds has focused on discussion and the discursive moves that a teacher can make in promoting interaction. Seldom have the studies in this area offered a consideration of how these interactions can become dialogic, nor have these studies included significant attention to the potential for drama in supporting this critical transition.

## Drama in Dialogic Read Alouds: A Theoretical Framing

Drama is an art form that is becoming more and more recognized for its potential as a pedagogy (O'Toole, 2002: O'Toole & Stinson, 2009), in particular in support of emergent bilinguals (Cummins & Early, 2010). All drama involves actors (people), acting (people taking on roles), and action (people doing something). Drama may or may not involve a script or even spoken words. Following the lead of Edminston (2013), our work explores drama as action that fosters dialogue in interactive read alouds. We situate our work in dialogue theoretically within Bakhtin's (1981) notions of dialogism and the appropriation of language, Freire's (1970) constructs of dialogic engagement and the mediating effects of codifications, and Bruner's (1986) emphasis on experience, iconic representations, and language interaction leading to concept formation.

According to Bakhtin (1981), speech utterances always appear in the context of chains of utterances. An utterance is made with the expectation and anticipation of a response from the audience. There are no limits on the dialogic context as it reaches into the boundless past and the boundless future.

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's "own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language … but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (pp. 293-294)

In the context of dialogic read alouds, the circulating words belong to the author (of the text being read), the teacher, and the other students. It is the work of the individual student, with the support of an interpretive community, to appropriate these words (or discourse patterns) into something that he or she owns. Edmiston (2013) draws on Bakhtin's writing on dialogic inquiry to explain the importance of learning through drama. Bakhtin explains the processes of coming to new understandings in terms of a dialogic process that moves from the inside to the outside and back into the inside again. This process is facilitated in the enactment of text through drama, with the student moving through the initial understanding as an outsider engaged with the text, to stepping into the text in becoming a character, to stepping back out again to examine the self with a new perspective. Edminston (2013) describes the triggers for this learning through drama in terms of the students' movement through "presentness" (placing oneself inside of the character) and "eventness" (placing oneself inside of multiple characters) and engaging in

dialogue with others around these experiences. These embodied experiences are viewed as fundamental to engagement.

Freire (1970) approached dialogue from a more social and political perspective. He focused on the dialogue that arises as individuals engage with other people in the naming and reading of their world. Freire regarded dialogue not just as a pedagogical practice, but also as a complement to our human nature. It is through dialogue that we humanize others, through people acting and interacting with each other. He was determined to open a path of liberation for those who are marginalized in a society as victims of institutional and politically oppressive forces—including education. Freire (1970) argued that a more humanizing alternative to the banking model of education that focuses on the transfer of information as a commodity into the minds of students, is a problem-posing approach that explores how challenges or realities people find themselves in can be transformed through dialogue (McLaren, 2000). In a process Freire termed *conscientization,* the teacher supports students to critically think about the situations they experience, often nurtured through a process of codification. Codification involves a gathering of information in order to build up pictures (images) around real situations and real people. Such codifications are socially constructed within communities and, in Freire's system, most often take the form of drawings that are then extended through dialogic interactions that uncover and reveal oppressive contexts.

One of the most powerful extensions of Freire's views on dialogue in education is found in Boal's (1985) work in *Theater of the Oppressed*. Boal believed that the human was a self-contained theater, actor, and spectator in one. "Spect-actor" is a term coined by Boal to reflect this layering of participation and observation. Because we can observe ourselves in action, we can amend, adjust, and alter our actions to have a different impact and to change our world. Boal's techniques use theater as means of promoting personal, social, and political transformation. With his associates, Boal explored many different techniques, theatrical styles, and cultural applications (e.g., Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994). Dialogism, in concert with Freire's theory, is at the heart of all of these.

Bruner (1986), building on Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, was one of the first to apply the metaphor of scaffolding to the teacher's (or knowledgeable other's) support for the learner in gaining concept formation (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Bruner's theory of concept formation is complex regarding the role and placement of language interaction. He argued that concept learning moves from enactive representation (doing), to iconic (image based exploration—semiotic), to symbolic representation (language based). The progression is not a rigid sequence but one the learner may recycle through again and again. In our view, the discussion strategies typically associated with scaffolding support based solely on the symbolic (verbal) may fail to provide significant opportunities in the formation of ideas in the enactive and iconic modes and may fail to provoke meaning making that the child is invested in through their own sense making. We believe what is needed is more exploration, more image making (iconic formation), and more 'doing' that puts the participants in the lead and thus becomes dialogic.

Across these theories is a shared focus on dialogue as situated in humans acting on their world in ways that make personal, social, and political sense. Imagery, movement, and language play key roles in supporting the development of a critical consciousness about the world and our place in it.  The stepping in and out and back in again into action suggests not a linear path to knowing but a highly interactive and relational understanding of what meanings are present in situations.

## Drama in the Teaching of Emergent Bilingual Students

Spada (2007) advocates for a communicative approach to second language teaching that is meaning-based and learner-centered and where "…fluency is given priority over accuracy and the emphasis is on the comprehension and production of messages, not the teaching of correction of language form" (p. 272). This view is consistent with Cummins's (1981) position that children best learn the English language when they are actively involved in the process of communicating with one another. The possibilities for drama to create a context for meaningful communication, interaction, and the negotiation of identity for emergent bilingual students are enormous (e.g., Lee & Finney, 2005; Medina & Campano, 2006; Medina, Weltsek-Medina, & Twomey, 2007).

In Belliveau and Kim's (2013) synthesis of the scholarly literature around drama and L2 learning, four findings stand out. First, the synthesis documented the widespread interest and enthusiasm for drama to be used in language learning. Second, despite this expressed interest in drama, it does not appear to be widely implemented. Third, even when drama is integrated into classrooms, it has often been limited to "decontextualized scripted role-plays, memorization of superficial dialogues, and warm-up games that fall outside the curriculum" (p. 6). And fourth, teachers face numerous challenges implementing drama including: "a need for teacher training, skepticism from teachers and students; product-driven or examination-oriented circumstances; [and] cultural differences in learning styles" (p. 13).

## Drama in Dialogic Read Alouds: A Pedagogical Practice

There are many different forms of drama-based instructional activities currently being explored through research (e.g., Adomat, 2012; Cawthon, Dawson, & Ihorn, 2011; Lee, Patall, Cawthon, & Steingut, 2015; Willcut, 2007; Wilhelm, 2000). Drama activities are often used as a 'culminating' activity to work with a piece of literature—as in the writing and/or presenting of a reader's theater performance of a story that has been read (e.g., Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Rasinski, 2009). We subscribe, in our work, to Kao and O'Neill's (1998) notion that the most powerful forms of drama for language support are not the less contextualized script-based drama activity but rather process dramas that evolve over extended periods of time and "build on the ideas, negotiations and responses of all the students to foster social, intellectual, and linguistic development" (p. x).

Our work has focused on using drama in working with emergent bilingual students as a tool for language learning and comprehension. Our work envisions drama in read alouds as a

scaffolding tool for concept formation that is experiential, iconic, and dialogic. We use drama to expand on and extend Sipe's (2000) concept of 'performative' responses as part of text engagement. Performative response refers to children's spontaneous responses to text that reflect a performative (e.g., making the face of a monster as the character speaks out in the story). Sipe (2000) describes this performative stance as "entering the text world and manipulating it for one's own purposes" (p. 268). The student in-role sees the world through the character's eyes, through a differing perspective lens for a while. Sipe (2000) has referred to this as the transparent stance, whereby one "enters the story world and becomes one with it. The story world becomes (momentarily) identical with and transparent to the children's world" (p. 268).

Initially, we used two formats for drama activity. In one format—a reader's theater approach—the teachers created short scripts surrounding critical moments in a text that was read the day before (i.e., from a previous chapter). A small group of students took on roles, practiced the script, then performed before the class. The teacher and other students engaged the actors in a conversation around their motivations and thought processes. The teacher continued to draw the actors into the conversation as the class moved on to read the next chapter in the book on that same day by asking them, for example, to consider how the characters they played might feel about a particular event. In a second format the teacher invited a small group of students to create a "tableau vivant" (Clyde, 2003; Cornett, 2006; O'Neill, 1995; Wilhelm, 2000) around a critical moment from the text that had been read the day before. A tableau, rooted in the French word for a living picture, offers a motionless scene or pose created by actors. The students chose the moment, created and practiced the tableau, and presented it to the class. The class engaged the actors in the tableau in a discussion to explore characters' intentions, feelings, and motivations. While there was some preparation time and guidance by the teacher for the small group presenting, the presentation was short and built momentum for the reading of the next chapter.

In the tableau option, the identification of the critical parts was the responsibility of the students in the performing group. One of the key questions posed in the interpretation of a tableau was "Why did you choose this section of the text to enact?" When there were multiple groups presenting different representations, this conversation around the choices of scenes to perform could be used to encourage further discussion around what makes certain parts of a story significant. In the case of the reader's theater scripts, the identification of critical moments rested initially on the teacher's judgment, who was encouraged to identify a moment of significant plot development, a major shift in character development, or something particularly complicated that might need further sorting out. As the students become more experienced in the reader's theater format, we began to involve them in the identification of the critical moments and even the authoring of the scripts.

There is nothing particularly new in either of these drama strategies. What is new, to our knowledge, is the use of these strategies woven in and through a classroom read aloud experience with chapter books over an extended period of time. Also new are the explicit connections made to the theoretical work around dialogue found in the writings of Bruner, Freire

and Boal. Drama work embodies Bruner's "enactment" and "iconic" (imagery) constructs that accompany dialogue and support concept formation. We stress the importance of Freire's codifications, problem-posing, and generative themes that are of importance to the participants as well as Boal's concept of "spec-actor" as everyone is collectively involved. We stress the importance of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism where language expression is always in the middle—drawing on the past and speculating on the future, as the students and teacher move through a text experience making their own meaning along the way utilizing iconic representations. Finally, what is new in our effort is the focus on emergent bilingual students, and the possibilities for promoting access, engagement, language growth, and comprehension.

## The Drama in Dialogic Read Aloud Study

This study was conducted as a collaborative teacher research investigation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Classroom teachers and university-based researchers were involved in both designing the study and in collecting and analyzing data. Our goals were focused on four areas. First, we were interested in the impact of the drama intervention on comprehension. Second, we were interested in the responses of students to the use of drama in read alouds, with attention to differences in responses related to gender, grade level, skill level, and English Language Learner (school labeled) status. Third, we were interested in the students' explanations for why (or why not) the drama enhanced their engagement with the stories read. Fourth, we were interested in the feasibility of implementing the drama practices in the flow of classroom teaching.

## Participants and Setting

The participants included five elementary teachers and their students across three schools. Two of the three schools, and four of the five teachers, served low-income, predominately Latino communities with high percentages of emergent bilingual students. All of the participating teachers had been involved in a graduate course involving the use of drama in the literacy classroom. Teachers worked in two groups: four teachers in a 2nd/3rd grade group, and one teacher in a 5th grade group—with this same teacher working with three classrooms as the departmentalized reading/language arts instructor. Student participants included a total of 86 second/third graders and 56 fifth graders. While our primary focus for this study is on emergent bilingual learners and drama, we have included students in one second grade classroom from a school serving a predominately English monolingual community as an opportunity to examine engagement with drama across two different student populations.

## Procedures

The research team identified four chapter books for use in the 2nd/3rd grade group and four different chapter books for use in the 5th grade classes.

**Figure 1. Books for the Dialogue in Drama Study**

| Primary Grade Chapter Books | Fourth Grade Chapter Books |
|---|---|
| *Poppy* by Avi | *Liar and Spy* by Rebecca Stead |
| *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo | *Glory Be* by Augusta Scattergood |
| *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes | *Love, Ruby Lavender* by Deborah Wiles |
| *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl | *Firegirl* by Tony Abbott |

Consideration in book selection was given to quality literature, cultural relevance, and themes appropriate to the age of the students in the classes. Scripts were developed for each chapter in each book with the exception of the first chapter. Each teacher employed the Drama into Dialogic Read Aloud strategies for two of the books and traditional interactive read aloud methods for the other two books. The traditional interactive read aloud refers to the methods these teachers had used prior to their engagement with the drama-based strategies for use in read alouds. The traditional interactive read aloud practices included the use of think-alouds, discussion, and reader response. All of the teachers had participated in a methods course at the University of Texas, Austin with a focus on drama methods during the summer prior to start of the study. Effectively, the teachers alternated the drama and traditional interactive practices moving from one book to the next, with the order of books the same within the grade level groups. In this way, each book was read by at least one teacher and her class, under both the Dialogue in Drama and control conditions.

**Figure 2. Books by Title and Order**

| Grade Levels | Book 1 | Book 2 | Book 3 | Book 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2nd/3rd Grades | *Because of Winn-Dixie* | *Poppy* | *James and the Giant Peach* | *The Hundred Dresses* |
| 5th Grade | *Firegirl* | *Love, Ruby Lavender* | *Liar and Spy* | *Glory Be* |

All of the classrooms participated in a two-week introductory unit for the drama-based instructional approaches to be used. This introductory unit provided opportunities for students to practice the drama-based strategies with several picture books. Teachers then read the chapter books to their classes with a roughly parallel schedule across all the classrooms. Drama in Dialogic Read Aloud activities were conducted daily when the book being read was designated for the drama condition and not used when the book being read was designated as the traditional condition. Most of the books required four to six weeks to complete.

Throughout the study, teachers followed the research protocol that was outlined and scheduled prior to the school year beginning. Each teacher maintained a log with general information relating to drama or traditional conditions for the book as well as anecdotal notes about the read aloud (e.g., students' comments, participation). There were variations in the ways teachers elected to design language charts, utilize quick write journals, and offer strategies to support students in the drama activities during the read aloud cycles. These differences were noted and shared during research meetings. Once the drama intervention was concluded, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher. During these interviews, the teachers were asked to describe: (1) their experiences participating in the study; (2) the effects of using Drama in Dialogic Read Alouds on students in the classroom; (3) how their participation in the Drama in Dialogic Read Aloud study impacted teaching practices; and (4) strategies and modifications used during the study.

## Data Collection

There were multiple data-sources for this study: pre- and post -assessments of attitudes toward reading and drama; comprehension assessments for each book read; teacher logs documenting implementation and student responses; and teacher interviews at the end of the study. Research members that were not one of the identified teacher-researchers from the previous section created the assessments utilized in the study. Additionally, six focal students were selected from each class for interviews following each book. Interview protocols were developed to guide these interviews that focused on students' enjoyment of the book, participation in drama activities, and support for understanding through the drama activities.

## Data Analysis

Open-ended questions on the post assessment and comprehension tests were coded for emerging patterns. The research team refined codes and analyzed data using constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The comprehension assessments, which had multiple choice and short answer sections, were graded by members of the research team. At least two members of the team graded the short answer section of the tests to ensure reliability. In cases of disagreement, a third member of the team graded the item.

Furthermore, for the quantified data gathered from the assessments, significant tests were employed. Specifically, the two-sample *t*-test was used to determine if comprehension means of the students in drama or control conditions were equal; the Chi-Square test was used to examine whether the attitudinal responses (e.g., book preference) varied among the participating students. The 5% level of significance was used in all significance tests, and the software package Stata was used to run the analyses.

## Findings

Before moving to general findings, we will ground our report in an example from our data of how the students in one of the 5th grade classrooms engaged in a reader's theater dialogue after reading Chapter 9 of *Glory Be*. The setting for this book is a small Mississippi town in 1964, as seen through the eyes of 11-year-old Gloriana Hemphil. "Freedom Workers" from the north have entered the community and are shaking up the status quo, including efforts to open the community swimming pool to Black residents. The reader's theater script followed the read aloud of the chapter from the previous day. Over the course of the book, the class had engaged in conversations problematizing issues of segregation and racism, as well as the complexities of race. Frankie is faced with a decision whether to follow the lead of his older brother (JT) regarding his family's stance against integration and viewing the presence of Freedom Fighters in their town as interfering with the social norms of the community. Frankie's father and his older brother, JT, continue to adhere to ideological beliefs supporting segregation and racism.

**Glory**: You wanna bat, Frankie?... What's the matter? Just cause your brother doesn't want to play, you're leaving?

**JT**: Let's go. (*turns and looks at Frankie*) You comin'?

**Frankie**: (*looks at Glory, then Laura, then moves closer to Glory*) I can't stay. My brother'll tattle to Daddy that I was playing baseball with a Yankee. (*rubs his arm where JT usually whacks him*) Or worse.

**Glory**: Why're you always doing everything he tells you? JT is not your daddy.

**JT**: My little brother ain't supposed to play with no Yankees, here to cause trouble and mess up our town. (*narrows his eyes at Laura*) Wish you'd go back to where you came from. (*spits next to Laura's bare feet*) You need to get out of Hanging Moss, go where you're wanted, if there is any such place.

**Glory**: (*hollering and clenching fists*) JT Smith, you stay away from me and my friend! Stay away from my house and don't ever come back!

Given the salience of race and racism in the script and the ensuing discussion, it is relevant to recognize the racial and gendered identities of both the characters and students playing them. The student who took on the role of Glory (a White female character) identified as a Black male. Frankie (a White male), Glory's best friend, was played by a female Latina student. A Black female student played JT (a White male character) who is Frankie's older brother. A female Black student portrayed Laura's character (a White character) who is the daughter of a nurse helping out at the Freedom Clinic. Below is a portion of the class's discussion after the performance of the script:
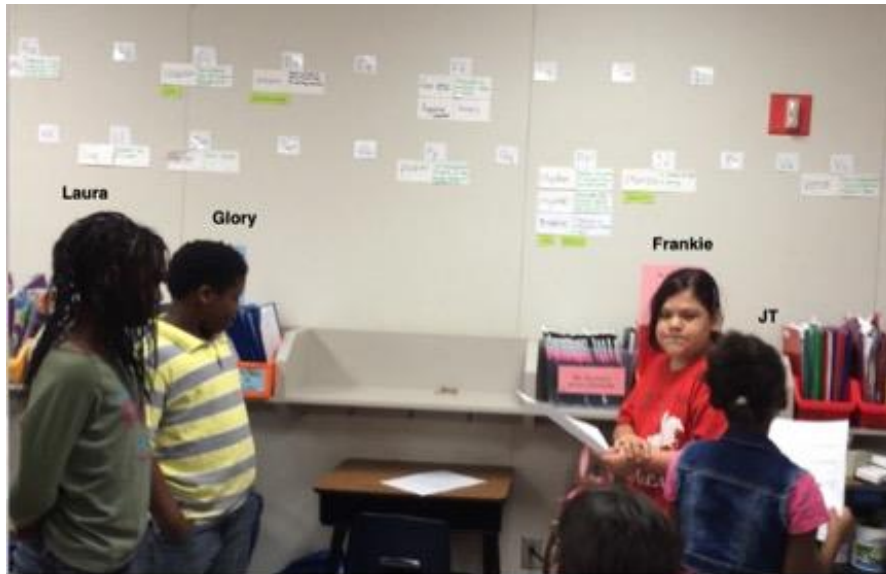
**The Characters**



**JP spitting on Laura**

**Teacher:** Okay. Questions for our actors.

**Student 1:** Frankie, how do you feel?

**Frankie**: Sad.

**Student 1**: Why?

**Frankie**: 'Cuz I can't play with Glory and Laura.

*(Teacher recaps question and asks Frankie to repeat their response.)*

**Student 2**: Frankie, do you want to listen to JT or Glory if there was no segregation?

*(Teacher notices some confusion around the question and rephrases question to clarify and scaffold for character to respond.)*

**Frankie:** Yes, because my brother may have still hated people like that. And if I didn't listen to him because he's the oldest, I'd probably get hurt…so

**Student 3**: Frankie, do you want to play with Laura and Glory?

**Frankie:** Yes, but I'm just scared of my brother.

**Student 4**: Frankie, why do you let JT push you around?

**Frankie:** 'Cuz, he's the oldest and he bullies me and tells my dad.

**Student 5:** What's your problem JT?

**JT:** Well, my dad is putting all these things in my head and I'm actually believing him. So then…if my dad tells me, I follow. I go along with it.

**Student 6**: Frankie, why don't you just take the consequences and stay with your friends and play and stand up for what's right?

**Frankie:** 'Cuz I'm scared. I'm a little kid and he's a teenager, a football player. He can beat me up. And I'm scared of my dad.

**Student 7:** JT, why are you being so mean?

**JT:** Because it's my job to look after my little brother and my dad always tells me that certain people are bad and stuff like that…

*(The teacher acknowledges that the class has strong feelings around the situation that is happening. She expresses that the students playing the characters are responding in realistic ways that corresponds with the characters' beliefs and interactions in the text.)*

**Student 8:** Laura, how do you feel about the situation?

**Laura:** Weird.

**Teacher:** Okay. Can you explain why you feel weird, Laura?

**Laura:** Because Frankie wants to play with Glory but JT is in Frankie's way. He [JT] tried to spit at me, which is…that's why it's kinda weird.

**Teacher:** Right. Do you feel really comfortable right now?

**Laura:** No.

This is just one script, one chapter, and one discussion in the middle of a book, but this was one of many instances when dialogic interactions emerged through drama. Generative issues of race, identity, and power were a central part of this interaction and might have never taken place without the affordances of this drama work. In the following section, we report findings from across the study around the four major research goals: impact on comprehension and engagement; student responses to the experience; student explanations of their own learning; and the feasibility of implementing drama practices into classroom teaching.

## Drama Intervention Impact on Comprehension and Engagement

We compared the performance of the students on the comprehension assessments looking at the differences in scores when they read under the drama versus control conditions. We found no statistically significant differences. We also compared performance on the books as a function of the condition read and found no statistically significant differences. These results are puzzling given the findings to be reported in the subsequent sections on the responses of the students to the drama conditions. We can only speculate that the assessment measures were not sensitive to the varying levels of engagement across the two conditions or, because we alternated drama and control conditions, it was not possible to capture any potential longitudinal effect of drama on students' comprehension. For all students we compared the ranking of the favorite book with the condition for reading the book (drama or control). We expected that the drama condition would affect the ranking of the book, but the data did not support this expectation. The favorite book at the primary grades (*Poppy* at 40%) was the highest rated regardless of the drama or traditional condition. The least favorite book *(The Hundred Dresses* at 7.5%) was lowest rated regardless of condition. The same pattern held true with the 5th graders (*Glory Be* at 40% and *Love, Ruby Lavender* at 11%). Again, this result is not totally surprising given the substantial literature documenting the overwhelming influence of the book on response (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Roser & Martinez, 1999). Although the statistical analysis did not reveal differences in the use of drama, we did find substantial evidence for the effects of incorporating drama in other data sources.

## Students' Responses to the Use of Drama in Read Alouds

There was broad confirmation across multiple data sources (focal student interviews and teacher interviews) that the students enjoyed and valued the experiences with drama. In the post assessment, we asked if the students would like to continue to use drama. At the 5th grade level,

0% reported "No," 41% said "Some," and 59% said "A Lot." At the 2nd/3rd grade level, 17% said "No," 27% said "Some," and 56% said "A Lot." The response is overwhelmingly positive, but we were curious about the 17% who reported "No." Teachers conducted follow-up interviews with the students who had indicated that did not want to use drama. In most of the dissenting cases, teachers reported there was a sense that drama slowed things down too much and those students just wanted to read more and faster For example, Alex stated that he liked drama "but was frustrated because he wanted to read, read, read. He wanted to pursue the book at his own pace." Gus stated that he liked all drama, "but wanted all the books to be as action-packed as Poppy." Norah said that she liked drama, "but wanted to spend more time on tableaux and the reading – less time on reader's theater and quick writes. She says that way we could read more books!" And "John says it must have been a mistake. He liked all of it. His favorite part was reader's theater."

There were no differences for gender, reading level, and emergent bilingual status in the preference for tableau, reader's theater, or both. Yet, there was a statistically significant difference between grade levels in terms of a preference for tableau and reader's theater. While more than the half of the students liked both tableau and reader's theater, the lower grade students were more positive to tableau. There were some patterns in the data that seem to contradict some widely held beliefs (or perhaps myths) about drama in the classroom. There were no differences between grade levels in terms of a positive response to the use and participation in Drama in Dialogic Read Aloud activities. The upper grade students were as positive as the lower grade students. There were no differences in the response of the students classified as high medium or low skill level (in relation to grade level) or in emergent bilingual vs. non-emergent bilingual classification to participation and valuing of drama. There were no differences between gender in terms of participation and valuing of drama.

It is always a challenge to interpret 'no difference' findings in quantitative research. However, in this case and with these findings, we feel these 'no difference' findings suggest something very important about the uses of drama across different labels that are used to separate students. Enthusiasm and engagement were high for all students. With respect to gender, we had anticipated possible concerns for the students in stepping into a gender role different from their own identity. This was never an issue. The teachers also expressed some surprise that gender was not an issue in who played roles. One of the early grade teachers commented, "I didn't have any gender issues at all. … it didn't matter they just want to be a part." Another teacher said, "Not at all a problem (gender) … when we had strong female characters in a story … like in the hundred dresses … the boys were like fighting, 'I want to be Mattie!'"

## Students' Explanations of the Impact of Drama

Our analysis for this area focused on the students' responses to two open-ended questions on the post assessment: "Why do you like (or not like) drama activities?" and "Which drama activities do you like most, and why?" We began our analysis through open coding of the

students' responses in one of the classrooms. As we coded the students' comments in other classrooms, we continued to compare the students' responses to the existing codes and refine them. In the end, our team came up with a total of 263 student comments coded into six categories: *Enjoyment, Embodiment, Comprehension Processes, Perspective Taking, Interacting with Audience,* and *Negatives.* We broke down some of these categories, such as *Comprehension Processes* into additional subcategories. In reporting these areas, we will include the number of responses coded for that category as well as the percent of the total. The two largest categories were *Embodiment* (N=104; 40%) and *Enjoyment* (N=88; 33%) though a significant number of the students' comments fell into the *Comprehension* process category (N=47; 18%). Our team used the individual interviews with students conducted at the end of each book, as well as focus group interviews with the students to confirm or disconfirm findings.

The *Embodiment* and *Enjoyment* areas included general comments about being able to perform (e.g., some students enjoyed reading lines, posing, disguising their voice), but other comments were focused on embodying the role of the characters. Some of the students enjoyed "getting to be" the characters. For example, Gina (3rd grader) stated, "you feel like you're the characters." Students expressed enjoyment about being able to perform in front of peers, but also suggested that taking on roles was sometimes an opportunity to embody the characters whose roles they were taking on. It appeared that taking on the role of the characters was more than simply getting to perform; to some students, it was a way to bring the characters and story into the real world.

The students were insightful and varied in the ways they linked the drama experience to their comprehension. One student, Ulrich (5th grader), said the drama activities helped "break it down for me." Other students made more general claims, such as, "it helps me understand the story." We found many students focused on visualization in their descriptions of how the drama activities had impacted their understanding of the stories. This subcategory of *Comprehension* included statements in which students described being able to see or imagine characters or scenes from the story better. Tricia (5th grader) described the activities as helping her "picture things about the book." Francisco (5th grader) appreciated that the drama allowed students to "realize how it would be in real life." One interesting aspect of these comments is that students often discussed this benefit in terms of both observing and performing, suggesting that the participants, as well as the audience, stood to benefit from the drama activities. Again, this appreciation for the way viewing and performing helped them imagine what was happening in the story was confirmed in the individual and focus group interviews with the students.

Students also made comments about the impact of *Perspective Taking* through the drama activities. Some students, such as Catalina (5th grader), felt viewing the drama activities helped them see "a different point of view." Other students enjoyed seeing the "frozen" characters in the tableau. Comments coded *Interaction with Audience* focused on how the performers and the audience talked, reacted, or made meaning together. Some students appreciated the questioning and answering that occurred between the audience and the performers. Antonio (5th grader)

enjoyed "explaining" while Leo (3rd grader) appreciated being able to ask questions. It was clear some of the students appreciated these back and forth interactions, echoing Boal's "Spect-actor" framework.

## Teachers' Implementation of Drama in Dialogic Read Alouds

The interviews, logs, and observations of teachers confirmed that the approaches had been implemented across the participating classrooms. The teacher interviews largely confirmed what the students said about their engagement in the experience with drama as well. Across the teacher interviews, there was a consistent report of the students, fairly quickly after the introductory unit, taking control of the drama. One teacher commented that once the process began, "I didn't participate in that part [the guiding of drama work and discussion] at all. I just said it's ok to talk to the characters and they would start off ... Everyone had questions they wanted to ask." Another teacher reported, "I didn't have to do much once we got started. With the tableau all of the kids did it and I would just walk to each one and the discussion would start." The data from the student responses suggested that the students enjoyed both of the formats. From the teachers there was appreciation for both in terms of good discussion of the stories, but some of the teachers felt that the tableau offered more open space for constructing meaning. One teacher commented, "My kids dug deeper with the tableau because they were having to create and to infer ... and they would argue." Another teacher described the affordances for the tableau in supporting visual imagery.

The teachers found the drama activities to be overwhelmingly positive in terms of how students engaged in the book. Teachers noticed that students were more enthusiastic and engaged when there were drama activities involved (and many students even complained when there were no drama activities). However, teachers also reported that the ways students engaged with the text was qualitatively different at times with drama. The conversations about what was happening in the tableau, how the actors had represented (or misrepresented) a scene, or their feelings about what was happening in the scene made the discussions powerful moments in which knowledge was co-constructed. In one 3rd grade tableau (from *The Hundred Dresses*), students chose to represent a split scene in which they showed a classroom with an empty chair and the young girl at home in bed. The chapter said nothing about the girl being sick, merely that she was not in class, and in fact, she was not sick at all. The actors explained that they chose a tableau that captured what they were imagining even though it was not written in the text. Some of the other children disagreed with their interpretation, but the drama itself created the opportunity to identify the group's inference in order to allow discussion of their idea. Overall, teachers reported that drama not only increased students' engagement with read alouds, but also allowed for qualitatively different discussions around text.

## Significance

The evidence is clear that the drama strategy was successfully implemented as designed and that the engagement of these emergent bilingual learners was enhanced under the drama

conditions. We find the comments of the students describing the impact of the drama to reflect the theoretical frameworks we have adopted: the importance of enactment ("doing") as a support for talk; the importance of iconic images; the importance of stepping into and out of characters; and the importance of thinking critically through multiple perspectives. These qualities of dialogism are supported in the flow of the dramatic experiences weaving throughout the text experience. Putting action into interaction yielded higher levels of engagement. Not surprisingly, we found the responses of the emergent bilingual students in schools serving economically disadvantaged communities to be similar to those from the students in schools serving high-income communities.

We feel that our study contributes to the existing literature and the findings from Belliveau and Kim's (2013) synthesis. First, our study demonstrates the possibilities for engaging in drama within a common routine in the classroom, over an extended period of time, and drawing on the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Second, our study dispels some of the common myths around the use of drama (e.g., it is only for girls, young children, the language proficient, or the high-achieving students). Third, our study points to some specific growth (voiced by the students) around important comprehension strategies (e.g., visualization, embodiment) that were directly supported by the drama-based activities. Fourth, our study documents the potential for drama-enhanced read alouds in creating an active voice for emergent bilingual students in their learning.

## Moving Forward

To be clear, we are not arguing that process oriented drama is all that is needed to support emergent bilingual students in the classroom. The evidence is clear that a balance of both interactive and more direct forms of instruction is important to the success of emergent bilingual learners (Goldenberg, 2008). We are arguing that the kind of drama work employed in this study can create a context that complements and informs direct instruction methodologies. We opened this study with a statement around the vulnerable position Black and emergent bilingual students often find themselves in the classroom—as silenced. The emergent bilingual students participating in this experience were far from silent. They were active, participatory, and intentional in using drama to express the important understandings they were making as they engaged with texts. They were passionate and creative as they explored the inequities, challenges, and injustices experienced by the characters in these books. We believe that these students who experienced Drama in Dialogic Read Alouds will go on to use the strategies they developed, as Boal (1985) suggests, to become more conscious of the inequities that exist in our society and begin to explore ways to push back on these inequities. Drama can be used to act on Cummins's(2000) call for collaborative efforts to make classrooms into an "interpersonal space within which the acquisition of knowledge and formation of identity is negotiated. Power is created and shared within this interpersonal space where minds and identities meet" (p. 44). Through the engagement of the students in this project, we experienced drama as art form that

provided what Maxine Green describes as an intersecting space for social imagination and critical pedagogy (Kohli, 2016).

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