

SHARING A READING TECHNIQUE WITH FAMILIES

Christy K. Irish ■ Seth A. Parsons

Isabella came home from her first day of preschool excited to show her mom the craft she had made. Isabella's mother was not expecting her daughter to tell her that she already had homework. When her mother looked in Isabella's folder, there was a note about the importance of reading to your preschooler every day for at least 15 minutes. Isabella's mother and father already read to her frequently, and they had many books at home. They read aloud to Isabella each night before bed and sometimes in the afternoon, but they questioned whether they were doing enough.

Isabella's parents were doing a great job reading to her, but Isabella's reading experience may be enhanced by her teacher sharing reading tips with her family. One practice teachers use to support young children's reading development is shared reading. A specific type of shared reading that focuses on enhancing a child's expressive vocabulary is dialogic reading, which takes place between an adult and a child and uses picture books to improve the literacy and language skills of young children. In dialogic reading, the child becomes the teller of the story and the adult becomes the listener

who helps the child tell the story by using prompts or questions.

The types of shared readings preschoolers experience can affect their literacy development in big ways. For example, dialogic reading may increase a preschooler's expressive vocabulary (Lonigan, Purpura, Wilson, Walker, & Clancy-Menchetti, 2013; Wasik & Bond, 2001)—and a preschooler's vocabulary is a strong predictor of his or her later success in reading (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2010). Expressive vocabulary is increased during dialogic reading because the child is given a chance to use new vocabulary while discussing the book (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998).

Many young children come to preschool with limited vocabularies (Biemiller, 2003), and teachers today are charged with the task of increasing young children's vocabulary skills through early literacy programs. For example, the Common Core English

Christy K. Irish is a doctoral candidate at George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, USA; e-mail cirish@gmu.edu.

Seth A. Parsons is an associate professor at George Mason University Fairfax, VA, USA; e-mail sparson5@gmu.edu.

Language Arts Standard 4 for kindergarten asks students to “Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Educators are focusing on similar standards for prekindergarten, even though the Common Core English Language Arts standards are for K–8. Teachers frequently use shared reading techniques with young children in the classroom, but children also benefit from these techniques at home. Some families may wonder what they can do to help their child learn to read, and teachers look to families to help support their instruction in the classroom by working with children at home.

Who Can Benefit?

All young children need to increase vocabulary to achieve reading success, and this is one important reason why dialogic reading is an effective method for families. Studies have found that dialogic reading may also benefit students’ narrative skills (Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). Families with young children (ages 3 to 6) are great candidates to share the technique with. Identifying families and

Table 1 Acronyms and Prompts to Facilitate Dialogic Reading

Acronyms	Examples
Completion prompts	Child fills in blank: “There were three little _____.”
Recall prompts	What was the old lady doing?
Open-ended prompts	Tell me what’s happening here.
Wh- prompts	Why do you think they are sitting there?
Distancing prompts	What is your favorite thing to eat?
Prompting child to label and talk	What is this book going to be about? (“Bunnies.”)
Evaluating the child’s talk	Yes, that’s a bunny.
Expanding child’s answers	What do you think she is going to do? (“She’s whispering hush.”)
Repeating child’s answers	Yes, she’s whispering hush and putting everything to bed.

children and helping families set goals to increase shared readings are great first steps. Look at the families you currently serve, and decide who could benefit most. One teacher stated that although she was presenting to families with elementary school students, many of these families also had young children in the home.

What Is Dialogic Reading?

Dialogic reading can best be remembered using two acronyms developed by Zevenbergen and Whitehurst (2003), CROWD and PEER, which describe nine scaffolding techniques that can be used during a shared reading. The techniques are mostly types of questions or prompts that can be asked while reading with a young child. Table 1 displays the type of prompts, with examples, used in the acronyms.

When implementing dialogic reading, the family should encourage the child to participate, provide constant feedback to the child, and adapt the reading style to the child’s growing linguistic abilities (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). The child and adult should consistently talk about what is happening in the story and expand on it beyond the printed text. Repeated readings will also help the child go further when she is asked to expand on answers or repeat parts of the story.

The child should be active and engaged. Asking children questions

that are engaging and that make them think critically encourages them to use new vocabulary. One experienced teacher writes the dialogic reading prompts on craft sticks and then gives the sticks to families to help them remember the prompts at home. The following example of Isabella reading with her father illustrates the technique with a popular children’s book, *Goodnight Moon*.

Isabella brings her father *Goodnight Moon* to read. The cover is worn from frequent reading. Even though Isabella and her father have read the book many times, he still starts the conversation by looking at the cover. Isabella’s father knows that the purpose of dialogic reading is to help Isabella increase her vocabulary and expand her understanding. He uses dialogic reading to open up dialogue between them, not to prompt her for a “correct” answer.

Father	What is this book going to be about? [open-ended prompt]
Isabella	Bunnies.
Father	Yes, that’s a bunny. What do you think the bunny is going to do?
Isabella	She’s whispering hush.
Father	Yes, she’s whispering hush and putting everything to bed. [PEER sequence]

Pause and Ponder

- What opportunities are you providing families to be involved with their child’s reading progress?
- When presenting a read-aloud, what types of questions may improve children’s vocabulary?
- How can you help families form active dialogue during their own read-alouds? What types of bonding experiences may result from this dialogue?

Isabella's father continues, and Isabella often finishes his sentence before he does.

Father "In the great green room
There was a telephone
And a red balloon; And a
picture of—
The cow jumping over the
moon
And there were three little
bears..." [completion prompt]

Isabella Sitting in chairs.

Father Yes, they are sitting on chairs.
Why do you think they
are sitting on those chairs?
[wh- prompt]

Isabella They are eating.

Father What do you think they are
eating? [distancing prompt]

Isabella I think they are eating pizza.

Father What is your favorite thing to
eat?

Isabella I like when we get to go out to
eat. Sometimes I get chicken
nuggets.

Father Yes, you do. Let's keep reading.
"And two little kittens
And a pair of mittens..."

When Will I Find the Time?

Dialogic reading can happen any-time a shared reading occurs, but because the children are active participants, the story may take longer than a traditional shared reading. Families should find a time when they will not feel rushed. Teachers can use a flier to share the technique with families or, if possible, hold a 30-minute workshop before or after school one day. When holding workshops for families, include the children. One teacher presented the technique at her school's Title I Family Fun Night. She explained, "The parents were engaged and able to use

their new knowledge that night! The parents were engaged with the school and with their children." During this Family Fun Night, the families practiced using dialogic reading with their children.

Where Should I Start?

Teachers should share with families that dialogic reading is beneficial for their young child, but if other children are present, those children may also participate. Teachers suggest scaffolding for families by sending home a printable book with sticky notes that have questions already formed for the families to ask. After families become comfortable with the questions, then the teacher can just put reminders for the prompts (such as the craft sticks with prompts attached), and then try just sending home the printable book. See Table 2 for more ideas for getting parents started.

How Does Dialogic Reading With Families Work?

Families can be directed to use dialogic reading the same way they use traditional shared readings. Families should pick out a book with their child and find somewhere comfortable to sit. Reading at home should be about enjoying books with each other. These experiences not only provide valuable interactions for children, but they also help to develop a love of reading. Most read-alouds children experience are based on fiction books (Ray, 2005), but dialogic reading works wonderfully with nonfiction texts as well.

It may be beneficial for teachers to help families choose quality books to read. After choosing a book, the family should start by sharing the front cover of the book with the child and discussing what the child thinks the book might be about. This activates

Table 2 Getting Started Today: Tips for Using Dialogic Reading

- Read with your child daily.
- Learn dialogic reading prompts (CROWD, PEER).
- Choose a book and discuss the front cover and title.
- Reread the same book multiple times throughout the week.
- Choose one or two prompts to practice using each day.
- Engage children with their own interests.
- Note any changes in your child's vocabulary.
- Talk with your child's teacher about how it is going.
- Have fun and enjoy this time with your child!

background knowledge and vocabulary. The parent then begins reading the book to the child and using the prompts (CROWD and PEER). Not all of the prompts have to be used in one reading. The family may want to save the book to read later in the week and try different prompts.

Why Is It Important?

Studies show that when families engage in book-centered literacy activities at home, scores in vocabulary and comprehension increase, especially in low-achieving students who have strong literacy support from the family (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000; Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008). Doyle and Bramwell (2006) also suggest that dialogic reading may promote social-emotional learning, as well as emergent literacy. By increasing a student's vocabulary, which is an emergent literacy skill, teachers can increase a young child's chance of reading success (Lonigan, Anthony, Bloomfield, Dyer, & Samwel, 1999).

Informed families are likely to try dialogic reading if they understand the benefits. The child's progress gives families something they will be excited to discuss with the teacher. For example, Isabella's father stated that he not only notices her vocabulary and

TAKE ACTION!

- Identify how you want to share dialogic reading with families (flier, after-school presentation, family literacy night, etc.).
- Prepare materials to present to families (e.g., flier with prompts, example books and questions, tips sheet provided by authors).
- Schedule a time to meet with families.
- Provide a comfortable, child-friendly atmosphere to share the technique.
- Send families books to use at home and reminders.
- Follow up with families to get feedback and answer questions.

comprehension of texts increasing but that they have also spent special time bonding while reading.

In addition to the highly structured book sharing that dialogic reading provides, families and teachers can never underestimate the importance of sharing beautiful books and allowing the young child to guide the discussion, to imagine, and to dramatize. It seems

both may be important if we want to grow both skilled readers and readers who cannot wait to find the next great book.

REFERENCES

- Biemiller, A. (2003). Vocabulary: Needed if more children are to read well. *Reading Psychology, 24*(3-4), 323-335. doi:10.1080.02702710390227297
- Doyle, B.G., & Bramwell, W. (2006). Promoting emergent literacy and social-emotional learning through dialogic reading. *The Reading Teacher, 59*(6), 554-564. doi:10.1598/RT.59.6.5
- Hargrave, A.C., & Sénéchal, M. (2000). A book reading intervention with preschool children who have limited vocabularies: The benefits of regular reading and dialogic reading. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*(1), 75-90. doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(99)00038-1
- Jordan, G.E., Snow, C.E., & Porche, M.V. (2000). Project EASE: The effect of a family literacy project on kindergarten students' early literacy skills. *Reading Research Quarterly, 35*(4), 524-547. doi:10.1598/RRQ.35.4.5
- Lever, R., & Sénéchal, M. (2011). Discussing stories: On how a dialogic reading intervention improves kindergartners' oral narrative construction. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 108*(1), 1-24. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2010.07.002
- Lonigan, C.J., Anthony, J.L., Bloomfield, B.G., Dyer, S.M., & Samwel, C.S. (1999). Effects of two shared-reading interventions on emergent literacy skills of at-risk preschoolers. *Journal of Early Intervention, 22*(4), 306-322. doi:10.1177/105381519902200406
- Lonigan, C.J., Purpura, D.J., Wilson, S.B., Walker, P.M., & Clancy-Menchetti, J. (2013). Evaluating the components of an emergent literacy intervention for children at risk for reading difficulties. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, 114*(1), 111-130. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2012.08.010
- Lonigan, C.J., & Shanahan, T. (2010). Developing early literacy skills: Things we know we know and things we know we don't know. *Educational Researcher, 39*(4), 340-346. doi:10.3102/0013189X10369832
- Lonigan, C.J., & Whitehurst, G.J. (1998). Relative efficacy of parent and teacher involvement in a shared-reading intervention for preschool children from low-income backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 13*(2), 263-290. doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(99)80038-6
- Mol, S.E., Bus, A.G., de Jong, M.T., & Smeets, D.J.H. (2008). Added value of dialogic parent-child book readings: A meta-analysis. *Early Education and Development, 19*(1), 7-26. doi:10.1080/10409280701838603
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- Ray, K.W. (2005). Read-aloud: Important teaching time. *School Talk, 10*(3), 1-6.
- Wasik, B.A., & Bond, M.A. (2001). Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*(2), 243-250. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.93.2.243
- Zevenbergen, A.A., & Whitehurst, G.J. (2003). Dialogic reading: A shared picture book reading intervention for preschoolers. In vanKleeck A., S.A. Stahl, & E.B. Bauer (Eds.), *On reading books to children: Parents and teachers* (pp. 170-191). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.