

Dialogic Reading: An Effective Approach for Reading Pictures Books with Preschool Children

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ダイアロジックリーディング：効果的な絵本の読み聞かせ方

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Abstract

Many adults believe reading picture books with children is beneficial for children. However, the methods they use will affect children's language and literacy skills. Dialogic reading developed by Whitehurst et. al (1988) shows an effective way that adults can interact with young children during joint picture book-reading in order to achieve the most language development. This paper first summarizes research findings about book-reading activities and introduces a book-reading procedure using dialogic reading.

Key words: dialogic reading, book-reading, literacy development, language development

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抄 録

子どもに絵本を読むことはよいことと考えられている。しかし、ただ絵本を読み聞かせるのではなく、養育者の読み方が子どものことばや読み書き能力の発達に影響を与えている。Whitehurst 他 (1988) によって開発された dialogic reading は効果的な読み聞かせ方を示している。本稿はまず読み聞かせに関する研究結果について説明し、dialogic reading を考察する。

キーワード：ダイアロジックリーディング、読み聞かせ、読み書き能力の発達、ことばの発達

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Introduction

Reading books to young children is considered to be important and has been linked to later school success in the US (Teale, 1984). This activity, however, may be perceived differently and variation in this activity has been found. Children could develop their emergent literacy skills from joint book-reading activities if adults read with them effectively. Dialogic reading developed by Whitehurst et. al (1988) demonstrated how adults read books with preschool children to develop children's language skills and preliteracy skills. This paper introduces how adults should employ dialogic reading when reading books with young children.

Theoretical Framework of Book Reading

Emergent literacy is defined as "the reading and writing behaviors that precede and develop into conventional literacy" by Sulzby (1989). Children are innately predisposed to construct these early literacy skills, being influenced by their social environment (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). For example, Heath's ethnographic study showed how the home language environment influenced children's later school performance (1982). Emergent literacy is also important because children's preparedness for literacy when entering school is strongly related for their later school success (Gee, 1996). However, the children's preparedness for literacy varies across families, social classes, and communities. Clues to what kind of literacy environment children have can be found in interactions between adults and children during book-reading.

Book reading studies indicate that reading books to children is related to children's vocabulary development (Ninio and Bruner, 1978), and level of language development (DeBaryshe, 1993). Reading to young children at home has been also linked to early literacy skills and to school success (Goldfield and Snow, 1984). It is also important to point out that adults' reading styles vary across communities and interaction during book-reading changes as children grow older (Heath, 1982).

Ninio and Bruner (1978) found a highly interactive routine between a mother and her child when they read picture books together. They found even earlier communicative forms between the mother and her child when she labeled pictures. For example, mothers tried to direct the attention of their 8 to 18 months old children and the children responded by gazing. The mothers asked questions and provided labels¹ upon request from the children. This routine is a distinctive characteristic found in book reading activities.

Book reading experience provides children not only an opportunity for developing language but an opportunity for a predictable routine. Goldfield and Snow (1983)

1) Mothers said "That's a frog" when their child saw a picture of a frog and asked "what's this?"

discovered a strategy for language acquisition which occurred through picture book-reading sessions. The child in their study learned many linguistic tools and lexical items in frequently reoccurring discussions with his mother. He also learned what to say about a picture from what his mother had said about it. Snow also suggests that the child begins to understand the adult's role through interactions with his mother during picture book-reading. The child came to ask what adults would ask when they read books to children (Snow & Ninio, 1986).

Types of questions parents raise also affect children's vocabulary growth. For example, in the study of Israeli mother-child interactions Ninio (1980) found that children learn productive vocabulary when they are asked "what" questions when they are read to. Children produce imitative vocabulary when they are asked "where" questions during their story time. She also found that mother who are of low-socio economic status are less likely to provide labeling, and they are less likely to ask "where" and "what" questions.

Types of interaction which parents have with their children during book-reading also affect children's literacy development. Heath's study (1982) on three different communities suggests that types of interaction when parents read stories to children affect children's literacy development. White working-class children in her study were regularly read to, but the parents did not extend book reading beyond its context, while middle class parents taught children to develop less literal concepts of reading. She also found that black working-class children faced unfamiliar questions when they started formal schooling because they had not had an opportunity to read books with their parents.

Different routines and approaches during book-reading have been also found. Teale (1984) observed three different book reading styles among mothers with their two-and-half-year old children. The first style he observed was mothers who simply read books to children without any interaction. The second style he observed was to involve the child in book-reading by providing turn-taking opportunities and questions. The third style he observed was mothers who had their children echo as they read.

In addition to these book reading studies at home, Marinez and Teale (1993) studied how kindergarten teachers read stories to students. They observed six different teachers at a kindergarten and found six different styles; a teacher who treated stories as cohesive entities comprised of interrelated elements; a teacher who emphasized inferential reasoning; a teacher who had little story talk and emphasized story theme; a teacher who focused on words and had children predict upcoming words; a teacher who focused on textually explicit information; a teacher who focused on unimportant information. Their study suggests that the book reading experience could be very different for kindergarten children.

Dialogic reading

The studies described in the previous section indicate that how adults interact with children during book-reading is more important than just reading to develop children's emergent literacy skills. It is also important to point out that adults have different reading styles when they read with children. A reading approach called dialogic reading developed by Whitehurst et. al (1988) shows how adults should interact with written text using dialogic reading. This approach has been demonstrated to be effective in enhancing children's language skills and preliteracy skills (Whitehurst et. al, 1994).

Dialogic reading was originally developed for parent-child shared book-reading intervention at home (Whitehurst et. al, 1988). The adult in dialogic reading teaches the child to become a story teller by providing models of language, asking the child questions, giving the child with feedback, and eliciting increasingly sophisticated descriptions from the child (see Appendix A for full description of principles). For example, adults should ask "what" questions instead of "yes/no" questions because children need to participate actively in the activity. Adult feedback is also important because children increase their spontaneous imitations and speeches.

Description of the dialogic reading procedures and materials

Below I describe how adults should interact with children when reading picture books with preschool age children using A Pocket for Corduroy (Freeman, 1998)² (see Appendix B for the list of books recommended for dialogic reading by Whitehurst et. al (1994)).

When adults begin reading the story, they should use different types of questions suggested in dialogic reading (Whitehurst et. al, 1988). The following example is a mock interaction between an adult and a child..

Text: "Late one summer afternoon Lisa and her mother took their laundry to the laundromat."

Adult: Where are Lisa and her mother going? (**Ask "what" questions**)³

Child: To the laundromat.

Adult: That's right. To the laundromat. (**Repeat what the child said to provide encouragement.**)

Text: "As always on such trips Lisa carried along her toy bear, Corduroy."

Adult: What is the name of her toy bear? (**ask a question about the object**)

Child: Corduroy.

2) Whitehurst et. al selected books to support vocabulary growth and story narrative by illustrations.

3) The (bolded) statements are types of questions and/or interactions which Whitehurst et. al recommended.

- Adult: Yeah, Corduroy is wearing red corduroy pants. (**Expand what the child said**)
- Adult: What is Lisa's mother carrying? (**ask a question about the object**)
- Child: Laundry.
- Adult: That's right. (**Praise and encourage**) Laundry. (**Repeat what the child said**)
- Text: "The laundromat was a very busy place at this hour. 'Now Corduroy, you sit right here and wait for me,' Lisa said. 'I'm going to help with our wash.'"
- Child: I go to the laundromat with Mommy, too.
- Adult: You, too. What do you do in the laundromat? (**Shadow the child's interests**)
- Child: I, I, ...
- Adult: You help.... (**Help the child as needed**)
- Child: I help Mommy.
- Adult: That's great! (**Praise and encourage**)
- Text: "Corduroy waited patiently. Then he suddenly perked up his ears. Lisa's mother was saying, 'Be sure to take everything out of your pockets, Lisa dear. You don't want your precious things to get all wet and soapy.'"
- Adult: What do you see on this page? (**Ask open-ended questions**)
- Child: They are doing the laundry.
- Adult: That's right, and what is Lisa doing? (**Ask "what" questions**)
- Child: She is checking the pocket.
- Adult: Why does she need to check the pocket?
- Child: Because.....
- Adult: Show me what you have in your pockets?
- Child: I have a candy.
- Adult: What will happen to your candy in your pockets when you wash your pants? (**Follow answers with questions**)
- Child: It gets wet.
- Adult: That's right. So, Lisa's mother is telling her to take everything out of the pockets.

A dialogue continues this way by inviting the child to speak to interact.

Follow-up Activities

As follow up activities of dialogic reading, have children draw a picture based on the story they read with them. Then, ask a child to tell a story. In this activity, adults will be

able to look for behaviors that they would expect from dialogic reading. They will also be able to assess how well children understand the story. Another follow-up activities could be to have children draw a picture about their weekend on Monday morning. Then, ask them to tell a story about their weekend. Observe how they tell a story by paying attention to their language and grammar. These activities will help the adults evaluate the children's reading activity (e.g. how well they understood the book; how much they have learned from dialogic reading).

Home and school environment

Whitehurst et. al (1994) suggest that dialogic reading works best when it is used by parents at home as well as by teachers at school. When both parents and teachers employ this technique during book reading, children see the connection between home and school environment. Arnold et. al (1994) created a video for parent training, teachers can use the video to train the parents to be a dialogic reading reader for their children. The training should also include the types of books ideal for dialogic reading because books containing colorful illustrations are suitable for vocabulary introduction and narrative development. By making a list of appropriate books for the activity, parents can check out the books from the class library.

As dialogic reading works best with a smaller number of children, it is difficult for teachers to do this activity when they have 20 children in a class (Whitehurst et al, 1994). When one teacher directs a follow-up activity, another teacher usually prepares the next activity. As Arnold et. al (1994) suggest, this reader/student ratio problem can be solved by training volunteers such as parents or college students to be dialogic reading helpers.

Conclusion

Dialogic reading is an effective approach for reading books with young children. It encourages them to learn new words and to improve their story telling skills. It is especially effective when used in conjunction with other types of reading approaches which promote other important aspects such as phonemic awareness or concepts of print.

Appendix A: Description of Dialogic Reading Principles from Arnold et. al (1994)

The first assignment consisted of the following seven principles.

1. *Ask "what" questions.* When children practice language they develop their language skills, and when parents ask "what" questions they evoke speech from the child. Such questions more effectively elicit language than does either pointing or asking "yes/no" questions.
2. *Follow answers with questions.* Once the child knows the name of a pictured object, parents should ask a further question about the object. Examples include attribute questions, which require the child to describe aspects of the object such as its shape, its color, or its parts, and

action questions, which require the child to describe what the object is used for or who is using it.

3. *Repeat what the child says.* Parents should repeat the child's correct responses to provide encouragement and to indicate when the child is correct.
4. *Help the child as needed.* Parents should provide models of a good answer and have the child imitate these models.
5. *Praise and encourage.* Parents should provide feedback and praise when the child says something about the book, for example, "good talking," "That's right," or "nice job."
6. *Shadow the child's interests.* It is important for parents to talk about the things that the child wants to talk about. When they child points at a picture or begins to talk about part of a page, parents should use this interest as a chance to encourage the child to talk.
7. *Have fun.* Parents can make reading fun by using a game-like, turn-taking approach. Parents should keep the procedures, in proportion by simply reading to the child part of the time.

During the second assignment, parents were taught to do the following.

1. *Ask open-ended questions.* Parents should ask less structured questions that require the child to pick something on this page and tell about it, for example, "What do you see on this page?" and "Tell me what's going on here." These questions are more difficult than specific questions, and at first the child might be able to say very little when asked these questions. Parents should encourage any attempts to answer and provide models of good answers. Additional open-ended questions can be asked about the same page. When the child runs out of things to say about a page, one more piece of information should be added.
2. *Expand what the child says.* Parents should model slightly more advanced language by repeating what the child says with a bit more information or in a more advanced form. For example, if the child said "Duck swim," parents should say something like "Right, the duck is swimming." If the child said "Wagon," the parent should say something like "Yes, a red wagon." The best expansions add only a little information, so that the child is able to immitate them.

Appendix B: Books Used in Dialogic Reading in the Whitehurst et. al dialogic reading study (1994)

Author	Title and publisher
Kate Duke (1984)	Guinea Pigs Far and Near. New York: E.P. Dutton.
Kate Duke (1984)	What Would a Guinea Pig Do? New York: E.P. Dutton.
Hazel Edwards (1988)	Stickybeak. Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens.
Don Freeman (1972)	A Pocket For Corduroy. New York: Viking
Jack Gantos (1989)	Rotten Ralph's Show and Tell. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Marie-Louise Gay (1987)	Rainy Day Magic. Niles, IL: Albert Whitman.
Eric Hill (1989)	Spot's Baby Sister. New York: Putnam.
Thomas Hood (1990)	Before I Go To Sleep. New York: Putnam.
Angela Johnson (1990)	Do Like Kyla. New York: Orchard, Division of Franklin Watts.
Eric Kimmel (1990)	I Took My Frog to the Library. New York: Viking Penguin.
Dave Saunders & Julie Saunders (1990)	Dibble and Dabble. New York: Bradbury Press.
Ashley Wolff (1990)	Come With Me. New York: E.P. Dutton

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