

# **Interactive Dialogue Journals at Home**

## **Introduction**

For this study, the interactive journals strategy was selected, as part of writing development home enrichment for my child. Interactive dialogue journals provide verbal support in an authentic setting to provide differentiated instruction to meet their individual learning potential as it helps support writing development. I implemented the interactive journal for communication between my daughter and myself, as a form of a daily diary submission. I deliberately modeled feedback to focus on building her skills of capitalization, pronouns, and spelling.

My daughter is in Kindergarten, 6 years old, and ranks academically high amongst her class. In comparison to my other children and her peers, Yaretzi developed verbal skills very young. By age 2, she was speaking better and clearer than her older cousins, and her use of vocabulary has even surprised the adults in our extended family. She is very social, outgoing and seeks out physical activity. My assumption was that she would look forward to the interactive dialogue journals as a break from the virtual classroom environment.

## **Research Question**

In her BOY iStation assessments administered on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Yaretzi scored high every category, with an overall index score of 202, and Level 5 for Overall Reading. For each subsequent monthly assessment after that, Yaretzi had scored lower each time. October's Overall Index score was a 196, and November's Overall Index dropped to 186 with a Level 2 for Overall

Reading. In brainstorming an appropriate and effective intervention strategy for her, I decided upon implementing an interactive journal, which led me to my research question. How would a monolingual English Kindergarten student respond to interactive journaling strategies to develop writing skills in the home setting?

### **Review of the Literature**

The interactive dialogue journal is a teaching strategy that organizes multiple socioeducational contexts for the development of reading and writing. These contexts are part of the teaching-learning process. They are social, zones of proximal developments and are designed to create positive potential development within students. (Diaz & Flores, 1990)

Diaz and Flores (2001) discuss the importance of teachers serving as mediators of home and school learning environments. The interactive journal strategy can be a positive connector for students that serves as a motivational resource for oral and written communication. This strategy provides opportunity to incorporate different cultural and social aspects through the dialogue sessions. Students are able to show their knowledge through the use of interactive journal writing sessions. The learning relationship that is built by incorporating parent participation throughout the learning process, supports Diaz and Flores idea that social interactions help develop higher level thinking.

During the interactive journal writing, the children choose a topic to write about. The children draw about their topics then write about them. When they are finished, the teacher listens to each child read their written language. By doing this she values and respects the children's prior and growing knowledge about written language. When the child is done reading

their entry, the teachers writes an authentic response – staring interest or asking a question. As the teacher writes the response, the child watches and listens. They are engaged within a zone of proximal development and use mediation to assist the child in learning.

The interactive journal was an important component for writing enrichment. The goal of interactive journaling is to create powerful learning connections in content areas, so children engage in and develop meaningful learning (Diaz and Flores, 2001).

Diaz and Flores (2001) concluded that students responded to teachers requests to draw and write by means of Spanish oral communication and the interactive dialogue journal. Social relationships are key to the mental and personal development of individuals. According to Vygotsky, "All higher mental functions are internalized social relationships, their whole nature is social" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 128). Vygotsky explains the ZOPD as the desire for an object that an individual seeks to possess in the sociocultural context. Interactive journals are an embodiment of Vygotskian theory because the authentic social dialogue that occurs in the topic selection and the verbal feedback allows for internalizing the social relationship. The modeled written feedback provides teaching to the potential within the ZOPD.

Escamilla (2014) focuses on the importance that writing instruction remains authentic to each language. Escamilla discusses the importance of engaging students in writing as a form of communication and suggests that writing and reading instruction be connected through meaningful activities because they compensate each other. Writing abilities develop at different rates for different children (Escamilla, 2014). Because of this idea, it is important that writing instruction is authentic to language and developmental needs.

Through home-school connections, parents can become part of their children’s learning and support the teacher work in the classroom. Parents can be a great form of support and scaffolding so students, especially the younger ones, have a different perspective of information. Together teacher and parents can contribute to help develop foundational skills without taking away from content instruction.

### Curriculum Unit

Standards selected:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.1.A- Print many upper- and lowercase letters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.2.A- Capitalize the first word in a sentence and the pronoun *I*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.1.E - Use the most frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., *to, from, in, out, on, off, for, of, by, with*).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.K.2.D - Spell simple words phonetically, drawing on knowledge of sound-letter relationships.

Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
Interactive Journal	Interactive Journal	Interactive Journal	Interactive Journal	Interactive Journal
Introduction to format of the interactive journal and introduce dialog component.	Using dialog to prompt longer responses.	Prompting for complex sentences. Using questions to prompt more detail.	Strategic use of dialogue prompts to elicit multiple ideas.	Accessing prior knowledge through intentional topic selection and questioning.

Gives me a baseline of student performance.	Tailoring feedback to model proper sentence structure/spelling.	Use of connecting words to build complex sentences.	Instructions becoming more literal and prescriptive.	Use of multiple sentences, connecting words, and high frequency words.
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To begin **Lesson 1**, my first topic question was “Tell me about Halloween. What did you dress up as?” I figured this initial prompt would be simple and interesting enough since it was a recent event for us. This first lesson would establish a baseline of her skills. Yaretzi responded with an accurate drawing and a simple phrase of *“I wus Slip ig Beaude/ “I was Sleeping Beauty”*. I believe the dialogue that lead up to a single question led Yaretzi to only focus on the last part and ignored the “Tell me about Halloween” portion of the prompt. Admittedly, “Tell me about Halloween” is a vague question for a 6-year-old. My written response was intentional. I responded with “That is a beautiful costume. I bet Halloween was fun.” I modeled the correct form of “beauty” and wrote 2 sentences, each separated with enough white space and a period.

**Lesson 2** attempted to draw a bit more detail from Yaretzi. As the weather was getting colder and daylight hours shortened during the month of November, I knew she had less outside play time. She would try to play outside daily. I asked her “Do you love playing outside?” To which she replied “Yes, I like playing on my swings and picking pecans.” I told her to tell me about what she loved about being outside. Her response did not end up longer and detailed as I had hoped for. Yaretzi replied with a drawing of her swing set and her family, along with the statement *“I LovE my famle. / I love my family.”* Again, I felt the need to be more specific as I knew Yaretzi could write more complete thoughts. She has a “diary” of her own

that she keeps in her room and I've seen her write in it. She also randomly writes in notebooks and is very good in typing search terms in YouTube when looking for videos. YouTube's predictive text assists with this, but her initial typing usually ends in successful results. For my feedback, I responded with "Your family loves you very much too." I wanted to make sure I modeled the correct spelling of 'family'.

I like the talk component of interactive journals to evolve freely, with less prescription around writing topics. **Lesson 3** began with a discussion of a recent drive-by birthday party. We discussed the event and I asked where she went. She said, "I went to my cousin's birthday." I asked, "Which cousin?" She replied, "You know!". At this point it did not help that I was her father as she seemed annoyed to be explaining an event that I had attended. In response I said, "Well, tell me about it, but pretend I don't know your cousins."

At this point in the discussion, I had to distance myself from the role of the parent, in order to encourage her to give more context to her entries. By pretending to be an outsider, Yaretzi finally gave more details in her journal response.

Yaretzi wrote *"We wet to a brthday parede weth my cusins and the brthday waz for my lett/ cusin. / We went to a birthday party with my cousins and the birthday was for my little cousin."*

Perhaps for the other entries, she felt the need to be brief because her "audience" had all the details he needed. By me prompting her to pretend I did not know her other family, she provided more details. I noticed her drawing was not centered on our family, but instead my sister's family. Yaretzi drew her aunt, and her cousins, and left out everyone else that attended.

My response to this entry was to model the correct spelling of 'party' and 'cousins'.

**Lesson 4** took place right after Thanksgiving holiday. I wanted to be strategic in my use of dialogue to prompt Yaretzi to write multiple ideas. During our dialogue, I wanted to mimic the inquisitive manners of young minds. I've noticed that Yaretzi always asks "but why?" when she is in a mood of discovery. While I am working in my office, she would randomly come in and say "Are you working?", to which I would respond in the affirmative, and she would always ask "but why?". When I would be heading outside to throw get something from the car or do some yard work, Yaretzi would always ask where I was headed, and respond with "but why?". I wanted to do the same when interacting with our dialogue. For this lesson I asked about what her favorite food was on Thanksgiving. She said, "The pie!". I playfully responded with "but why?" to which she gave an explanation. I realized that the "but why?" response after her statements would end in her giving reasons, even if they sometimes they were not as coherent as an adult would be. My prompt was "Tell me what you liked best about Thanksgiving, but tell me why." Yaretzi responded with a complex sentence, *"I LovED Teaksghvig becus we had uhladt uv food and all of my famly wus thare. / I loved Thanksgiving because we had a lot of food and all of my family was there."* Knowing the manner in which she speaks to me and her mother really helped in this context.

**Lesson 5** involved me accessing prior knowledge through intentional topic selection and questioning. Throughout the lessons, I discovered that to mediate to her potential, I had to establish some formality in the topic of discussions. Specifically, asking Yaretzi to explain why and to pretend that I did not have all of the details of her life events. The final lesson revolved

around asking about Christmas and what she hoped for. Her response was *“Wen it’s cesmas I hop ther will be a lot of pri(e)sens undr the tree and sata will leve the toys udra the tree wen he leve’s./ When it’s Christmas I hope there will be a lot of presents under the tree and Santa will leave the toys under the tree when he leaves.”* Yaretzi wrote 27 words in this lesson, which was a huge improvement over her initial 4-word entry on Day 1. As her father, I knew her potential was there but believe my lack of formal directions for length/time.

I refrained from being rigid in approaching this strategy, as I wanted this to be authentic and a chance to bond. I did not use my parental authority to dictate her output, but rather used my insight to ask the right questions to get the results I knew I could get from Yaretzi.

### **Critical Perspective Discussing Inequalities**

Interactive journals can only work in the home setting if the parent or adult who conducts them has the necessary skills to demonstrate and model appropriately. If the adult does not possess the ability to make intentional and prescriptive feedback, or the written feedback is incorrect, then the student will not gain needed skills to meet their potential. Ideal social learning occurs with competent adults in the home setting. Inequalities are not present within the curriculum itself, but inequalities can show up in the setting in which this is designed to take place. If the home setting is not ideal, or the parent/guardian is intellectually incapable of providing a suitable zone of proximal development, this strategy will most likely be ineffective and possibly detrimental for skill development.

## Plan for Collecting Student Work

As this project will be conducted in the home setting, journals were collected and scanned digitally. For the purposes of documenting the procedure, photos and short video clips of some interactive journal sessions were taken.

For the beginning activity, I helped Yaretz personalize her journal to become familiar with the purpose of this diary. Each day Yaretz used her journal to complete the writing activity, with my feedback. Feedback was modeled as a communicative and learning tool. (Escamilla et al, 2014) This strategy resulted in visible progress for my daughter's writing development. Yaretz became less apprehensive towards the process because she realized she was making daily gains. Her confidence allowed her to write longer sentences and explore inclusion of multiple streams of thought in her sentences.

The interactive journal strategy was a positive resource for Yaretz's enrichment process, as it allowed her to build meaningful connections with me throughout each session, which supported her writing development as evident from her most recent iStation scores.



Yaretz scores in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile within her age group. A percentile rank is a score that indicates the rank of a student compared to the students in our normative sample. If a student

scores at the 75th percentile, it can be said that he or she has scored at least as well as, or better than, 75 percent of students his or her age from the normative sample of the test.

<p>Entry 1</p> <p>She wrote 5 words/4 words is conventional spelling</p>	<p>I wus Slip ig BeuDe</p>	<p>Word boundaries for one and two syllable words is 2 syllables written as one word beuDe</p> <p>However, Slip ig is one word but she wrote as two words</p> <p>Complete sentence</p>
<p>Entry 2</p> <p>4/4 words</p>	<p>I LovE My famle.</p>	<p>Word boundaries for one syllable words</p>
<p>Entry 3</p> <p>17/17 words</p>	<p>We wet to a brthday parede weth my cusins and the brthday waz for my lettI cusin.</p>	<p>Strengths: capitalized and punctuated the sentence, excellent word boundaries, lowercase letters, some spacing to show word boundries, but less obvious</p> <p>8 High freq words: we, to, a, my, and, the, for, my</p> <p>Close in conventional spelling</p> <p>weth-with waz-was</p> <p>wet-went;</p> <p>parede-party</p>

		<p>cusins-cousins [vowel digraph ou]</p> <p>brthday-birthday [th, ay]</p> <p>lettI-little [double t, l]</p> <p>Compound sentence with the use of the word “and”</p>
<p>Entry 4</p> <p>16 words</p>	<p>I LovED Teaksgvhig becus we had uhladt uv food and all of my famly wus thare.</p>	<p>Complex sentence with the use of the word “because”</p> <p>Two sentences in one. the second sentence was “all of my famly wus thare.”</p> <p>The word “and” in this case is where there should be a period.</p>
<p>Entry 5</p> <p>27 words</p>	<p>Wen it’s cesmas I hop ther will be a lot of pri(e)sens undr the tree and sata will leve the toys udra the tree wen he leve’s.</p>	<p>8 High freq words: we, to, a, my, and, the, for, my</p> <p>Close in conventional spelling</p> <p>wen-when waz-was</p> <p>Spelled “a lot” as two words [excellent]; contraction “it’s”</p> <p>Two sentences in one. the second sentence was “Santa will leave the toys under the tree when he leaves.”</p>

## **Discussion and Interpretation**

Interactive journal writing is a second language acquisition strategy implemented to teach to students' potential (Diaz & Flores, 2001). Interactive journals allow for listening, speaking and language development using free writing, which seemed beneficial for an enrichment at home activity. Interactive journal writing provides connection between parent and student, during guided instruction at home. The objective of using interactive journals with my daughter was to create an interactive, positive learning environment that would allow us to make personal connections, while developing writing skills. The interactive journal lessons were modified according to students' learning potential.

Diaz and Flores discuss Daniel having a highly competent teacher. Since this project was implemented at home, the parent(s) must be competent enough to mediate the students' potential. Yaretzi's teacher's experience levels or instructional competence has no bearing on this research because it was an unknown factor. Moving forward, it would be helpful to figure out the competency of her teacher, as well as a competency measurement of the parent conducting the home-based project.

Parental awareness of the potential is a crucial foundation for this project's success. Without understanding a learner's potential, we can fall into the same trap that Daniel's teacher had experienced – becoming content with simple and minimal progress without tapping into the zone of proximal development.

Yaretzi and I plan to continue this practice, as she enjoys the bonding and experience to have time with her father. Since I was able to see an increase in her iStation scores from November to December, I will continue to implement and monitor this strategy and

demonstrate my investment in Yarezi's academic success.

## **Conclusions**

After conducting the first lesson, Yarezi's response exhibited good use of word boundaries and a developed sense of phonemic awareness. A complete sentence was written but lacked punctuation. Response length was short, so I needed to ask questions that encouraged additional details. Topics had to be phrased specific and intentional. This lesson gave me a baseline of student performance.

For lesson 2, based on the last entry, I realized I had to tailor feedback to model proper sentence structure/ spelling. Again, the entry was short, but this time contained punctuation, proper word boundaries, and was a complete sentence. I realized that my greatest advantage I had from being so involved in my daughter's life, turned out to be a weakness for her written expressions for me. The fact that I knew every event that she wrote about, meant that she believed there was no need to explain details. I had to come up with a new strategy.

As we discussed the important recent events in her week, we talked about a drive-through birthday party for her cousin that we recently attended. Her response was longer, as I explained that she needed to pretend I did not attend the event. This sparked her use of specific ideas and she wrote a complex sentence with the use of connecting words. With more words I was able to visualize some high frequency words and how she used white space to separate words. She used proper capitalization, punctuation (period), and proximal

conventional spelling. She is very close in using a one-to-one letter/sounds correspondence.

Instructions were becoming more literal and prescriptive for Lesson 4. Deliberately requesting a “why” after each verbal response, I forced an explanation for every statement. Yarezi’s response ended as a complex sentence being combined with the word “because”.

Lesson 5 resulted in her use of multiple sentences, connecting words, and high frequency words. The topic was Christmas and what she hoped for. She had written a letter to Santa recently so her enthusiasm about the topic was high. With no direction for minimum length, she ended up writing a 27-word sentence. The response contained 8 high frequency words which were close in conventional spelling.

Unfortunately, that lesson was the last in the series, but I can imagine that if I continue the interactive journals, she may begin to write longer sentences in the future. If the page template allows for more writing space, and if the topics include “why” statements, I have no doubt of her continued growth. I would like to see a longitudinal study done with this approach with multiple parents implementing the strategy for multiple children at various skill stages. In a setting with controlled variables, the results can be measured and its true implications for success can be validated.

## References

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