**Dialogue Journals with Children**


Whole literacy strategies can be used successfully with children from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds or students with Limited English Proficiency. This is so because the communicative model for second language teaching is consistent with the principles of the whole literacy approach. Both subscribe to the same principles such as 1) language learning through communication, 2) the interrelatedness of listening, speaking, reading and writing, 3) purposeful use of language in interaction and 4) importance of meaningful communication. An observational study of a multilingual, kindergarten, classroom was conducted to identify the extent to which whole literacy strategies can facilitate second language learning, English in this case. Classroom instruction included language experiences, literature, thematic studies and interactive journal writing that used content specific instruction, scaffolding, use of caretaker speech, wait time, use of peer interaction and cultural relating strategies. These activities promoted the development of English literacy of these students with Limited English Proficiency.


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The integration of reading and writing in beginning literacy instruction has been suggested in the literature on emergent literacy. However, little research has been done in this area. How this integration can be approached is the subject of this study. First grade students were studied as they participated in an experiment on the use of dialogue journals and invented spelling. The effect of these two variables on reading achievement and written expression were evaluated using the Standford Achievement Test in Reading and the Metropolitan Achievement Test – Writing Test. The students were divided into three groups. One group wrote dialogue journals with their parents three times a week. The other group wrote dialogue journals with their teacher three times a week while the control group followed the regular language arts curriculum. Results show that both experimental groups outperformed those in the traditional language instruction group.
Dialogue journal writing is an effective approach to integrating reading and writing instruction that should become an essential part of beginning literacy instruction.


A sense of audience can develop through dialogue journal writing. This was observed from six first and second grade students who participated in a year long study that explored the role of dialogue journal writing in the students written language development with an emphasis on the development of audience awareness. Six children who are representative of a larger study of first and second grade students in a large public school wrote dialogue journals with their teacher. The researchers were particularly interested in how these children use audience awareness strategies. They found that the students didn’t have any sense of audience at first but in the course of writing in meaningful contexts and in topics that they themselves generated, the students developed strategies to help them explain what they wrote about to the teacher. Through this writing process the children developed an understanding of the functions of writing.


Teachers can use journal writing to develop a sense of story with kindergarten students. This is done through a process writing approach. Many classrooms that use journal writing among young children do not make use of this approach although the literature on literacy programs for children promote a focus on meaningful reading and writing experiences. To develop a sense of story through journal writing, teachers can start by asking their kindergarten students to draw or write about something they want to talk about. This can be done on stapled sheets of blank bond paper with construction paper as cover. The teacher then asks questions in writing about that drawing and asks the children to respond in the next journal entry. The teacher then continues to ask questions for each entry in the same topic that was started by the student. These exchanges are also facilitated by teacher’s and student’s oral conversations and clarifications of what they are writing about.


The understanding of the concept of authoring and the emergence of authorship in children through speaking and writing activities in the classroom was descried by a parent and teachers in preschool classrooms in this book. They reported case studies of children in preschool classrooms that provide many opportunities for authorship. Each chapter discussed a case study of preschool children exploring different experiences of authoring through letter writing, dialogue journals, creative story writing, collaborating with other student writers or parent writers and book reviewing. The case studies showed that emerging authorship in young children is engendered by their reflections of their own conversations/dialogues with others, their experiences at writing, daily activities and
real life experiences that provide a reason for them to put their thoughts on paper, and collaborating interactions with not only young writers like themselves but adults writers as well. The case studies reveal that given the chance to take control of their writing and writing friendly classroom environment and opportunities, young children think about what to write, why they write it and what they are going to do about it.


A teacher was dissatisfied with the stilted kind of writing that her five year old students produce in class. She evaluated the student’s writing and concluded that they were “cloned” writing. They all wrote in similar format and language. The teacher couldn’t find the students’ individual voices in their writing. To remedy the situation, she introduced journal writing to the students. She asked the students to write to her in the journal notebooks she distributed. By writing to her, the children will be able to talk to a real audience. The teacher started with questions but she realized she was doing exactly the same question and answer routine they do in class. She changed her strategy and began with her own personal statements which got the students questioning and offering their own experiences. Before long the students were responding meaningfully to the conversation. As both teacher and student respond to each other’s entry, the teacher saw the students’ own individual voices develop. Their writing became more distinctive, more aware of audience, was purposeful and changed from “cloned” language to more meaningful conversational language.


Journal writing was one of the activities that Hannon used in her kindergarten class. While the activity proceeded successfully with the children and was eagerly anticipated by the students, the teacher did not observe any increase in fluency or use of a variety of writing formats. The types of entries did not change from early on to what they currently had. She, however, observed more purposeful writing and a variety writing styles when the students were in their choice time or at the message or writing centers. She decided to go ahead and introduce dialogue in their journals. It was not a requirement for the students but an invitation to for them to ask their teacher to write back. Although, not all of the students requested a response, those who did exhibited changes in their own writing. Unexpectedly, some of those who did not request response from the teacher instead began written conversations with each other. Adding a dialogue component to the journal writing provided opportunities for the students to use a variety of other writing styles in meaningful contexts and gave them other purposes for writing.

Seikatsu tsuzurikata is a writing education curriculum in Japan that makes use of life experiences in composition education. This is a process oriented approach where the author’s own view of life is explored in order to promote not only the development of the writer but the child’s cognitive and personal development. One of the methods used is journal writing, parallel to what is used in America. In a first grade classroom, a seikatsu journal is used as a teaching tool for teaching writing as well as an effective venue for teacher – child communication. Teachers and students share interesting entries in the morning and the teacher copies the entries for each of the student. Later they have intensive discussions about the entry or entries and use the discussion as a basis for a lesson. As the students and teachers discuss they are given the opportunity to deepen and enrich their observational and thinking skills. The journal entries also serve as seed topics for the students in their own composition. Picture journals and revolving or group journals are other variations used. These journals provide outlets for the students’ developing thoughts and maturing experiences and also serve as the basis for seikatsu writing.


The E-mail can be used as a tool for thinking and developing literacy skills. Similar to dialogue journal writing, electronic mails can be utilized by teachers to engage their students in conversations about literature and other things that are meaningful to them. The nature of these emails was studied using ethnographic methods to analyze the conversations that took place. For seven weeks, a class of 9- to 10- year old students corresponded with preservice teachers who engaged them in conversations about the novel they were reading in class. Recurring themes in the electronic conversations were coded and the conversations were equally divided between socialization and book talk. The researchers noted that these themes were not influenced by the children’s reading level. They concluded that the email dialogue journals gave the students the opportunity to think critically about themselves, their experiences and the book they are reading. They were also able to relate what they read with their own life. Their interaction with adults also helped them to conceptualize their experiences and articulate them in writing.


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A middle school student and her teacher discover the potential of intertextuality and reflective thinking in promoting learning using their dialogue journals. The teacher engaged her student in a conversation about a book they were reading and discovered the potential of this activity to bring about authentic learning. She also found out from her
case study of one of her students that the student used a past text, in this case a book she has read in the past, to inform her conversations with her teacher about a book they were reading at present. At the same time that she was comparing the interpretation of a previous text with her present one, also called intertextual tying in this report, she is also reflecting on her interpretations and making new meanings in her dialogue journal. These processes promoted growth not only in her learning about literature but also about herself and her relationship with her teacher in the classroom context.


Students’ and teacher’s oral and written language transactions can promote the development of English writing by young linguistically different learners. These transactions help students from different first language backgrounds to negotiate their learning of a second language through writing. A class of kindergarten children from different linguistic backgrounds were observed as they engaged in journal writing with their teachers. The researchers found that interactive journal writing, which involved both written and oral interactions that happen in the processes of writing journals seems an effective strategy in developing emergent English literacy. Through the mediation of these written and oral interactions, the children were able to not only learn to speak the second language, but also develop progressive awareness of phonemic clues, and an understanding of English structure, semantics, and pragmatics. The study also suggested that children need not be proficient in oral language in order to learn from the oral and written interactions in that language.


The language interactions of children with peers and adults they come in contact with are most important in developing their reasoning skill. These interactions or dialogue, specifically those kinds where both child and adult participate actively in thinking through a situation or a problem, enable the child to learn to use language to learn about his or her environment. It is not just any dialogue but a dialogue where there is interactional scaffolding provided by an expert user of the language. Interactional scaffolding developed from the work of Vygotsky and other psychologists such as Cazden, and Brunner where the adult takes the child through the process of thinking out loud. Another way of developing thinking skills from language interactions is participating in written conversations with expert users of the language such as writing dialogue journals. These purposeful conversations have been found to positively affect reading performance and encourage independent thinking. Some suggestions on how to increase structured thinking and additional resources teachers can use to promote these interactions are discussed.

The use of electronic mails as dialogue journals in literature discussions is used as a strategy to develop independent reading skills among children through cooperative learning. A group of University students in a preservice program who need to develop teaching strategies and new insights on shared inquiry were grouped with sixth- and fifth-grade special needs students who need to develop independent reading skills. Both groups had preparatory training in the use of emails and other guidelines for the exchanges. In spite some obstacles in the use of electronic mail learning took place. These literature conversations through emails enabled the children to discuss more specific details of the books they were discussing through the course of the exchanges. These details included reactions to character development, literary devices, relationship to one’s personal experience and theme of the selection. The University students had hands on experience for gaining new strategies and seizing teachable moments for the children.


To approach the problem of teaching second language learners who appear to have strong oral language but are still developing in their reading and writing skill, this bilingual teacher and a researcher used process writing and dialogue journals. They observed four children from this class, who come together regularly to discuss a composition they were doing. The students together with their teacher spent time discussing what they were writing about before and during the time that they were writing their piece. After the discussions, they meet again for revision and repeat the process until they grew tired of the topic. They also do dialogue journals where they discuss freely whatever they want to discuss. Three areas of growth noted and described were a sense of audience, a sense of voice and a sense of power in language. The interactions during these writing and revising conferences as well as the written conversations in the dialogue journal provided the students the necessary motivation, the background knowledge and the process by which they can begin to express themselves to others in a second language.