

What Works Clearinghouse



Dialogic Reading

Program Description¹

Dialogic reading is an interactive shared picture-book reading practice designed to enhance young children's language and literacy skills. During the shared reading practice, the adult and

the child switch roles so that the child learns to become the storyteller with the assistance of the adult, who functions as an active listener and questioner.

Research²

Two studies of dialogic reading that fall within the scope of the Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The two studies included 52 students with language delays, from ages three to six, participating in early childhood programs in the Pacific Northwest.³ Both studies examined intervention effects on children's communication and language competencies.

Based on these two studies, the WWC considers the extent of evidence for dialogic reading to be small for communication and language competencies for children with disabilities. No studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations examined the effectiveness of dialogic reading for children with disabilities in the domains of cognitive development, literacy, math competencies, social-emotional development and behavior, functional abilities, or physical well-being.

Effectiveness

Dialogic reading was found to have potentially positive effects on communication and language competencies for children with disabilities.

1. Dialogic reading does not have a single developer or official description. The descriptive information for this program was adapted from publicly available sources: descriptions of this practice (see the websites listed under Additional Program Information) and research articles. This practice also is reviewed in the WWC intervention report for the general population as part of the Early Childhood Education topic area. Two related practices are reviewed in the Early Childhood Education WWC intervention reports on *Interactive Shared Book Reading* and *Shared Book Reading*.
2. The studies in this report were reviewed using WWC Evidence Standards, Version 2.0 (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Chapter III).
3. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

Effectiveness *(continued)*

	Cognitive development	Communication/ language competencies	Literacy	Math competencies	Social-emotional development/ behavior	Functional abilities	Physical well-being
Rating of effectiveness	na	Potentially positive effects	na	na	na	na	na
Improvement index⁴	na	Average: +11 percentile points	na	na	na	na	na
	na	Range: -2 to +45 percentile points	na	na	na	na	na

na = not applicable

Additional program information

Developer and contact

Dialogic reading is a practice that does not have a single developer responsible for providing information or materials. However, readers interested in using dialogic reading practices in their classrooms can refer to sources available through Internet searches for information. A list of examples follows, although these sources have not been reviewed or endorsed by the WWC:

- Pearson School: <http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PSZ16i&PMDbSiteId=2781&PMDbSolutionId=6724&PMDbSubSolutionId=6733&PMDbCategoryId=3289&PMDbProgramId=22109&level=4>
- Committee for Children: <http://www.cfchildren.org/programs/ww/overview/>
- Reading Rockets: http://www.pbs.org/launchingreaders/rootsofreading/meettheexperts_2.html
- American Library Association: <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/ecrr/index.cfm>
- Washington Learning Systems: <http://www.wlearning.com/language/dialogic-reading/>

Scope of use

Dialogic reading was created in the 1980s, and the first published study appeared in 1988 (Whitehurst et al., 1988).⁵

4. These numbers show the average and range of student-level improvement indices for all findings across the studies.

5. Whitehurst, G. J., Falco, F. L., Lonigan, C. J., Fischel, J. E., DeBaryshe, B. D., Valdez-Menchaca, M. C., & Caulfield, M. (1988). Accelerating language development through picture book reading. *Developmental Psychology*, 24(4), 552–559.

Information on the number or demographics of children or centers using this intervention is not available.

Teaching

Dialogic reading can be used by teachers and other adults with children individually or in small groups. Adults can be trained in the principles of dialogic reading through video followed by role-playing and group discussion. While reading books with the child, the adult uses five types of prompts (forming the acronym “CROWD”):

- **Completion:** The child fills in the blank at the end of a sentence.
- **Recall:** The adult asks questions about a book the child has read.
- **Open-ended:** The adult encourages the child to tell what is happening in a picture.
- **Wh-:** The adult asks *wh-* questions about the pictures in the books.
- **Distancing:** The adult relates pictures and words in the book to the child’s own experiences outside the book.

Children should be allowed sufficient time to respond to questions and prompts.

Additional program information *(continued)*

These prompts are used by the adult in a reading technique called PEER. The adult does the following:

- Prompts the child to say something about the book
- Evaluates the response
- Expands the child's response
- Repeats the prompt

As the child becomes increasingly familiar with a book, the adult reads less, listens more, and gradually uses higher level prompts

to encourage the child to progress beyond naming the objects in the pictures to thinking more about what is happening in the pictures and how this relates to the child's own experiences.

Cost

Published dialogic reading procedures are freely available to the public. Information is not available about the costs of training for and implementation of dialogic reading.

Research

Fifty-nine studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of dialogic reading on children with disabilities. Two studies (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999; Dale, Crain-Thoreson, Notari-Syverson, & Cole, 1996) are randomized controlled trials that meet WWC evidence standards. The remaining 57 studies do not meet either WWC evidence standards or eligibility screens.

Meets evidence standards

Comparisons meeting evidence standards in Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) included 19 three- to five-year-old children with mild to moderate language delays from five classrooms in three school districts in the Pacific Northwest. This study compared two intervention groups—a staff-implemented dialogic reading group and a parent-implemented dialogic reading group—to a comparison group that did not receive one-on-one dialogic reading. This report focuses on the comparison of communication and language outcomes between the parent-implemented group and the no-treatment comparison group. The comparison between the staff-implemented group and the no-treatment comparison group did not meet evidence standards because of

high differential attrition and lack of baseline equivalence and is excluded from this report.⁶

Dale et al. (1996) included 33 three- to six-year-old children with mild to moderate language delays from early childhood education programs at the University of Washington. This study compared communication and language outcomes for children whose mothers were trained in and asked to implement dialogic reading with those for children whose mothers were trained in and asked to implement the *Conversational Language Training Program*, an intervention which is similar to dialogic reading in its emphasis on an interactive style of communication with children but does not involve book reading.

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or medium to large (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix G). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.⁷

6. The Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) study was previously reviewed in the WWC's intervention report on dialogic reading as part of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) review of interventions for the general population. Results pertaining to the parent-implemented dialogic reading group were excluded from the previous review, because the ECE review focused exclusively on center-based interventions. In the previous review (based on WWC Version 1.0 study attrition standards), the WWC downgraded the Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) study, because differential attrition between the staff-implemented dialogic reading and the comparison group was high.
7. The extent of evidence categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept—external validity, such as the students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place—are not taken into account for the categorization. Information about how the extent of evidence rating was determined for dialogic reading is in Appendix A5.

Research *(continued)*

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for dialogic reading to be small for communication and language competencies for children with disabilities. No studies that meet WWC evidence standards with or without reservations examined the

effectiveness of dialogic reading for children with disabilities in the domains of cognitive development, literacy, math competencies, social-emotional development and behavior, functional abilities, or physical well-being.

Effectiveness Findings

The WWC review of interventions for Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities addresses student outcomes in seven domains: cognitive development, communication and language competencies, literacy, math competencies, social-emotional development and behavior, functional abilities, and physical well-being. The studies included in this report cover one domain: communication and language competencies. The findings below present the authors' estimates and WWC-calculated estimates of the size and the statistical significance of the effects of dialogic reading on children with disabilities.⁸

Communication and language competencies. Two studies examined outcomes in the domain of communication and language competencies for children with disabilities; one of these showed statistically significant positive effects, according to WWC criteria.⁹

Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) analyzed group differences for dialogic reading implemented by a parent and a comparison group. The authors did not find statistically significant differences between the parent-led intervention and the comparison group on any of the measures. The WWC did not find statistically significant differences on any measure, and the average effect was not large enough to be called substantively important and positive, according to WWC criteria (that is, at least 0.25).

Dale et al. (1996) found a statistically significant difference favoring children in the dialogic reading group on lexical diversity, but no statistically significant differences between groups on measures of mean length utterance and number of child utterances.¹⁰ The authors combined measures taken during a book-reading activity and a play activity, but the WWC separated outcomes by type of activity (book-reading or play) to calculate group differences on six outcomes. According to WWC calculations, there were statistically significant differences between the intervention and comparison groups on two of the six measures (lexical diversity during the play activity and total number of utterances during the book-reading activity).

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings, the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix E).

8. The level of statistical significance was reported by the study authors or, when necessary, calculated by the WWC to correct for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the WWC Tutorial on Mismatch. For the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance, see WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix C for clustering and WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix D for multiple comparisons. For the dialogic reading studies summarized here, no corrections for clustering were needed; however, corrections for multiple comparisons were needed, so the significance levels may differ from those reported in the original studies.
9. Process-oriented outcomes measuring the children's engagement in the tasks—called “partic” in Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) and “verbal engagement” or “total engagement” in Dale et al. (1996)—are excluded from this report.
10. The study also did not find a statistically significant difference on verbal engagement, which the WWC considers a process-oriented outcome and excludes from the review.

The WWC found dialogic reading to have potentially positive effects for communication and language competencies for children with disabilities

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Appendix F). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition and the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is entirely based on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analysis. The improvement index can take on values between -50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting favorable results for the intervention group.

The average improvement index for communication and language competencies for children with disabilities is +11 percentile points across the two studies, with a range of -2 to +45 percentile points across findings.

Summary

The WWC reviewed 59 studies on the use of dialogic reading for children with disabilities. Two studies meet WWC evidence standards; the remaining 57 studies do not meet either WWC evidence standards or eligibility screens. Based on the two studies, the WWC found potentially positive effects of dialogic reading on communication and language competencies for children with disabilities. The conclusions presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

References

Meets WWC evidence standards

Crain-Thoreson, C., & Dale, P. S. (1999). Enhancing linguistic performance: Parents and teachers as book reading partners for children with language delays. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 19*(1), 28–39.

Dale, P. S., Crain-Thoreson, C., Notari-Syverson, A., & Cole, K. (1996). Parent-child book reading as an intervention technique for young children with language delays. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 16*(2), 213–235.

Studies that fall outside the Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities review protocol or do not meet WWC evidence standards

Arnold, D., Lonigan, C., Whitehurst, G., & Epstein, J. (1994). Accelerating language development through picture book reading: Replication and extension to a videotape training format. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 86*(2), 235–243. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.

Arnold, D. H. (1993). Accelerating language development through picture book reading: Replication and extension to a videotape training format. (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1993). *Dissertation Abstracts International, 54*(10B). The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.

Arnold, D. S., & Whitehurst, G. J. (1994). Accelerating language development through picture book reading: A summary of dialogic reading and its effect. In D. K. Dickinson (Ed.), *Bridges to literacy: Children, families, and schools* (pp. 103–128). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Blom-Hoffman, J., O’Neil-Pirozzi, T., Volpe, R., Cutting, J., & Bissinger, E. (2007). Instructing parents to use dialogic reading strategies with preschool children: Impact of a video-based training program on caregiver reading behaviors and children’s related verbalizations. *Journal of Applied School*

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- Psychology*, 23(1), 117–131. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Branscum, E. (1998). *The effects of the presentation of compound stimuli on language acquisition during dialogic reading sessions*. Unpublished master's thesis, California State University–Stanislaus, Turlock, CA. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Brickman, S. O. (2002). Effects of a joint book reading strategy on Even Start. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(12A). The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention—there was only one unit assigned to one or both conditions.
- Briesch, A. M., Chafouleas, S. M., Lebel, T. J., & Blom-Hoffman, J. A. (2008). Impact of videotaped instruction in dialogic reading strategies: An investigation of caregiver implementation integrity. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(10), 978–993. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Canning, P. L. (2002). Picture book intervention to facilitate language production in monolingual Spanish-speaking children. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Denver, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 63(12A). The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine an intervention implemented in a way that falls within the scope of the review.
- Chambers, B., Cheung, A. C. K., & Slavin, R. E. (2006). Effective preschool programs for children at risk of school failure: A best-evidence synthesis. In B. Spodek & O. N. Saracho (Eds.), *Handbook of research on the education of young children, 2nd edition* (pp. 347–359). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Chow, B. W., & McBride-Chang, C. (2003). Promoting language and literacy development through parent-child reading in Hong Kong preschoolers. *Early Education and Development*, 14(2), 233–248. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Chow, B. W., McBride-Chang, C., Cheung, H., & Chow, C. S. L. (2008). Dialogic reading and morphology training in Chinese children: Effects on language and literacy. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(1), 233–244. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Chow, W. (2005). *Enhancing children's reading ability and vocabulary growth through dialogic reading and morphology training*. Unpublished master's thesis, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Collins, K. A. (1995). *Language development and dialogic reading with at-risk children*. Unpublished honors paper, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL. This study is ineligible because it does not use a sample within the age or grade range specified in the protocol.
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- Davis, S. E. (2004). An enhanced dialogic reading approach to facilitate typically developing pre-school children's emergent literacy skills. (Master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2004). *Masters Abstracts International*, 42(05). The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
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- Epstein, J. N. (1994). Accelerating the literacy development of disadvantaged preschool children: An experimental evaluation of a Head Start emergent literacy curriculum. (Doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1994). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 55(11B). The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Fielding-Barnsley, R., & Purdie, N. (2002). Developing pre-literacy skills via shared book reading: The assessment of a family intervention program for preschool children at risk of becoming reading disabled. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 7(3), 13–19. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Fielding-Barnsley, R., & Purdie, N. (2003). Early intervention in the home for children at risk of reading failure. *Support for Learning*, 18(2), 77–82. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Fries-Dias, C. M. (1993). Picture book reading to enhance vocabulary acquisition. (Master's thesis, University of the Pacific, 1993). *Masters Abstracts International*, 32(02). The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Fung, P. C., Chow, B. W. Y., & McBride-Chang, C. (2005). The impact of a dialogic reading program on deaf and hard-of-hearing kindergarten and early primary school-aged students in Hong Kong. *Journal of Deaf Studies & Deaf Education*, 10(1), 82–95. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Gregory, A. E. (2002). Constructing meaning: Kindergarten children's textual importations following dialogic reading intervention. (Doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 64(07A). The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Hargrave, A. C., & Senechal, 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. The study is ineligible for review because it does not take place in the geographic area specified in the protocol.
- Huebner, C. E. (2000). Community-based support for preschool readiness among children in poverty. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 5(3), 291–314. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Huebner, C. E. (2000). Promoting toddlers' language development through community-based intervention. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21(5), 513–535. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine an intervention implemented in a way that falls within the scope of the review.
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- Joye, E. W. (2007). A psychometric examination of the dialogic reading observation form in a sample of English and Spanish speaking caregivers. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Denver, 2007). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, *68*(11A). The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Justice, L. M. (2006). *Clinical approaches to emergent literacy intervention*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Kelley, C. P. (2003). *Dialogic reading: When a picture is worth a thousand words*. Unpublished master's thesis, Bank Street College of Education, New York, NY. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2003). *A dialogic reading intervention programme for parents and young children*. Sheffield, UK: Sure Start Foxhill & Parson Cross. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group.
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- 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. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
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- Sabbatini, H. L. (2001). *The effects of dialogic reading on the early reading abilities of preschoolers*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, AR. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.

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- Whitehurst, G. J., Epstein, J. N., Angell, A. L., Payne, A. C., Crone, D. A., & Fischel, J. E. (1994). Outcomes of an emergent literacy intervention in Head Start. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 86*(4), 542–555. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
- Whitehurst, G. J., Falco, F. L., Lonigan, C. J., Fischel, J. E., DeBaryshe, B. D., Valdez-Menchaca, M. C., et al. (1988). Accelerating language development through picture book reading. *Developmental Psychology, 24*(4), 552–559. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol.
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