Pre-K Families Learning Together: Examining Dual Language Learning and Literacy with Drama

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Abstract

In this study, we share how families of participating pre-K students perceive the use of drama in their child’s classroom for supporting dual language learning (DLL) and literacy after participating in a family drama event. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theoretical framework was used to unpack pre-K child’s participation in the EYEPlay program, which integrates drama strategies to support dual language (DL) literacy development. We qualitatively analyzed videos and photographs of the family drama event, surveys from participating family members, and reflection discussions to better understand how the event engaged families in co-constructing new knowledge through dual language teaching and drama instruction. Families shared their belief that the drama strategies supported their child in expanding their vocabulary and literacy skills in Spanish and English.

Keywords: Dual language learning, drama, families, literacy, pre-K
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Family Involvement in Early Childhood Literacy

Family involvement in school plays an integral role in the literacy development of young children (Dove et al., 2015); however, parental involvement tends to decrease as children enter school settings (Murray et al., 2015). Fortunately, developing parents’ teaching skills at home has the potential to increase parental involvement at school (DeLoatche et al., 2015). Murray et al. even showed that parents who extended learning at home were more involved in their child’s learning at school; engaging in educational activities at home was a better predictor of parental involvement at school than socioeconomic status or home. In order to successfully develop parental engagement at home, teachers must embrace the language and cultural backgrounds of families, acknowledge the diverse assets families bring to their children’s education, recognize that at home educational practices may look different than traditional school practices, and focus on developing humanizing relationships with families to further collaborations (Chavez-Reyes, 2010; Gallo, 2017). Additionally, supportive administrators may offer resources (e.g., time, space, professional development, materials) to foster teachers’ abilities for effectively sharing programming information with students, their families, and the community (Farrand et al., 2019b). When teachers receive these necessary resources, they are better able to articulate the benefits of using specific strategies at home to promote literacy.

Family literacy programs, designed to recognize the strengths family members bring to literacy events (Baird et al., 2015), build family members’ confidence and knowledge related to children’s literacy skill development by providing resources, strategies, and supports for home learning (Anderson et al., 2010; Timmons & Pelletier, 2015). When family members engage in
literacy programming and events, they gain valuable knowledge about how to incorporate literacy into their children’s everyday experiences at home and increase their enjoyment and participation in their children’s literacy development (Swain & Cara, 2019; Timmons & Pelletier, 2015). Many families then successfully implement what they learn during school literacy programming and events into their home literacy instruction, allowing for a more seamless transition between home and school literacy learning (Swain & Cara, 2019). For young children who are learning more than one language, the transition between home and school learning may be even more challenging. Family literacy programs must recognize the unique literacy experiences of emergent bilingual and multilingual children and adjust their frameworks to better suit these students and their families (Baird et al., 2015; Gallo, 2017). Baird and colleagues recommend families “engage in a variety of literacy activities across languages and in the presence of multiple family members” (p. 170). In our view, schools have the opportunity to do the same by providing dual language (DL) literacy programming which incorporates multiple family members across languages.

Guided play and drama strategies support the development of DL literacy. Baker (2019) suggests exemplary DL teachers view guided play as a means for language learning in which students can co-construct the curriculum with their teachers. Specifically, young children benefit from curriculum which integrates drama strategies to explore new learning through interactive dialogue, multiple modes, collaboration, and creative problem solving (Brown, 2017; Farrand & Deeg, 2020). Adomot (2009) suggests the use of drama activities as a literacy development strategy supports students with gaining a broader understanding of literacy. Strategies such as dramatization and pantomime support bi/multilingual learners in learning new vocabulary through movement (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013) and encourage children to embody their
learning to better express their content knowledge (Farrand & Deeg 2020). Using guided play-based approaches also supports young children with their vocabulary acquisition (McLeod et al., 2017). Macfarlane, Lakhani, and Maher (2016) even suggest collaborative play-based experiences which engage parents alongside their children focus on the strengths of young children and foster relationships. Through learning about play-based approaches to literacy instruction, such as drama strategies, parents can extend school learning at home while simultaneously deepening their relationship with their child through collaborative play. For instance, in one study, parents of pre-K DL learners attended arts workshops led by local teaching artists to learn how to use drama strategies to promote their children’s language and literacy development while teachers participated in a residency program to integrate these strategies into their teaching (Farran & Mindrila, 2017). Upon learning and implementing these strategies, parents were given a post survey to assess their beliefs about the use of drama to support their children’s learning. The results revealed that parents recognized drama strategies as a valuable tool to develop the language, literacy, and critical thinking skills of their children at home and at school. The findings of this study further suggest pre-K DL learners who participate in drama as part of their language instruction will likely see cognitive gains.

The present study extends previous research showing that parents who participate in arts workshops to learn about drama strategies to support learning recognized the benefits these strategies create for the development of DL literacy (cf. Farran & Mindrila, 2017). Specifically, we examine how using drama strategies during a family drama event created an inclusive environment for teachers, pre-K students, and their families to interact and engage in learning together. Additionally, we investigate how parents and other family members attending the drama event perceived the use of drama strategies to support DL learning. Feedback from the event
unveils families’ perceptions of the benefits and applications of using dramatic strategies for early childhood dual language learning (DLL) and provides further insight for future program implementation. We posed two main research questions:

1. How does the use of drama strategies at a family drama event engage educators, pre-K students, and families in learning together?

2. How do educators and families perceive the use of drama strategies to support DLL for pre-K students?

**Theoretical Framework**

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural approach provided value in understanding how individuals connect their own development with social and cultural-historical knowledge to make meaning together (Enciso & Ryan, 2011; Rogoff, 2003). According to Vygotsky, in early childhood, play is also essential to this approach. Through dramatic play, pre-K students can enter more adult roles and act out different situations they might engage in the future. The Early Years Educators at Play (EYEPlay) program (Farrand & Deeg, 2021; Farrand et al., 2019b; Kilinc et al., 2016) allowed students to actively engage in this type of imaginative play, so students could develop DL language and literacy skills. Collectively, students, families, administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and teaching artists each bring their own set of assets and experiences to the table to facilitate student learning as a collaborative team or community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger suggest CoPs develop through a shared interest in which a community works together to develop their skills and share resources. As newcomers gain more experience and knowledge about the sociocultural practices within a particular CoP, they progress from mere observation (i.e., legitimate peripheral) to increased participation in the community with the support of more experienced old-timers.
In this study, a community including a school principal, classroom DLL teacher, paraprofessional, pre-K students, and families came together to engage in shared learning around the topic of DLL using drama strategies. While families assumed the role of newcomers, the students alongside school personnel assumed the role of old-timers. Students were leveraged as knowledgeable members of the CoP who could support their families as they gained more experience with DLL using drama strategies. Since family involvement in school plays an integral role in the literacy development of young children (Dove, et al., 2015), the lead teacher in this study created an opportunity for families to experience how the EYEPlay program (Farrand & Deeg, 2021; Farrand et al., 2019B; Kilinc et al., 2016) incorporates drama strategies to support DL literacy development. This way, they could potentially utilize some of these same strategies to support their children’s learning at home and expand their CoP beyond school.

**Methodological Approach**

Data for this paper comes from a three-year mixed methods study examining DLL in preK classrooms in one Southern United States public school district. The present study was conducted during the 2018-2019 school year during the second year of the program. Focus groups were conducted at the beginning of the school year in accordance with the main research project. At this time, one teaching team, made up of a DL pre-K teacher and her paraprofessional, created a goal aimed to share the drama strategies they were teaching their students with families to extend learning at home. Their goal spurred an extra layer of research that developed from the much larger research project. We focus on this teaching team’s goal in this paper to examine how one pre-K teacher and paraprofessional engaged the families of their students in learning about the drama strategies they learned through the EYEPlay professional development (PD) program, an evidence-based PD approach which supports early childhood educators in using drama
strategies as tools to develop children’s Spanish and English literacy skills (Farrand & Deeg, 2021; Farrand et al., 2019b; Kilinc et al., 2016). The EYEPlay program aims to cultivate inclusive classroom environments that foster learning for all students through the use of drama strategies. This paper will unpack how the teaching team achieved their goal with an end-of-year family drama event designed to engage families in learning about drama strategies to cultivate an inclusive learning environment for pre-K students and their families to learn together.

**Early Years Educators at Play Dual Language Learning Professional Development**

The EYEPlay PD incorporates an “I do (model lesson), we do (team lesson), and you do (solo lesson)” lesson structure which supports teachers as they learn to implement drama strategies in the DL literacy classroom to help develop the language and literacy of early childhood Spanish/English DLLs (Farrand et al., 2019b, p. 62). The “I do, we do, you do” lesson structure is implemented in a focused unit that emphasizes a specific drama strategy such as pantomime, character development, or group story building and one or two curricular objectives (Farrand et al., 2019b; Kilinc et al., 2016). The unit plan cycle begins with a model “I do” lesson. Then the teachers receive in-service training to support the development and implementation of a team “we do” lesson. The cycle finishes off with a planning session, a solo or “you do” lesson, and a reflection session. During the “I do” stage, a teaching artist models drama integration lessons in the teacher’s classroom. Later in the year, the classroom teacher, paraprofessional, and teaching artist work together to create a team or “we do” lesson. The team lesson allows the teacher and paraprofessional an opportunity to practice with arts integration techniques while still being supported by the teaching artist. Finally, the teacher and paraprofessional conduct a solo or “you do” lesson, and the teaching artist observes the lesson and provides relevant feedback.

Throughout the entire year, the teaching artist acts as a coach assisting the classroom teacher and
paraprofessional with drama integration during in-service training, lesson planning, lesson implementation, and debriefing sessions.

**Setting**

In order to protect the anonymity of the student participants and their families on this large-scale project, the demographic data was aggregated by the school rather than the specific classroom. The setting for this study was a DL pre-K classroom in an urban public elementary school. The elementary school resides in a large school district in the Southeastern United States and includes students from 165 countries who spoke 157 languages during the 2018-2019 school year. The elementary school demographics for the 2018-2019 school year were reported as 67.8% Hispanic, 6.8% White, 18.7% Black, 4.0% Asian, and 2.6% Multiple Race. Twenty-two point two percent were identified as English Language Learners (ELLs).

The family drama event took place in the school media center and began with a welcome from the school principal to family members in both Spanish and English. The classroom teacher, paraprofessional, and students entered the media center and asked students to sit in front of their family member or members on the floor. Chairs were arranged in an open circle with family members seated in the chairs. The paraprofessional and classroom teacher sat on the floor to close the circle. The school principal, teacher, paraprofessional, and other adults attending the event partnered with students who did not have a family member present.

**Participants**

At the time of the study, the DL pre-K teacher, Miss Hernandez\(^1\), and paraprofessional, Miss Agosto, had participated in two years of PD and coaching provided by the EYEPlay

\(^1\) Pseudonyms are used for all participants.
program (Farrand & Deeg, 2021; Farrand et al., 2019B; Kilinc et al., 2016) for implementing drama strategies to support Spanish and English literacy development. The EYEPlay PD was provided to teacher participants as part of a three-year grant examining the use of drama strategies to support literacy learning for early childhood students in DL pre-K classrooms. The teacher and paraprofessional were both females who are fluent in Spanish and English. They were in their third year of teaching DL pre-K together. Although many pre-K teachers and paraprofessionals at various schools in the district also participated in the EYEPlay PD, the teacher Miss Hernandez and the paraprofessional Miss Agosto more fully embraced the concepts co-teaching and co-planning together, similar to a previous EYEPlay study in the Southwest (cf. Farrand & Deeg, 2021). During the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, they collectively created a goal to get more families involved in sharing the drama experience with their children. Thus, they developed a family drama event to engage parents and other family members in an example drama lesson, allowing parents to learn and co-construct knowledge with their child through drama. This study focuses on one lead pre-K DL teacher, the paraprofessional working in her classroom, the principal, Mrs. Guerro, who supported the implementation of the family drama event, the students in the participating classroom, and the students’ family members (n = 16) who consented to participate at the family drama event.

**Measures**

This study draws on data related to the family drama event including event videos, event photographs, family survey responses, and reflective discussions with the teacher, paraprofessional, and principal. The entire event was video recorded and photographed to capture the interactions of the teacher, paraprofessional, principal, students, and family members in attendance with the consent of those involved. Additionally, participating family members were
invited to participate in a survey on their perceptions of the use of drama strategies to support learning. Finally, researchers guided the teacher, paraprofessional, and principal through an audio recorded focus group that was transcribed for analysis. Focus groups questions relating to families focused on family involvement and communication (e.g., How do you share dual language learning with families of students in your school? How do you share drama strategies with families of students in your school?) Focus group questions also related to DLL (e.g., Describe how classroom teachers and paraprofessionals support language instruction during Spanish and English days in your school? How are teachers and paraprofessionals supported with DL instruction? How do educators engage students in dialogue/conversations during language and literacy instruction?) and the use of drama strategies (e.g., Describe drama strategies that you utilize outside of drama lessons to support language or literacy instruction; Describe drama strategies that you observe students use outside of drama lessons to further their learning; How do you ensure that all students have opportunities to participate during Spanish and English instruction?)

Family members were invited at the end of the family drama event to complete a survey reflecting on their experience participating in the drama event with their child or grandchild. The survey included fifteen Likert style statements and five open-ended response questions and statements about their experience and their child’s experience using drama during the family event and for learning, as well as their feedback on the use of drama for learning and how their child shares their experiences about using drama. The survey was created by the authors to identify family perceptions of the use of drama at school and at home, as well as drama as a tool to support literacy learning and DLL. A four-point scale was used for the Likert style statements with the following response choices: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly
disagree. See Table 1 for a list of statements used to examine parent perceptions of the use of drama.

**Table 1**

*Family member perceptions of drama in education (n = 16)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child expanded his/her Spanish vocabulary using drama strategies.</td>
<td>93.75%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child expanded his/her English vocabulary using drama strategies.</td>
<td>81.25%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child learned literacy skills in English using drama strategies.</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child learned literacy skills in Spanish using drama strategies.</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child tells me about using drama at school.</td>
<td>86.67%</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child feels included during drama lessons.</td>
<td>63.64%</td>
<td>27.27%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child shows me how he/she uses drama strategies.</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child and I used drama strategies together at school.</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child and I have used drama strategies together at home.</td>
<td>68.75%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think drama strategies help my child learn.</td>
<td>87.50%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think drama strategies should be used in school.</td>
<td>84.62%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to play with my child using drama strategies.</td>
<td>84.62%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think drama lessons include all learners.</td>
<td>84.62%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think my child likes the drama lessons.</td>
<td>92.31%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I think my child uses drama strategies when playing at home. 100%

Data Analysis

Video and audio data from the family drama event were transcribed, and family survey data were recorded into Qualtrics. The video and audio data were used to identify ways that families, students, and educators engaged with collaborative DLL during the drama event. In addition, the video data from the family drama event informed the focus group with the classroom teacher, paraprofessional, and principal. The video data was first examined to provide a description of the family event.

The focus group data was transcribed for analysis. The authors analyzed the survey data, Likert style questions and the open-ended response questions, using descriptive statistics and open-coding to gather additional insights into how families of pre-K students perceive the use of drama strategies to support their child’s DLL. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the survey measures, due to the small sample size of the family member participants. Open-coding was used to unpack the responses from the families in the open-ended response section of the survey and the transcripts from the teacher, paraprofessional, and principal to identify concepts in relation to the use of drama strategies to support literacy development in a DL classroom and with families. Both authors coded the data individually and then met to compare codes to identify themes and identify agreement or disagreement. The authors came to one hundred percent agreement on coding and identified concept areas that best aligned with the coding. Three concept areas were detected: drama strategies and DLL, drama strategies and inclusion, and families and communication. Using the three concepts, listed above, the first author went back
and coded the video data to identify examples from the family drama event that represented the three concepts used for analysis.

**Findings**

The findings are described using the three concept areas identified above: drama strategies and dual language literacy, drama strategies and inclusion, and families and communication. A brief description of the family drama event from our video analysis will be shared first. Then examples from the video analysis, families survey, and focus group will be presented in relation to the three concept areas.

**The Family Drama Event**

Mrs. Guerro, the principal, finished her introduction to families and then family members were partnered with their child. Miss Hernandez welcomed family members in English and then told everyone that she would be switching to Spanish for the drama lesson. She explained that when she and Miss Agosto take off their blue tie, this will indicate that it is now time for Spanish instruction because the blue tie is only worn during English instruction. Teachers in the district wore a blue item on days when English was the target language for the day and a green item on days when Spanish was the focus language. Each teacher selected an item for their classroom to wear for the appropriate color and Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto selected a tie. The educators selected a blue tie to indicate to students that it was time for English instruction. The focus was on color associated with a language for instruction, not the item itself, and should not be seen as sign of higher social placement. Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto co-taught a drama lesson in Spanish, just like a lesson that they would lead for students in the classroom using the lesson structure they learned from the EYEPlay PD (Farrand & Deeg, 2021; Farrand et al., 2020; Kilinc et al., 2016). All instructional activities, described below in English, were delivered in Spanish.
for the family drama event. See Figure 1 for more information about drama strategies used during the family drama event.

First, Miss Agosto led everyone in singing a song indicating that it was time for drama. Miss Agosto used her face to demonstrate she was sad by frowning and making her voice sound like she was crying. Next, she smiled from ear to ear and students and their family members joined in by clapping their hands on their knees and excitedly signing that it was time for drama. The first time they sang it using a sad tone, then happy, and the final time they sang it at a faster pace. Then Miss Hernandez previewed important vocabulary that would be used in the lesson with visuals for colors: rojo (red), azul (blue), marrón (brown), and blanco (white). After she held up a piece of paper with the color and the word written in Spanish, Miss Hernandez then called on a student or family member to share the name of the color. Next, she would repeat the color word aloud, asking students and families to repeat the word and occasionally pointing at her ear to say, “I can’t hear you family members!” The audience would then smile, repeating the word again with the students. Miss Hernandez led the students and their families in clapping their hands on their knees to count the syllables of each color word. When one student, Jose, volunteered to say the name of a color but did not respond, his mom whispered “marrón” in his ear, which prompted Jose to exclaim, “marrón!” Miss Hernandez thanked his mother for helping him, just as she had earlier when a student helped a peer with a word that she had forgotten.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example from Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family In-character</strong></td>
<td>Students and their family members step into character as characters in a book, allowing students and their family members to pretend to enter the fictional space of the story and take on different characters within the fictional narrative space. This strategy helps students and their family members with exploring different possibilities and ideas to promote problemsolving skills and point of view.</td>
<td>The educators invited students and family members to step-in character to become the gato (cat) in the fictional world of Pete el Gato. Families put imaginary ears, eyes, legs, paws, a tail, whiskers, and shoes on their bodies. Next, they imagined they were picking berries with their paws and moving noisily through the barro/mud in their zapatos (shoes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bridge Up</strong></td>
<td>The student and his/her family member reach their arms up to make a bridge by touching palms. The individuals in the bridge use that space to talk about information, share something new they have learned, and collaborate to come up with new ideas through talking. This strategy helps to focus student attention on the opinions, key ideas, and details being shared by the person or persons involved in the bridge up.</td>
<td>The student bridges up with his/her family member(s) and shares personal connections using vocabulary from the lesson to share a favorite color, such as rojo (red), azul (blue), marrón (brown), and blanco (white).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multimodal Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Write vocabulary words for the languages being learned and students’ home languages. Have an image and/or an object that represents the vocabulary words available with each of the target vocabulary words written in both languages. Model and encourage students to use the images, objects, and movement to support language and literacy development. This strategy supports the language learner’s language acquisition and comprehension by connecting key vocabulary to actual objects, images, and movements.</td>
<td>The instructor holds up pictures of the items in the story labeled in Spanish and English: fresas/strawberries, arándanos/blueberries, barro/mud, or zapatos/shoes to review key vocabulary before and during the read aloud. After the read aloud, the instructor holds up a toy or image of items from the story, so children and family members can identify the colors of the items. Then children and families retell the story using movements, such as pretending to eat fresas/strawberries, in combination with Spanish or English to support language acquisition, vocabulary, and comprehension.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. List of select strategies used during the family drama event to promote dual language literacy development*
Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto stood up and modeled a learning strategy that they use to support literacy development called bridge up. For bridge up, two people raise their hands above their head and reach out to touch the palms of their hands against another person to make a bridge. During bridge up, Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto modeled a think aloud strategy to explain that the activity required students to talk to each other, identify their favorite color in Spanish, and give an example of an object of that color. Next, they invited families to make a bridge with their child. Family members around the circle put their hands up with their child. A grandmother could be seen smiling with her grandson as she shared that azul was her favorite color. A mother laughed when her son told her his favorite color was green. She smiled and said, “Tell me in Spanish.” He smiled back and replied “verde.” One boy stood up and bridged up with his mom and dad, to share their favorite color, including his older brother, who smiled and actively participated alongside his family. Families then came together as a whole group and shared their favorite colors with the students in Spanish. Students proudly raised their hands to share the favorite color of their family member. One boy shyly shared that his mom liked two colors, rosa and verde, and counted dos (two). Everyone clapped and cheered for him, which brought a big smile to his face.

Miss Hernandez then reviewed vocabulary for items: fresas (strawberries), arándanos (blueberries), barro (mud), and zapatos (shoes). She invited students and families to call out the colors of the different food items. Miss Hernandez extended the activity by inviting everyone to use their hands to support meaning making by pantomiming how they would eat certain fruits. Family members pinched two fingers together to pretend they were eating pequeño (small) berries.
Next, the teaching team led children and their families through pre-reading activities and a read aloud of *Pete, el Gato: I Love my White Shoes* (Litwin, 2016) in Spanish. Miss Hernandez kept the papers of the vocabulary words with images displayed in front of her on the carpet. She then invited students and families to count out loud while using their fingers to identify the number of shoes the character, Pete, had on the cover of the book. Everyone could be heard counting to four in Spanish. Miss Hernandez used positive praise and a thumbs up to encourage students and their families throughout the lesson. She would stop and say “*muy buena*” to a family member or student who responded to a question. After reviewing the colors of the character’s shoes, Miss Hernandez introduced a social phrase song with hand movements to students and their families, letting them know that they would get opportunities to sing the social phrase song during the read aloud. Miss Hernandez smiled and happily began singing and moving her hands in front of her. The students quickly began to sing and do the hand movements with her, inspiring family members to quickly join in singing. Students smiled and beamed with pride as their mom, dad, brother, sister, or grandparent moved their hands and sang with them. During the next stage of the lesson, Miss Hernandez passed Miss Agosto the book, and she began the read aloud. She reviewed the elements of the book, including the title, author, illustrator, front cover, and back cover. During the read aloud, Miss Agosto read with expression, changing her voice and facial expression to convey sadness and happiness at various points in the story. Miss Agosto stood up and started to move her feet and pretend she was walking like the cat in the story as she read. Periodically, she would stop and invite students and their families to sing the social phrase song they were taught. Students would turn to their family members to smile and move their hands, singing to the rhythm created by the families in the room.
After the read aloud, Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto invited students and their families to stand up and pretend to pull ropes to open an invisible magic bag that was hanging from the ceiling. Family members reached their arms high into the air with their child and pulled the invisible ropes to open the magic bag. The invisible magic bag fell to the ground, and everyone pretended to open the bag. Everyone reached out their hands and pulled the bag back and peeked inside. Miss Hernandez then called on a student or family member and asked them to share what they would need from the bag to become a cat. Miss Hernandez encouraged everyone to grab pretend items from the bag, such as feet, shoes, whiskers, and fur to become a cat, like the character in the story they had read, *Pete the Cat: I Love my White Shoes* (Litwin, 2010). Students were seen putting on whiskers and turning to their family members, smiling as they touched their whiskers with their cat paws and smiling. Students and their families joined Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto in becoming a cat by making cat noises, walking around, and picking and eating strawberries and blueberries. Families joined in pretend play with the students by “meowing” and walking around in character as a cat to explore the pretend world created in the media center. While in character, the audience authentically reviewed vocabulary for colors and the items introduced prior to the read aloud as they described the color of their shoes and the food they were eating. Parents and students in character as cats began to bend down and pick berries with their paws. They then turned to each other to share the color of the fur on their paws as they ate different types of berries. For instance, students told their family members that their fur turned *rojo* (red) when they ate *fresas* (strawberries) and *azul* (blue) when they ate *arándanos* (blueberries). Students and families could be seen and heard squishing their *zapatos* (shoes) in the *barro* (mud), just as in Pete the Cat (Litwin, 2010). Together they explored through movement and sound what Pete the Cat did and felt as he stepped in the *barro*. 
The activity concluded when everyone took off their imaginary paws, shoes, whiskers, and fur and placed them back in the magic bag, stepping out of their roles and out of the pretend world they had created together to explore meaning making with their interactive read aloud. The magic bag was returned to the invisible place high in the ceiling. Everyone clapped their hands on their legs and excitedly sang a song indicating that drama time was over. Lastly, the students answered some comprehension questions connected to the read aloud. Students raised their hands proudly in the air and smiled as they shared what they had learned in the pretend world with their families as cats.

Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto put on their blue tie to indicate a transition back to using English and thanked the families for coming to their drama event and for participating with the class. Miss Hernandez reviewed the drama strategies that were used and explained to the audience that they had just experienced how teachers and students read stories during DL instruction in the classroom. Families expressed excitement at hearing all of the Spanish their children had learned. Students thanked their families for coming today to join them in pretend play with drama to make meaning by using their arms to make a roller coaster motion with sound effects as a multimodal thank you.

**Drama Strategies and Dual Language Literacy**

Drama strategies promoted DL literacy by providing families with opportunities to use multiple modes for learning, such as observe, sing, and move, during the event in Spanish to engage in learning with their child and educators. Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto modeled the use of strategies and then invited students, families, and Mrs. Guerro to participate in using drama strategies together to support DLL. During the family drama event on May 1, 2019, Miss
Hernandez and Miss Agosto modeled how they preview vocabulary with images and movement, prior to, during, and after a read aloud to support vocabulary development. Family members and students actively clapped out syllables to color words and supported their child with naming colors, like marrón (brown), when they needed support. They also modeled and invited families to participate in talking about specific vocabulary words using the bridge activity to share personal connections with vocabulary words, such as the Spanish words for various colors. Families participated by singing the social phrase and incorporating relevant gestures. Finally, they stepped into character by using the magic bag to put on whiskers and fur. Family members were able to enter the pretend space created in the media center with the students to explore becoming a character from a book to make meaning and support language development with movement, sound effects, song, and spoken word. Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto also reviewed the parts of a book and read aloud a picture book. The embedded literacy experiences during the family event allowed families to participate in literacy strategies with their child, identifying potential strategies to use at home to support literacy learning. Family members were observed actively participating with the students throughout by singing, talking, moving, and pretending to be a cat for the sake of making meaning in Spanish.

Through the survey, families were able to share their perceptions of literacy learning using the survey. The survey contained four Likert-style statements and one open-ended response question about literacy learning for their child (See Table 1). All family members relayed that their child expanded his or her Spanish and English vocabulary using drama strategies; one hundred percent of families stated that their child learned literacy skills in Spanish and English using drama.
In the open response section of the survey, family members expanded upon their child’s experiences using drama strategies to learn language and literacy in Spanish and English in the open response section. One family member wrote, “Instead of just playing with English words he will use both Spanish and English words or songs as well as using gestures.” Another family member commented, “He is always singing what he is taught, whether it’s English or Spanish. He really loves Spanish.” Two family members commented that it has supported their child in becoming more confident in their DL skills. One said, “She enjoys every step that she does and she feels so confident even when she’s shy sometimes.” Another wrote, “Utilizing these skills have helped him become more confident whenever using either language.”

Miss Hernandez expressed her belief that drama has supported students with becoming more confident in Spanish and English in the classroom:

They are saying more words in Spanish and I have John, speaks no Spanish at home. Before he was so shy. Now, he’s talking. I have videos of them talking in Spanish and then like Elizabeth, she was so shy, she didn’t want to talk and she surprised me because she knows a lot of letters…and she’s participating more in class (Focus Group, May 5, 2019).

Drama Strategies and Inclusion

Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto had been implementing drama strategies in Spanish and English for the entire school year based on their participation in the EYEPlay PD. The family drama event provided families with an opportunity to be included in experiencing a drama lesson by participating alongside their child and their child’s teachers. Mrs. Guerro also provided administrative support by partnering with a student and participating alongside students and their families during the drama event. Family members reflected on their perceptions of the
drama strategies and learning for their child at school by responding to five Likert style statements. One hundred percent of families identified that their child tells them about using drama at school and that they think their child likes the drama lessons. One hundred percent of family members also identified that drama lessons include all learners and that their child feels included during drama lessons. Over ninety percent of families surveyed stated that drama strategies should be used in school.

In the open-ended response section, family members were asked, “What benefits or drawbacks do you think using drama has on your child’s learning in the classroom?” All of the families who answered this question responded positively to the use of drama for their child’s learning in the classroom. One family member wrote, “Only seen benefits because he even uses it to express himself when he needs to describe something that he can’t find the words” (Families Survey, May 1, 2019). Another wrote, “He understands what he is being told. He loves to dance and sing. He has learned a lot from drama. The way he gets in the car he is singing the material.” Multiple parents continued to comment on their child’s confidence, “She feels confident” and “I think it helps them express and overcome shyness.” One parent remarked, “it has stimulated his imagination and recollection of a story greatly.”

Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto explained that they are now implementing drama strategies outside of drama lessons to support students with their learning throughout the day. Miss Hernandez described some strategies that have been implemented during literacy centers:

- They [students] were making an illustration and writing words…they were counting the syllables. Because I implement some of the strategies that we learn in drama, I implement them during my whole class. For example, when we are learning new
vocabulary words in Spanish, we do Bridge Up, that is *manos arriba*. And then they have to come with a partner and count the syllables of the word.

**Families and Communication**

Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto promoted family engagement with communication and participation with families through a newsletter, classroom visits, videos, and family events. The family event described in this manuscript is the second family drama event the Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto had done during the 2018-2019 school year. The first event was held in December in English. Miss Hernandez shared that some family members had volunteered in the classroom during the year and participated and observed drama lessons in the classroom. Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto also developed a weekly newsletter throughout the school year to share what they are doing in the classroom, including vocabulary words in Spanish and English. In addition, Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto made videos of the children learning with drama that they shared with families, so families could observe what they are doing inside of the classroom and extend learning opportunities from the classroom into the home.

When Mrs. Guerro welcomed the families at the beginning of this event, she reinforced the importance of education and family involvement in education. She also emphasized the value of reading to children and explained that she and the classroom teacher are always available to provide support and answer questions. The principal went on to share how she read with her children as they grew up and examples of how she stayed involved in their education throughout the years. She ended by thanking the families for making time to come to school that day and participate alongside their child in the family drama event.
Five of the Likert style statements focused on families and their involvement with their child and drama strategies. All family members identified that they have used drama strategies with their child at school and that their child shows them how he or she uses drama strategies. One hundred percent of families stated that they use drama strategies with their child at home, with 68.75% marking strongly agree. Lastly, all participants identified that they like to play with their child using drama strategies. Family member participants did not expand to provide examples of how they use drama with their child at home.

Family members were asked to respond to two open-ended response questions or statements related to their experience at the drama event and how their child has shared their experiences using drama at school. First, families were asked to describe their experience at the drama event, revealing that all family members found the experience positive. Additionally, family participants explained that they enjoyed seeing the students express their learning, noting that the experience demonstrated the progress the students had made in regards to DLL in Spanish and English. One family member wrote, “I love the participation with students, teachers, and parents during these events. I am not fluent in Spanish, but I am learning through my son.” Another wrote, “So fun to see her progress from the beginning of the school year. Her confidence has soared.” Yet another parent wrote, “I was very impressed with my child’s growth with language and motor skills.” Multiple parents commented on the success of the program, with a parent writing, “Had lots of fun and really enjoy watching them demonstrate what they learned and the great work the teachers have done.”

The second open ended response question asked family members to explain how their child shares his or her experiences using drama in the classroom with them. Most family
members explained that their child shares what they are learning every day when they get home from school. Examples of comments parents made include

“Every day he tells me something new he learned. New words, stories, or songs.”

“He comes home talking about everything he’s learned and shows his sister.”

“He gets in the car, he sings and dances the way he is taught. He loves to show us what he is learning”

The classroom teacher, paraprofessional, and principal were also impressed with the number of families who attended and participated in the family drama event. The teacher was unsure if attendance would be high because the lesson was in Spanish, but she was pleasantly surprised to have over three fourths of the families in attendance. Some of the families in her classroom were bilingual, but the majority of the families spoke English at home. The principal, classroom teacher, and paraprofessional explained that they maintain an open-door policy at their school and encourage families to be involved. Miss Hernandez said,

I always tell my parents the doors are open if you want to come, be sure that you are a volunteer…I always invite them…They can see their [student] routine, they can see what the kids are learning. I always invite parents and I always have good communication with them. Every day I’m sending them messages in class. For today students have this homework, when they meet one of the goals, then, I record them and I send them [videos] to them (Focus Group, May 5, 2019).

The researchers asked Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto how they support students and their families with bringing in their culture into the classroom. Miss Hernandez replied that the main focus has been on academics and supporting language learning in Spanish and English.
Both Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto explained that their goal for next year will be to support students and families in learning more and sharing more about their heritage.

**Discussion**

By setting a goal at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, Miss Hernandez and Miss Agosto committed to extending their own professional development not only in their classroom instruction but also to the families of their students. Through the creation of the family drama event, the teacher and paraprofessional in this study aimed to share the drama strategies they learned through the EYEPlay PD program (Farrand & Deeg, 2021; Farrand et al., 2019b; Kilinc et al., 2016) with parents and families so that families could extend learning at home. This event allowed families to experience how drama strategies and play provide opportunities for literacy learning in which students, teachers, and families could co-construct new knowledge together (cf. Edmiston, 2008) in a shared CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Using Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural approach to learning, students became a “head taller” by participating in meaning making with their family members, peers, and educators. Students alongside educators were experienced in this CoP and were therefore able to help the newcomers, the visiting family members, learn more about the use of drama strategies as a resource of language and literacy learning at both school and at home. Students were able to do more with the support of their family members, peers, and teachers than they could have individually to make meaning to support language and literacy development in Spanish during the family drama event.

The use of drama strategies to promote language and literacy allowed children, alongside their teachers and families, to engage in learning through collaborations incorporating multiple modes of communication (Brown, 2017; Farrand & Deeg, 2020). By stepping into the role of characters from the book, families along with their children were able to create a “broader, rather
than narrower, approach to literary understanding” (Adomat, 2009, p. 635). Similar to the findings of Farran and Mindrila’s (2017) parent survey about the benefits of using drama strategies, the families, classroom teacher, and paraprofessional in our study identified that incorporating drama strategies promoted the language and literacy development of their children in Spanish and English. The family drama event and on-going communication provided by the school principal, DL teacher, and the paraprofessional further extended learning beyond the classroom. Previous research has found providing this type of on-going support has the potential to increase parental involvement (DeLoatche et al., 2015) and build family member’s knowledge about how to incorporate literacy activities at home (Swain & Cara, 2019; Timmons & Pelletier, 2015). Moreover, the administrative backing provided by the district, school principal, and teaching artists facilitated the necessary PD and resources to support educators in effective family outreach. This type of administrative support fosters teachers’ abilities to articulate the benefits of inclusive DL programming to students, families, and the community (Farrand et al., 2019A; 2019B) and share how drama strategies promote DLL and literacy.

Limitations and Recommendations

The authors were unable to include information about participant backgrounds or cultures in this research. The authors acknowledge that literature is needed that examines the culture of educators, students, and their families and how cultures play a role in educational programming, like the family drama event described above and DL programs for pre-K students. Because the data from the family drama event was collected at the end of the academic year, researchers were unable to follow up with participants to identify ways that families are incorporating drama strategies to support language learning at home. The authors recommend including a follow up survey or focus group with family members to learn more about how families incorporated
drama strategies to support language learning at home after the event. Also, by following up with family and educator participants, researchers can gather specific information about how drama strategies are being used at home and school, as well as how families culture plays a role in their beliefs about education.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this study suggest that when parents are invited to participate with drama alongside their child in the early childhood classroom, they are able to actively explore DLL opportunities to promote literacy. The classroom teacher, principal, paraprofessional, and families all agreed that drama had supported students with becoming more confident in both Spanish and English, and parents further expressed a desire for drama strategies to be used in school. The classroom teacher, paraprofessional, and principal related the improved academic and social outcomes they have observed in the students in the DL classroom with the use of drama strategies learned during the EYEPlay PD.
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