

Promoting Early Literacy with Dialogic Reading

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Children's reading success is partially related to early literacy experiences that begin before kindergarten entry. Experiences at home can set the stage for children's beliefs about and motivation toward reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). As such, efforts that target preschoolers' early literacy experiences can have a positive influence on their later reading success.

Parents are children's first teachers. When parents see reading as a source of pleasure the message is communicated that reading is a form of entertainment. Shared book reading, which involves caregivers and children reading a book together, is one way in which children can acquire important pre-reading skills, including vocabulary knowledge, awareness of print, and story structures (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Dialogic reading (in other words having a dialogue with the child when reading together) is an approach to shared book reading that has been shown through numerous research studies to be helpful for children's language development. Dialogic reading was originally developed and researched by Dr. Grover Whitehurst and his colleagues at SUNY-Stony Brook. The goals of dialogic reading are for the child to become the storyteller and for the adult to facilitate, expand, and respond to the child's verbalizations. Dialogic reading is based on the theory that practice using language and providing children with specific feedback facilitates language development. When using dialogic reading strategies parents:

- (1) Ask their child open ended questions.
- (2) Follow their child's answers with questions.
- (3) Repeat their child's answers.
- (4) Provide assistance to their child as needed.
- (5) Provide praise and encouragement.
- (6) Follow their child's interests.
- (7) Have fun.

Dialogic reading includes nine specific questioning/prompting strategies that caregivers can use to actively engage young children in storybook reading. The strategies are represented by two acronyms, CROWD and PEER (see Table 1). The acronym CROWD stands for:

Completion
Recall
Open Ended Questions
Wh-type Questions
Distancing Prompts

The acronym PEER stands for:

Prompt
Evaluate
Expand
Repeat

Recently, Dr. Whitehurst collaborated with Pearson Early Learning to develop a commercially available video-based training program designed to teach parents and teachers to use dialogic reading strategies. The video program entitled, Read Together, Talk Together, is approximately 15-minutes in length. There are separate videos for parents and for teachers to learn to use dialogic reading strategies. The videos describe the dialogic reading strategies using the CROWD and PEER acronyms and show demonstrations of adults using the strategies with children.

A recent study found the Read Together, Talk Together parent video to be well regarded by parents who viewed the video (Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, & Cutting, 2006). In this study parents and their children were videotaped reading together at three points in time (at the beginning of the study, 6 weeks later, and 12 weeks later). Half of the parents viewed Read Together, Talk Together after the first videotaped observation and the other half did not (these families were able to see the video at the end of the 12 week study). The study demonstrated that the group of parents who viewed the video used the strategies with their children much more after they viewed the video than before they viewed the video. They also used the strategies much more than the group of parents who did not view the video (Blom-Hoffman, Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, Cutting, & Bissinger, in press). More information about the Read Together, Talk Together videos can be found on the internet at: <http://www.pearsonearlylearning.com/>.

Author Note: Dr. Blom-Hoffman and Ms. Cutting do not have a financial interest Read Together, Talk Together. The Read Together, Talk Together evaluation study conducted by Dr. Blom-Hoffman and her colleagues was funded by Northeastern University.

References:

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- Blom-Hoffman, J., O'Neil-Pirozzi, T., & Cutting, J. (2006). Read Together, Talk Together: The acceptability of teaching parents to use dialogic reading strategies via videotaped instruction. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43, 71-78.
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More Information on Research Supporting Dialogic Reading:

Whitehurst, G. J., Arnold, D. S., Epstein, J. N., Angell, A. L., Smith, M., & Fischel, J. E. (1994). A picture book reading intervention in day care and home for children from low-income families. *Developmental Psychology, 30*, 679-689.

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Whitehurst, G. J., Zevenbergen, A. A., Crone, D. A., Schultz, M. D., Velting, O. N., & Fischel, J.E. (1999). Outcomes of an emergent literacy intervention from Head Start through second grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 91*, 261-272.

Table 1.
Descriptions and Examples of DR strategies (CROWD and PEER; Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003)

Completion prompts	Fill-in-the-blank questions.	"At bedtime we brush our ____?"
Recall prompt	Questions that ask a child to remember a detail from the book.	"What did Jack do when he saw the pumpkin?"
Open-ended prompts	Statements/questions that encourage the child to talk about the book.	"Tell me about what is happening in this picture?"
Wh-prompts	What, where, and why questions.	"Why is the little boy sad?"
Distancing prompts	Questions that ask the child to connect events in the book to his/her own life experiences.	"You went to the zoo just like Sam did in the book, what did you see when you went to the zoo?"
Prompt	Encourage the child to name items in the book and talk about the book.	"Look at this picture, what do we call that?"
Evaluate	Statements that positively reinforce correct answers or correct child's incorrect responses.	"Yes, that is right, that is a bird."
Expand	Repeating what the child says and giving additional information.	"Yes, that is a bird. It's a red bird and we call it a cardinal."
Repeat	Encourage the child to repeat the adult's expanded response.	"Now you say cardinal."