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Supporting Children's Language and Literacy through Collaborative

Shared Book Reading

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Abstract

Language and literacy skills are critical for academic success. Shared book reading is an

evidence-based practice for improving a range of language and literacy skills in young children,

including those with or at risk for learning disabilities. The aim of this paper is to describe how

teachers and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can collaborate to support young children's

learning through shared book reading. An overview of shared book reading is presented,

followed by a description of the collaboration, implementation of the shared book reading

sessions, as well as instruction that can take place after the reading. By collaborating through

shared book reading, teachers and SLPs can enhance their overall instructional quality to more

effectively support the language and literacy needs of children with or at risk for learning

disabilities.

Keywords: shared book reading, collaboration, early childhood, learning disabilities,

language, early literacy

Supporting Children's Language and Literacy through Collaborative Shared Book Reading

Children who learn in inclusive settings have the opportunity to interact with peers with and without disabilities. Over the past decade, the amount of time students with disabilities spent in inclusive settings increased from 59 to 65%, and this increase was pronounced for students with learning disabilities of which 73% spend more than 80% of their day in general education settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). As such, developing a workforce of educators that are able to provide students with or at risk for developing learning disabilities with the high-quality instruction they need in order to make educational progress is a priority. The purpose of this paper is to provide guidance on how teachers can leverage the expertise of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to improve the language and literacy outcomes of young (i.e., preschool and kindergarten) children with or at risk for learning disabilities.

Teachers and SLPs can collaborate to provide high quality services to children with and without disabilities (Archibald, 2017; Chow, 2018). Active collaboration can promote an important partnership that centers on meeting the language and literacy development needs of all children, and these two educators are well-suited to learn from each other and contribute their unique knowledge and skills meeting the goals of the partnership. In doing so, they can establish an instructional environment that proactively addresses the learning needs of students with learning disabilities and their peers, which allows students with learning disabilities to learn with their peers. Ensuring that the general education classroom is the least restrictive environment for students with learning disabilities as often as possible is an important tenet of inclusion and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

In practice, classroom teachers can begin with a strong foundation for engaging students, setting positive and clear expectations for learning, developing strong rapport and understanding of the students' strengths and needs, and practice effective behavior management as a context for effective instruction (Chow et al., 2020). Once a high-quality learning environment is set, SLPs can use their expertise in typical and atypical language development and language intervention strategies to provide targeted instruction to students with or at risk for disabilities (including learning disabilities). This blending of skills and expertise has the high potential to improve literacy instruction and student outcomes, and both educators can learn skills and instructional strategies that can improve their own practice (Wallace et al., 2021).

This paper uses shared book reading as a practice that has high potential to improve student outcomes through a collaborative partnership between teachers and SLPs. Given the interplay between language, literacy, and reading (Suggate et al., 2018), SLPs bring nuanced expertise in language development to practice and can likely enhance the effectiveness of shared book reading – particularly for students with or at risk for learning disabilities, who often present deficits not only in early literacy but also language and are therefore likely to be on the SLP's caseload. The SLPs' expertise includes a deep understanding of the linguistic underpinnings of literacy and knowledge of structures that relate to spoken and written language (e.g., phonological awareness; Spencer et al., 2008).

Overview of Shared Book Reading

A large body of research points to the importance of interactive shared book reading to support young children's development of the language and literacy skills most closely linked to later reading achievement (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008; National Research Council, 2008). Consequently, shared book reading is recommended as a foundational practice in

early educational settings (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2000). Interactive

shared book reading refers to an adult-child interaction that prompts the child to actively engage

during the reading process as the adult encourages the child's responses to the reading. Through

this interactive format, that occurs almost daily in early childhood classrooms (Pentimonti et al.,

2011), the book serves as a focus of joint attention and a catalyst for meaningful conversations

that are often referred to as extratextual talk (i.e., talk between teachers and children beyond

reading the text itself). Simply reading the text is not as effective as an interactive reading style

(Flack et al., 2018; NELP, 2008). Through this meaningful interaction, the shared book-reading

experience becomes a highly valuable activity that takes up a relatively small amount of

instructional time, but has high potential for increasing engagement and educational significance.

In regard to specific skills, research points to the importance of interactive shared book

reading to support children's knowledge and skill development in three areas most closely linked

to reading achievement: (1) print knowledge, (2) phonological awareness and (3) oral language

(NELP, 2008; National Research Council, 2008). Print knowledge instruction provides explicit

teaching focused on enhancing children's emerging knowledge of the specific forms and

functions of written language, such as recognizing letters, words, and print conventions (e.g.,

Justice et al., 2009). Phonological awareness instruction teaches prerequisite decoding skills

focused on sound awareness abilities such as rhyming and blending and segmenting words,

syllables and phonemes (e.g., O'Connor et al., 1993a). Oral language is supported through the

use of dialogic reading strategies in which teachers use a variety of prompts to help children

learn vocabulary, improve their listening comprehension, and take an increasingly active role in

narrative retellings over repeated exposures to the book (e.g., Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998).

Beyond supporting language and literacy skills, conducting shared book reading sessions that are

interactive in nature may also be a helpful strategy to promote young students' social-emotional

learning (Fettig et al., 2018), especially given that talking, listening, and engaging in

conversations that reflect a child's interests and preferences can positively impact children's

motivation and attitudes.

Importantly, the benefit of engaging in shared book reading activities with a wide range

of children is also well established, including for young children with disabilities (Towson et al.,

2021). Most research including children with disabilities has established benefits of shared

reading with children with low language skills (e.g., Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). Specifically,

shared reading can positively impact the language (Dawes et al., 2019), including vocabulary

(Volmle & Storkel, 2015), and early literacy skills (Justice et al., 2015) of these children. The

clear value to conducting shared book reading activities for children with disabilities points to

the potentially important collaboration teachers and SLPs could engage in around these types of

activities to support children's language and literacy learning in the classroom environment. In

the next section, overviews and examples for planning and implementing collaborative shared

book reading are provided.

Planning and Implementing the Instruction

Structure: Collaborating and Planning the Shared Book Reading Sessions

Teachers and SLPs should first plan how they will work together to provide the shared

book reading sessions. One option is to use a co-teaching model; for detailed descriptions of such

models, see Zimmerman et al. (this issue). The aim of this paper is to describe a collaborative

model specific to shared book reading. Collaboration can take many forms, but the scenario

described here involves: 1) the teacher and SLP planning together, 2) the teacher conducting

shared book reading with the whole class, and 3) the SLP providing targeted, individualized

intervention for the children with or at risk for learning disabilities, many of whom would likely

be on the SLP caseload for speech-language impairment (Catts et al., 2002; McArthur et al.,

2000). The planning can involve choosing the books, targets (concepts, words, etc. from the

book that the teacher and/or SLP will focus on), and strategies, as described below. See Table 1

in Supplemental Materials for an example of what the shared book reading sessions may look

like. The intervention provided by the SLP can take place in the classroom in small groups, or

outside of the classroom in small groups or one-on-one. Ideally, if scheduling permits, the SLP

would observe some of the teacher's shared reading sessions to better understand children's

functional needs in the classroom. The teacher can provide valuable input in terms of prioritizing

goals for the children with disabilities. To be successful, collaboration must involve scheduling

regular communication between the teacher and SLP to update each other on progress, provide

feedback, and make adjustments as necessary. Meetings can take place once a month, for

example, with weekly email updates.

Shared book reading frequently involves repeated reading of a book across multiple days.

The teacher and SLP can target different skills and concepts on different days, or provide extra

practice with specific targets based on the children's needs. Students with disabilities need a

higher dosage of the instruction, or more frequent exposures to the targets, than students without

disabilities (e.g., Volmle & Storkel, 2015). The collaborative model ensures that students with

disabilities get repeated exposure and instruction, and facilitates generalization of learning given

that the instruction takes place in multiple contexts.

Choosing Books

Discussions aimed at choosing the right books to use during shared reading sessions can

be an important way for teachers and SLPs to collaborate. The teacher can bring the view of

selecting books to best engage the class and meet curricular needs. The SLP's view will be selecting books that align with the specific language and literacy goals of the children with disabilities.

An important consideration is to ensure that children are exposed to different types of books. Exposure to a varied 'diet' of book genre and type can have a dramatic impact on the resulting interactions with the book and may encourage different types of learning that can impact language and early literacy development (Pappas, 2006). The 'diet' of book genres should include narrative, informational, alphabet books, rhyming books, and wordless picture books. Exposure to narrative books and engaging in corresponding activities related to story structure provide an effective opportunity for instructing children in comprehension strategies (Lynch & van den Broek, 2007). Informational books may help children become familiar with scientific text structure and terms (Donovan & Smolkin, 2002), as well as encouraging children's use of higher-level language typically found in informational books (e.g., observational comparisons, causal chains, explanations). Alphabet books and books with rhyming or alliterative structures are an excellent way to expose children to important early literacy concepts (e.g., letter names and sounds, rhyming patterns, initial sounds). Wordless picture books may offer some unique advantages as well, especially in terms of teacher and child discourse. Schick et al. (2021) found that teachers encouraged more active participation and children produced more utterances during shared reading of wordless picture books.

The teacher and SLP should also consider choosing books that have emotion content and vocabulary (e.g., frustrated, joyful), and causal statements about shifts in emotion (e.g., explain why a character went from feeling happy to angry). Further, exposing children to books with multicultural content (e.g., books that include characters and themes representative of a variety

of race/ethnicities, cultures and religions) can have important benefits for children. These books can help children feel valued and respected when they find images or experiences similar to their own represented in the classroom, and children can benefit from learning about and identifying with people and cultures different from their own (Fox & Short, 2003).

Targets: What to Teach

A useful framework to guide decisions about which skills to support in this context is Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001). The Reading Rope represents the many strands of language and literacy skills woven into skilled reading. Specifically, the Reading Rope consists of a word recognition strand and a language comprehension strand. Skills in the word recognition strand - phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words - relate to the written code of language and support readers as they become accurate, fluent, and increasingly automatic. At the preschool and kindergarten level, it is helpful to think of this strand as the precursors to word recognition, e.g., phonological awareness and print knowledge. Skills in the language comprehension strand - background knowledge, vocabulary, listening comprehension, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge (i.e., knowledge of print concepts) - relate to meaning and support children's comprehension of the texts they read. When skills from both strands are woven together, students can become skilled readers with instruction, time, and practice.

Additionally, shared book reading also serves as a useful context to introduce vocabulary specific to emotions, which can support both language and social-emotional development. It is also a valuable instructional context for enhancing emotion understanding because teachers can ask questions about the characters' emotions and children can infer feelings based on what they felt in similar situations (Spradlin & Brady, 2008). For instance, research suggests that young

children respond with emotional state talk when their teachers talk about emotion identification, causality, and inference from the books they read (Alvarenga et al., 2020).

The following are examples of word-recognition (letter-sound knowledge), language comprehension (listening comprehension and vocabulary), and social-emotional prompts that can be used in a preschool shared reading session using the book *The Way I Feel* (Cain, 2005). Note that these are just examples; the teacher and SLP may also choose other targets such as literacy knowledge, verbal reasoning, sight recognition, and background knowledge, depending on the needs of the children.

- **Letter-sound knowledge:** Point out the letter 'F' in the title and tell children that 'feel' starts with the /f/ sound. Invite children to come up to the book and point to the letter 'f' while saying /f/. Then ask children to identify other words that start with /f/.

- **Vocabulary:** On the page about the word 'frustrated', tell children that when you are frustrated you feel mad or angry, especially when you can't do something you wanted to do. Ask them to repeat the word 'frustrated' with you. Next, ask if they can think of anything that has frustrated them - provide options if children need support (e.g., putting together a puzzle that is hard, not getting to go for ice cream, etc.).

- **Listening comprehension:** After reading the book, ask children to recall the types of feelings they heard about in the book. Next, call out a feeling (e.g., sad, happy, frustrated) and ask them to act out that feeling.

- **Feelings:** On the page that talks about being angry, ask children to act out being angry (e.g., make an angry face, stomp, cross their arms). Ask them what might happen to make them angry and then have a conversation about strategies to help with being angry (e.g., taking deep breaths, counting to 10, talking to a friend/teacher).

Strategies: How to Implement Shared Book Reading

Once the teacher and SLP have decided on the structure, books, and targets, they should plan for the interactions, or *how* to deliver the instruction. The strategies implemented during the shared book reading session are the 'active ingredients' that will effect change in children's skills. As previously mentioned, shared book reading interactions should include extratextual talk and a dialogic (interactive) reading style (Flack et al., 2018). Another important feature is explicit instruction. Although incidental learning occurs during shared book reading, that is, children may learn by being exposed to the words and concepts in a book without an adult providing any instruction, evidence suggests that explicit instruction results in greater learning (Maynard et al., 2010). Explicit instruction involves direct, purposeful instruction by the adult. Below, we briefly describe examples of strategies that provide explicit instruction and include extratextual talk and an interactive style. These features encourage active engagement (Blewitt & Langan, 2016), which is critical for learning (Beck & McKeown, 2007). In addition to the strategies described below, adults can increase children's engagement through use of gesture and movement (e.g., showing an angry face, asking children to show 'rain' with their fingers) and by being responsive and positive to children's comments and questions.

Ask Questions. Asking questions during shared book reading is an effective way to improve children's language skills (Blewitt et al., 2009), and often includes specific dialogic reading techniques. The reader can engage the children by using a variety of question types to ask about the book. Open-ended questions encourage more talk from children and are preferable to closed-ended questions that require a one-word response (e.g., *"Who laughed?"* or *"Did the girl feel happy?"*). For example, 'why' and 'how' questions elicit longer responses from children (Deshmukh et al., 2019). Questions can be literal or inferential. Literal questions are factual; the

answer is directly provided in the text or pictures. In contrast, inferential questions ask about

things not directly stated in the text or shown in the pictures. Children must go beyond the text to

infer meaning, using their background knowledge and verbal reasoning. Inferential questions can

be about causal connections, such as character feelings and motivations (“*How do you think*

Jabari felt when he dove off the board?”; *“Why do you think his dad told him to take a rest?”*).

Another type of inference is prediction. Prediction questions can be used when introducing the

book (e.g., “*Why do you think the book is called Jabari Jumps? What do you think it will be*

about?”) as well as during the book reading to predict what will happen next. Although

inferential questions are more difficult than literal questions, children as young as 4 years of age

with language disorders benefit from them (Dawes et al., 2019).

       Provide Rich Vocabulary Instruction. Rich vocabulary instruction involves carefully

selecting which words to teach and then explicitly teaching those words using child-friendly

definitions, multiple exposures and contexts, and opportunities for children to actively engage

with the words and their meanings. This type of instruction increases depth of knowledge about

words and is an effective way to improve children’s comprehension and use of words (Beck &

McKeown, 2007; Maynard et al., 2010). Rich vocabulary instruction can be embedded within the

shared book reading session by providing brief, child-friending definitions of target words and

encouraging children to repeat the words and their meanings, for example. Additional depth can

be provided during extension activities (described below). When selecting which words to teach,

consider the children’s familiarity with and the utility of the words. It is best to choose words

that are unfamiliar but useful in that they occur frequently in storybooks and may be encountered

in conversations and academic contexts. These words are often called Tier 2 words, based on the

categories described by Beck and colleagues (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 2007). A more in-depth

description of vocabulary instruction during shared reading can be found in Spencer et al. (2012).

Scaffolding. In order to support learning and provide instruction that is within a child's

zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), adults can use a variety of scaffolding

strategies (Pentimonti & Justice, 2010). When children have difficulty responding correctly to

the adult's prompts, high-support scaffolds can be used. These include co-participating

(completing a task together), reducing the choices available, and eliciting a response through

direct imitation. Low-support strategies can be used to extend a child's learning when a task is

too easy; these include generalizing, reasoning, and predicting. See the appendix of Pentimonti &

Justice (2010) for descriptions and examples of each of the scaffolding strategies.

A few key strategies for shared book reading have been described. The strategies chosen

will depend on a variety of factors, such as age and needs of the children, the structure of the

shared book reading session (i.e., whole class or small group and model of teacher-SLP

collaboration), and classroom dynamics. Differentiating the instruction, particularly for the

children with disabilities, requires careful planning but also the flexibility to make adjustments as

needed during the instruction. The teacher and SLP will have several possible targets and

strategies to keep track of during the shared reading, while attending to the attention, motivation,

and engagement of the children. As part of the planning process, prompts or modifications can

be added directly to the pages of the book (e.g., with sticky notes).

Beyond the Book-Reading Session: Extension Activities

The opportunities for language and literacy instruction do not end when the book ends.

The teacher and SLP can engage children in a variety of activities to build on what was targeted

during the book reading. This can take place immediately after the shared reading session or any

other time during the day or week and will provide repeated exposure and additional practice

with key concepts. This repetition and continuity of instruction may be particularly important for

children with disabilities. Extension activities should be engaging, interactive, involve multiple

modalities, and require children to use their knowledge and skills in multiple contexts. The

following are example activities for a variety of language and literacy targets.

Narrative language: Telling and comprehending stories. Retelling and re-enacting the

story can be a lot of fun for children. Use play, role play, props, puppets, or movement to

facilitate the retelling of the story. Prompt children to recall story structure elements such as the

problem or initiating event, the character's feelings and attempt(s) to solve the problem, and a

consequence. The teacher or SLP can also ask children to share a personal narrative about similar

experiences they have had ("*Tell me about a time when something like that happened to you*").

Discussion. Engage the children in conversation about the book. For example, talk about

the concepts or themes of the book to build children's knowledge; ask children what they did or

did not like about the book and why; brainstorm some other ways the main character might have

acted or felt; or ask the children to speculate how they would act or feel if they were in the book.

Vocabulary. Following the principles of rich vocabulary instruction, children will benefit

from activities in which they can use and engage with new words in a variety of ways and

contexts. This can include looking back at pictures from the book that depict the word to talk in

depth about what it means and how it was used in the story. Children can be prompted to tell

what category the word belongs in (*"Autumn is a season"*), think of synonyms and other related

words ("*Another word for autumn is fall*"), use the word in sentences ("*Leaves fall off trees in

autumn*"), and talk about personal experiences ("*Last autumn my family went on a vacation*").

The teacher and SLP can be purposeful in providing multiple opportunities to use target words in

a variety of contexts beyond the book reading session. Children can be encouraged to use the word in appropriate contexts throughout the day or week, across different classes, or can be assigned a homework activity in which they have to use the word with a parent or caregiver.

It is also beneficial to show the written word when practicing the spoken word. The pairing of spoken and written word forms leads to improved vocabulary learning. This effect, called orthographic facilitation, is widely reported in school-aged children (Colenbrander et al., 2019) and there is evidence that it occurs for children with disabilities (Clark & Reuterskiold, 2021) and preschool children (O'Leary, 2017). Explicitly drawing attention to the written word is not necessary to obtain this benefit, but the teacher and SLP can certainly talk about the letters or spelling when doing print-focused activities.

Writing and Spelling. Activities to engage children in copying or writing letters or words encountered in the books can be both fun and beneficial. There is a growing body of literature about the importance of early spelling ability. Not only is early spelling a unique predictor of later reading and spelling (Ouellette & Senechal, 2017; Treiman et al., 2019), but instruction that facilitates children's invented spelling, through scaffolding and developmentally-appropriate feedback, benefits learning to read and increases sophistication of spelling attempts (Ouellette et al., 2013; Sénéchal et al., 2008).

Conclusion

In this paper, an intentional collaboration between teachers and SLPs has been proposed to support the language and literacy development of young children with or at risk for learning disabilities. This collaboration is situated within shared book reading which is a high-potential area for students with and without disabilities to learn. The use of shared book reading allows for teachers and SLPs to target key early literacy and language skills using evidence-based

strategies. By collaborating, the teacher and SLP support each other's practices and together

enhance the quality and effectiveness of instruction and intervention that the children receive.

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Teacher/SLP Planning Discussion Points:
- Student: Rosa
- Language/literacy areas that require support: Listening comprehension
- Collaborative instruction format: Shared book reading lessons (Teacher read first with whole class, SLP follow with individual shared book reading)
- Lesson targets for teacher with whole class: Letter-sound knowledge, listening comprehension, vocabulary
- Lesson target for SLP to meet Rosa's needs: Listening comprehension
- Book: *Corduroy* (Freeman, 1968)

Teacher Shared Book Reading Session (Read to whole class, engages Rosa and whole class)

Target	Strategy	Example
Letter-Sound Knowledge/ Print Knowledge (Justice, et al. 2009; NELP, 2008)	Scaffolding - Reducing Choices (Pentimonti, & Justice, 2011)	Teacher (T): Rosa – can you come up to the book and point to the 'R' in the title? Rosa: Points to the 'O' T: Not quite, is this the letter 'R' or is this the letter 'R'? (Note: Teacher points to the 'O' and the 'R') Rosa: Points to the 'R' T: That's right – that's the letter 'R' just like in your name Rosa!
Listening Comprehension/ Oral Language (NELP, 2008)	Ask questions using Dialogic Reading techniques (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998)	T: Why is Corduroy sad? *If child answers correctly, T says: That's right! Corduroy is sad because the girl and her mother do not buy him. *If child answers incorrectly, T says: Let's try that again. Why is Corduroy sad?
Vocabulary/ Oral Language (NELP, 2008)	Rich Vocabulary Instruction (Beck & McKeown, 2007)	T: The watchman dashed after Corduroy. "Dashed" means go very fast. Which one can dash: a rabbit or a turtle?

SLP Shared Book Reading Session (one-on-one with Rosa)

Target	Strategy	Example
Listening Comprehension/ Oral Language (NELP, 2008)	Ask questions using Dialogic Reading techniques (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998)	After the first page, SLP explains to Rosa that Lisa, the girl in the story, is at the store. SLP: What kinds of things do you buy at a store? *If Rosa answers correctly, SLP says: That's right! You can buy [encourage plausible responses] at a store. What kinds of things do you buy at a store? * If Rosa answers incorrectly, say: Let's try that again. What kinds of things do you buy at a store?
Listening Comprehension/ Oral Language	Scaffolding (Pentimonti, & Justice, 2011)	SLP: When Corduroy accidentally knocked over the lamp, what kind of noise do you think it made? Rosa: I don't know SLP: Do you think it was loud noise or a soft noise?

Listening Comprehension/ Oral Language	Ask questions using Dialogic Reading techniques (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998)	SLP: At the end of the story, Lisa takes Corduroy home. What does Lisa fix for Corduroy? *If Rosa answers correctly, SLP says: That's right! Rosa fixed Corduroy's button. What did she fix? *If Rosa answers incorrectly, say: Let's try that again. What does Lisa fix for Corduroy?
The SLP will use other language facilitation strategies		