The Effectiveness of Dialogic Reading in Increasing English Language Learning Preschool Children's Expressive Language

Diana Brannon
Elmhurst College, Illinois, United States

Linda Dauksas
Elmhurst College, Illinois, United States

Abstract

The effectiveness of dialogic reading in increasing the literacy interactions between English language learning parents (ELL) and their preschool aged children and children's expressive language development were studied. Twenty-one ELL parents of preschool aged children received dialogic reading training every other week for a ten-week period. Parents in the dialogic reading group allowed their children access to the book and posed and solicited questions significantly more than the control group. Children with parents in the dialogic reading group held the book, posed and solicited questions, and sustained attention significantly more. Overall, parents in the dialogic reading group exhibited significantly stronger skills in two categories of reading: promoting interactive reading and using literacy strategies. Children whose parents received the dialogic reading training acquired significantly more words from pre-test to post-test. Researchers found that and parents' literacy interactions with their children were positively influenced by the dialogic reading training and that parents' use of dialogic reading positively affected their children's expressive language skills

Introduction

Dialogic reading is a form of shared reading that encourages parents to share the reading process with their child. It focuses on verbal interactions between parents and children rather than on the more traditional format of parents reading aloud to children and children sitting and listening. Dialogic reading techniques focus on open-ended questions and expanding on children's comments and ideas regarding the book being shared. The program is based on encouraging children's participation, providing feedback, and adjusting verbal interactions based on children's ability (Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, Fischel, 1994). Exposing young children to a variety of types of interactions such as is done with dialogic reading expands their vocabulary, (Wilde & Sage, 2007) use of narratives, questioning, and answering (Beals, DeTemple, & Dickenson, 1994). This is particularly important for ELL students who are often at risk on not making adequate vocabulary gains (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011).

Dialogic reading provides opportunities for direct vocabulary instruction. Direct vocabulary instruction is especially important for ELL children. Biemiller and Boote (2006), found that direct vocabulary instruction for young ELL children can result in significant gains. In their review of vocabulary research for young children, Jalongo and Sobolak (2011) explained the need for children to be provided with vocabulary instruction that includes questioning, clarifying, repeating, pointing to words, supplying examples, and teaching vocabulary using "child friendly" definitions young children can understand. Dialogic reading encourages parents to utilize all of these techniques.

The effects of dialogic reading training on parents' literacy interactions with their children over time have also been studied. Huebner and Payne (2010) found that two years after receiving brief

dialogic reading training, parents who received training used 90% more dialogic reading behaviors than parents who had not received training. This leads to the conclusion that parents' literacy interactions with their children can be positively influenced with limited training. The generalizability of this finding however is limited due to the homogenous nature of the population. Ninety-four percent of the participants were Anglo-American women.

Research on the dialogic reading method supports its use with young children. However, Mol, Bus, De Jong and Smeets (2008) questioned its use with families at the greatest risk of school failure. Their meta-analysis of 16 (quasi-) experimental dialogic reading studies concluded that the research base so far has be standardized on middle-class White suburban families and questioned its effectiveness for families with lower education levels and families learning English as a second language.

Current Study

The current study was designed to measure the effectiveness of dialogic reading training at increasing ELL parents' literacy interactions with their preschool aged children and their children's expressive language development. It attempts to answer whether ELL parents' literacy interactions with their preschool aged children can be positively influenced with dialogic reading training; and, if parents' use of dialogic reading affects their ELL children's expressive language skills.

The study was conducted in preschool classes that were part of a school district in the Midwest of the United States located just outside of a major city. The school district serves the second most severe Limited English Proficient population in the county. The school population is 52-percent low-income and has 71-percent limited-English proficiency. The district provides preschool programs for children three to five classified as "at risk" based on screening results of children's expressive and receptive language, fine and gross motor skills, and social / emotional and intellectual processing. The preschool incorporates daily mandatory family involvement. Parents spend the first 15 minutes of school reading aloud with their children before leaving the school each morning. This Family Time was used for dialogic reading training for parents involved in the study.

Participants
A total of 40 parents participated in the study. A majority of the participants were children's parents. However, three grandparents and one babysitter participated in the study in place of a parent. Parents whose children attended preschool in the morning participated in the dialogic reading training. Parents whose children attended preschool in the afternoon participated in the traditional preschool Family Time which consisted of parents being asked to read aloud to their children with no other dialogic instruction.

Twenty-one parents were in the morning dialogic reading group and 19 parents participated in the afternoon traditional Family Time group. An initial survey was given to determine if there were any significant differences between the groups that might impact the results of the study. There were no significant differences between the two groups regarding parental education, home language, number of books in the home, visits to the library, or the number of times children see a parent reading in the home. These items were surveyed because parental education (Myrberg & Rosén, 2009) home language (Halle, Hair, Wandner, McNamara, & Chien, 2012) and the number of times parents read (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002) have all been found to have an effect on student achievement. A majority of the parents participating in the program (75% of the dialogic reading group and 67% of the traditional Family Time group) had a high school education or less, spoke

Spanish in the home (75% of the dialogic reading group and 61% of the traditional Family Time group), and reported reading with their children at least four times a week (65% of the dialogic reading group and 56% of the traditional Family Time group).

There were 42 preschool children (26 boys and 17 girls) between the ages of three and five participating in the study. On average, the children in the dialogic reading group (13 boys and 9 girls) were four years three months (SD = 6.09 months) and the children in the traditional Family Time group (13 boys and 8 girls) were four years two months (SD = 6.66 months).

Dialogic Reading Training

The two groups of parents whose children participated in the morning classes were provided dialogic reading training three days a week every other week for 10 weeks. The program therefore included five weeks of instruction for both morning classes over a period of 10 weeks. Parents from Teacher A's class received training weeks 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9. Parents from Teacher B's class received training weeks 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10.

Every other Monday parents received 15 minutes of dialogic reading training focusing on the dialogic reading strategies *Comment, Ask, and Respond (CAR)* and *1, 2,3 Tell Me What You See.* The *CAR* strategy, part of the *Language is the Key Program* designed by Washington Research Institute, teaches parents to Comment and wait (provide a language model), Ask questions and wait (encourage interaction and reflection) and Respond and add more (build expressive language). This technique was taught for the first two weeks of each group's training. The last three weeks of each group's training focused on a technique designed by one of the authors specifically for this study called *1, 2, 3 Tell Me What You See.* This strategy asks children to comment on what they see (encourage expressive language), parents to teach new words (build expressive and receptive vocabulary) and to connect the story to the child's life (connect to background knowledge).

Every other Tuesday parents watched the dialogic reading method being modeled in front of their child's class for 10-15 minutes. Every other Wednesday parents received sample questions and a copy of the book being used that week to practice dialogic reading techniques with their child.
All presentations, materials, and children's literature were in English and Spanish. Parents were allowed to keep the copy of the book being studied each week of the intervention to encourage practice at home. The books used for the study were chosen to align with the preschool curriculum. Parents in both the control and intervention groups received a set of 5 random picture books in English and Spanish to be kept in the home to ensure equal access to literature in the home.

Six undergraduate students administered the trainings. All but one of the students spoke Spanish. All of the administrators were asked to attend a full-day training on the dialogic reading method and to observe in the preschool classrooms for the first couple of weeks during the semester to build familiarity with the preschool program and with the families before the dialogic reading program began.

Methodology
Adult – Child Interactive Reading Inventory
Parents' literacy interactions with their children were videotaped in the fall before the study began and in the winter at the conclusion of the dialogic reading training sessions. Children had five

books to choose from (in English and Spanish). Parents and their children were videotaped for seven minutes each time.

Two undergraduate research assistants were trained to score the videos using the Adult – Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI) developed by Andrea DeBruin-Parecki. The ACIRI is an observational tool designed to assess adult / child interactions during storybook reading. The ACIRI measures both adult and child behaviors related to 12 literacy behaviors in three categories of reading including: enhancing attention to text, promoting interactive reading and supporting comprehension, and using literacy strategies.

The items, categories, and total mean scores for the adult and child portions of the ACIRI were each found to be significantly correlated (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999). Alpha coefficients were calculated for both pre and post-tests, subscales, and overall. The ACIRI was found to be reliable with Alpha coefficients of .80 or above (Duran, 2008). The construct and consequential validity were also found to be high (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999).

Results

Paired t-tests were performed between groups and within groups across time to determine the effect dialogic reading training had over time on program participants. There were no significant differences between the group of parents who were going to receive the dialogic reading training and the traditional Family Time group regarding interactions at the beginning of the program (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Interactions of Parents from Each Group at Pre-Test

Item	Dialogic Reading Group (N = 21)		Traditional Family Time Group (N = 19)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Enhancing Attention to Text				
Maintaining physical proximity	.05	.22	.05	.23
Sustaining interest and attention	.62	.80	.26	.65
Holding the book and turning pages	.33	.58	.16	.37
Displaying a sense of audience	.38	.59	.26	.45
Promoting Interactive Reading & Comprehension				
Posing and soliciting questions	5.05	2.75	3.32	2.69
Identifying and understanding pictures & words	3.86	2.74	2.90	2.28
Relating content to personal experiences	.67	1.02	.32	.58
Pausing to answer questions	.76	1.30	.79	1.36
Using Literacy Strategies				
Identifying visual clues	1.10	1.18	2.00	1.97
Predicting what happens next	.14	.36	-	-
Recalling information	.05	.22	.05	.23
Elaborating on ideas	.09	.30	-	-

Table 2: Interactions of Children from Each Group at Pre-Test

	Dialogic Reading Group	Traditional Family Time Group

	(N = 21)		(N = 19)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Enhancing Attention to Text				
Maintaining physical proximity	-	-	.05	.23
Sustaining interest and attention	1.81	1.50	2.74	2.21
Holding the book and turning pages	1.62	3.94	1.05	1.31
Displaying a sense of audience	.09	.30	-	-
Promoting Interactive Reading & Comprehension				
Posing and soliciting questions	4.05	3.07	2.37	2.22
Identifying and understanding pictures & words	.71	1.15	1.53	1.50
Relating content to personal experiences	.19	.40	.05	.23
Pausing to answer questions	.95	1.47	1.00	1.76
Using Literacy Strategies				
Identifying visual clues	.76	1.67	.63	1.61
Predicting what happens next	-	-	-	-
Recalling information	.05	.22	.05	.23
Elaborating on ideas	.52	.81	.26	1.15

There were significant differences by the post-test, as seen in Table 3. Parents in the dialogic reading group allowed their children access to the book and posed and solicited questions significantly more than the traditional Family Time group (p < .01). Children with parents in the dialogic reading group held the book, posed and solicited questions, and sustained attention significantly more than children in the traditional Family Time group (p < .01) (Table 4). Overall, parents in the dialogic reading group exhibited significantly stronger skills in two categories of reading: promoting interactive reading and using literacy strategies (p < .01) (Table 5).

Table 3: Interactions of Parents from Each Group at Post-Test

	Dialogic Reading Group (N = 21)		Traditional Family Time Group (N = 19)	
Item	M	SD	M	SD
Enhancing Attention to Text				
Maintaining physical proximity	.09	.30	.05	.23
Sustaining interest and attention	.71	1.19	.26	.56
Holding the book and turning pages	.67**	.58	.05	.23
Displaying a sense of audience	.67	.73	.11	.32
Promoting Interactive Reading & Comprehension				
Posing and soliciting questions	19.52**	11.62	5.53	5.33
Identifying and understanding pictures & words	2.90	2.72	4.63	3.90
Relating content to personal experiences	.52	.98	.58	1.30
Pausing to answer questions	1.29	2.19	.37	.96
Using Literacy Strategies				
Identifying visual clues	.95	.97	.74	.87
Predicting what happens next	.19	.51	.05	.23
Recalling information	-	-	.05	.23
Elaborating on ideas	.71	2.17	-	-

 * p < .05
** p < .01

Table 4: Interactions of Children from Each Group at Post-Test

	Dialogic Reading Group (N = 21)		Traditional Family Time Group (N = 19)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Enhancing Attention to Text				
Maintaining physical proximity	.05	.22	-	-
Sustaining interest and attention	1.48	1.44	3.37**	2.65
Holding the book and turning pages	2.00**	2.53	.47	.70
Displaying a sense of audience	-	-	-	-
Promoting Interactive Reading & Comprehension				
Posing and soliciting questions	17.76**	11.23	3.68	4.12
Identifying and understanding pictures & words	.57	1.08	1.79	2.42
Relating content to personal experiences	.29	.56	.11	.32
Pausing to answer questions	1.33	2.37	.42	.96
Using Literacy Strategies				
Identifying visual clues	1.14	.85	-	-
Predicting what happens next	.24	.70	.11	.46
Recalling information	-	-	.05	.23
Elaborating on ideas	.52	.81	-	-

 * $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Table 5: Overall Scores for Interactions from Each Group

	Dialogic Reading Group (N = 21)		Traditional Family Time Group (N = 19)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Attention to Text	1.42	.87	1.08	.68
Promoting Reading	11.05**	5.33	4.28	3.33
Using Literacy Strategies	.94**	.78	.25	.25

 * $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Test of Expressive Language

Students' expressive language was measured using the picture-naming portion of the Individual Growth Developmental Indicators (IGDI) test developed at the University of Minnesota. The IGDI test is designed to monitor the literacy development of young children ages three to five. The test includes three separate measures including picture naming, rhyming, and alliteration. Each of these assessments is administered one-on-one. Only the picture-naming test was administered because the focus of the study was expressive language.

Students taking the picture-naming test are presented with pictures on individual cards. They are asked to name the objects on as many of the cards as they can in one minute. The number of words correctly identified and the number of words attempted are recorded by the test administrator. Students' picture naming ability was assessed prior to the start of the study and 10 weeks later after the parent dialogic reading training sessions were completed.

The words assessed by the picture-naming portion of the IGDI include those that are typically found in a preschool-aged child's vocabulary including household objects, animals, and foods. The picture-naming portion of the preschool Individual Growth and Developmental Indicator (IGDI) was found to be a valid and reliable measure of language development in young children. One-month alternate form reliability coefficients range from $r = .44$ to $.78$ (McConnell, Priest, Davis, & McEvoy, 2002). It was found to correlate with results from other norm-referenced language skill measures for young children including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (3rd edition) and the Preschool Language Scale (McConnell, Priest, Davis, & McEvoy, 2000).

Children whose parents received the dialogic reading training acquired significantly more words ($p < .01$) from pre-test to post-test than children in the traditional Family Time group (Table 6).

Table 6: Children's Picture Naming Results at End of Program

	Dialogic Reading Group (N = 20)				Traditional Family Time Group (N = 21)			
	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Number Correct	11.45	6.32	14.32**	5.38	11.52	5.93	12.48	6.22
Number Attempted	19.27	6.78	24.18	4.74	18.33	4.75	20.10	5.25

 * $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Discussion

The current study was designed to address the need for research about the effectiveness of the dialogic reading method in increasing literacy interactions between ELL parents and their children and the effect these interactions had on children's expressive language development. Researchers found that parents' literacy interactions with their children can be positively influenced with weekly dialogic reading training and that parents' use of dialogic reading positively affects their children's expressive language skills.

These findings help to address the concerns of Mol et al., (2008) regarding the effectiveness of dialogic reading training with ELL families. English language learning parents in the dialogic reading group exhibited significant shifts in behavior. They allowed their children access to the book significantly more often than the traditional Family Time group. This simple act of encouraging their children to hold the book and turn pages encourages sharing between parents and children, which helps to encourage attachment (Nash & Hay, 2003). The parents using dialogic reading strategies also posed and solicited questions significantly more often than the traditional Family Time group. This is important because posing questions is an important step towards increasing children's comprehension and retention of information (Kertoy, 1994).

Limitations

The relatively small number of participants involved in this study is a limitation. Also, attendance varied with participants. The post assessment videos were taken with the same parent as the initial videos to ensure consistency. However, sometimes children were represented by a different parent, childcare provider, or relative during the program. There was not a statistically significant difference in the attendance between the group that received the dialogic reading training and the

traditional Family Time group. But, because of variations in attendance, some parents received less training than others.

Another possible limitation on the effect the program had on children's expressive language and parents' interactions is the books used during the program. The books used aligned with the preschool curriculum. However, they were not the best examples of effective books for the dialogic reading method. The illustrations were often very simplistic and repetitive, possibly limiting the responses and interactions of parents. In the future, books with detailed and varied illustrations including culturally relevant items children are familiar with that can be used for discussion and retelling should be selected. Gains may have been greater for the dialogic reading group if the books utilized followed these criteria.

Conclusions

Children learn new vocabulary through active engagement (Bloom, 2002) and exposure to new words in meaningful ways in their environment (Hart & Risley, 1995). When young children participate in shared reading with a parent they are provided opportunities to develop their expressive language through parental modeling of new vocabulary, increased questioning, and feedback (DeBaryshe, 1995).

Expressive language development is especially important for children who are English language learners. English language learners often experience slow vocabulary development. Slow vocabulary development is directly related to decreased comprehension levels later in school (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). Hart and Risley (1995) found that low-income children, often English language learners, knew 600 fewer words than children from upper-income families at the age of three. This discrepancy only widens as years go on. Biemiller and Slonim (2001) found that minority children can know as many as 4,000 words fewer than children from upper-income families by second grade. Therefore, it is important that interventions such as dialogic reading training be provided for ELL families during preschool when children's largest vocabulary growth occurs (Farkas & Beron, 2004).

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Authors

Diana Brannon is an Associate Professor of Education at Elmhurst College and a Nationally Board Certified teacher with 20 years teaching experience. Her research interests include parent involvement, emergent literacy, and working with English Language Learning families. She has developed and implemented a variety of programs to help increase family involvement and literacy practices for families of promise. brannond@elmhurst.edu.

Linda Dauksas is an Assistant Professor of Education at Elmhurst College. Before joining the college she dedicated thirty years teaching and leading programs for children with special needs. Her specialty area is early childhood special education. dauksasl@elmhurst.edu.

Contact details for both authors
Elmhurst College
190 Prospect Ave
Elmhurst College, 1L 60126